



## DIMAMO raises community awareness on Alzheimer's and Diabetes

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On 31 October DIMAMO Population Health Research Centre (PHRC) held an impactful community engagement session at Mamotshwa Community Church in Mamabolo, Limpopo. This meeting, organised in collaboration with USAID and the Age-in-Action organisation, aimed to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease and diabetes mellitus—two significant health concerns that often affect ageing populations. Over 200 people, including community members, the Department of Home Affairs and representatives from Age-in-Action, gathered to learn more about these conditions and to access important health services like HIV testing.

The event focused on educating the community about the risk factors associated with Alzheimer's disease. These included ageing, family history, cardiovascular health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity, as well as lifestyle factors such as smoking, binge drinking, and lack of physical activity.

A guest speaker, who is a dietician also provided insights into diabetes mellitus, addressing common misconceptions and explaining how it affects the body. Observing that some elderly attendees were unfamiliar with diabetes, the dietician presented simple, practical dietary tips and examples of meal plans to help improve blood sugar control through balanced nutrition.

This information was delivered in person, using the local language, Sepedi, to ensure clarity and understanding. The attendees were keen to engage, asking questions like, "Please explain more about the genetic predispositions of Alzheimer's disease" and "What kind of food can one eat to improve their diabetes outcomes?" The guest speakers responded by clarifying that while genetic factors such as mutations in the \*APOE\*, \*PSEN1\*, and \*PSEN2\* genes can increase the risk of Alzheimer's, lifestyle choices and environmental factors also play a crucial role. On the topic of diabetes management, eating high-fibre foods, lean proteins, complex



carbohydrates, and balanced meals every 3-4 hours were some of the recommendations to help regulate blood sugar.

The meeting was a success. Machipa Dikgale, DIMAMO’s Community Engagement Manager highlighted the importance of the event, saying, “We are here with our researchers; these are the people who take the information that we collect when we visit you. People, do open your doors for our team when visiting your households.”

One community member shared, “We are happy to be with you; we appreciate the information you shared. We are now more informed about the road ahead as elderly people.” Another added, “Please continue to visit our households; we like knowing about our life.”

This engagement was crucial, not only in providing valuable health knowledge but also in dispelling dangerous misconceptions about Alzheimer’s disease that exist within the rural community. Individuals in advanced stages of Alzheimer’s can sometimes be mistaken for practicing witchcraft when they appear confused or wander into others’ homes. Such misunderstandings can lead to tragic consequences. Similarly, the diabetes education segment aimed to debunk the belief that high blood pressure results from “madi a manchi” (“too much blood”), a misconception that has sometimes led people to resort to harmful practices.

As the meeting concluded, many attendees left not only with critical health information but also having accessed essential services. Some were able to consult with Home Affairs representatives, and others left knowing their HIV status—a testament to DIMAMO’s commitment to holistic community health and empowerment.