

Centre for Health Systems Research & Development

News Report 2023 – 2025



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Centre for Health Systems Research & Development

News Report 2023 – 2025

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Foreword

The Centre for Health Systems Research & Development (CHSR&D) had been exceptionally productive between 2023 and 2025, marked by projects and events that not only advanced our mission but also strengthened our community and academic partnerships.

Firstly, grounded in implementation science, our project, *Adapting an evidence-based intervention for Sesotho-speaking couples to promote male engagement in maternal and neonatal health*, successfully engaged the community. The five-week intervention, *Botswadi bo kopanetsweng – Let's be together* on this, delivered to pregnant women and their partners through loveLife, was completed with strong participation and overwhelmingly positive feedback. The findings revealed strong potential for wider adoption and scale-up.

Secondly, in collaboration with the Free State Department of Health and a World Health Organization representative, we addressed significant health information system (HIS) challenges that arose during the COVID-19 outbreak. We participated in the development of digital HIS tools through implementation science, participatory action research, and descriptive qualitative research. We also co-authored three chapters of the 2024 book, *The Emerging South African National Health Information System: Strategies, Approaches and Experiences*, published by the National Department of Health and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. In addition, we participated in organising a Digital Health Webinar presented virtually by the Free State Department of Health on 21 November 2024.

Thirdly, the significance of our project, *Factors influencing nursing students' involvement in mental health care in the Free State Province*, lies in its focus on integrating mental health into primary health care (PHC) in South Africa. This project highlights the need to assess and improve nursing students' attitudes, awareness, and preparedness for mental health care to enhance broader, more patient-centred service delivery and improve health outcomes in the Free State Province and similar settings elsewhere.

Fourthly, in late 2024, we secured funding from the University of the Free State (UFS) Directorate Research Development (DRD) for the project *Older adults' experiences of HIV in the Free State Province: A biopsychosocial perspective*, advancing research in this crucial area. This project is timely as it addresses the unique challenges faced by older people living with HIV (OPLHIV) in the Free State Province, including polypharmacy, multimorbidities, and mental health conditions. By examining the biopsychosocial factors influencing their health and well-being, the research aims to improve the quality of life and reduce stigma and social isolation among OPLHIV.

Fifthly, we significantly expanded the Centre's academic footprint through enhanced collaboration in research and postgraduate training with various departments and faculties within the university. These include the Division of Public Health, the School of Nursing, and the Departments of Community Health and Paediatrics in the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Departments of Psychology and Social Work in the Faculty of the Humanities, and the Disaster Management Training and Education Centre (DiMTEC) in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. These collaborations signify a trend towards greater transdisciplinarity, especially across the social and medical sciences, in CHSR&D's research and in its teaching and learning impact within the institution. The transdisciplinary nature of our work is also reflected in the academic outputs of our students: three completed theses in Health Professions Education, Disaster Management, and Development Studies, we have five ongoing PhD projects across Psychology, Development Studies, and Public Health, four completed master's dissertations in Health Systems Studies and Clinical Psychology, we have eight ongoing master's projects in Health Systems Studies, and 18 completed honours projects in Psychology.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the researchers and fellows of CHSR&D for their exceptional and influential scholarly contributions. Their collective achievements, comprising seven book chapters, 19 accredited journal articles, three technical reports, 19 conference/workshop presentations, and 14 media engagements, are a testament to their unwavering commitment to academic excellence and societal relevance.

My gratitude is extended to Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male for so aptly coordinating our Master of Health Systems Studies (MHSysStud) programme, with a steadily increasing number of candidates. One of our MHSysStud graduates, Nyeleti Chauke, was awarded the Discovery Clinical Excellence Award: Social Behaviour Sciences for a presentation titled, *Patients and providers' perspectives on barriers and facilitators to male uptake of HIV testing services at primary healthcare facilities in Orange Farm*, at the 11th SA AIDS Conference, Durban, 20-23 June 2023. She also published an article on her study in the *Journal of Men's Health*.

I also wish to commend the team for their extensive and meaningful engagements across multiple levels: seven international, 18 national, 14 provincial, and 12 institutional transdisciplinary collaborations, alongside 12 peer reviews for academic journals. These efforts have significantly elevated the visibility, credibility, and reach of our research.

In 2024, we bid farewell to Belinda Jacobs, our valued administrative officer, who retired after 16 years of dedicated service. We sincerely thank her for her commitment and wish her all the very best in her retirement. A special word of thanks goes to Bridget Smit, whose steadfast support in both administrative and financial management since Belinda Jacobs's retirement has been indispensable to our continued success.

At the end of 2024, we also bid farewell to Dr Ngwi Mulu, whose three-year postdoctoral tenure strengthened the qualitative component of our project, *Adapting an evidence-based intervention for Sesotho-speaking couples to promote male engagement in maternal and neonatal health*. She also mentored and supervised students, leaving a lasting contribution to both the research and our team.

Finally, we are sincerely grateful to the Faculty of the Humanities, the UFS, and our other funders for their ongoing support and partnership in advancing our research mission.

Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht,
Director: CHSR&D

Background, mission, aims and priority programme areas

Background

The CHSR&D was established at the UFS in 1993 and stems from a rich tradition of research and training in medical sociology and the sociology of health and health care. The Centre was founded specifically to address the need for bio-social scientific enquiry, operational research, and the development of research skills in the field of health systems studies. It has also accumulated commendable experience and expertise across key methodological approaches (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods).

Mission

To generate and disseminate scientific knowledge on health and health systems at the local, provincial, and national levels and to use this knowledge to improve and inform new and existing policies, strategies, and practices. The Centre is also committed to developing health systems capacity via implementation science and postgraduate research training.

Aims

- To meet the need for multidisciplinary research and development in the domain of health, health systems and health care.
- To generate and disseminate research findings and information on health and health systems, and promote the translation of research findings into policy and practice.
- To inform the strengthening of health systems with a view to greater equity, effectiveness, and efficiency.
- To provide postgraduate training and capacity building that contributes to expanding expertise in health, health systems, and healthcare research and development.

Priority programme areas

While the Centre maintains an overall focus on health systems strengthening, it particularly focuses on the following healthcare programmes:

- Tuberculosis (TB) prevention and control
- HIV & AIDS
- TB-HIV co-epidemic
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Mental health

- COVID-19
- Health information (systems)

Staff, research fellows and interns

Staff

- 2019–25: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (Director)
- Prof. Christo Heunis (Associate Professor)
- Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (Associate Professor)
- Bridget Smit (Administrative Officer)
- 2023–24: Dr Ngwi Mulu (Postdoctoral Fellow)
- 2024: Lerato Masopha (Intern)
- 2023–24: Belinda Jacobs (Senior Administrative Officer)



Bridget Smit, Prof. Christo Heunis, Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male, Belinda Jacobs, Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht, and Dr Ngwi Mulu



Dr Ngwi Mulu (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, CHSR&D)

Staff achievements

- 2025: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht delivered an inaugural lecture, *Male partner involvement in maternal health: A gender transformative lens on health equity and social change*, on 8 October.



Prof. Marelize Rabe (Vice-Dean: Teaching and Learning, Faculty of the Humanities, UFS), Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS), and Dr Molapo Qhobela (Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Strategic Initiatives, International and Institutional Affairs, UFS)

- 2025: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht was promoted to full professor.
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis delivered an inaugural lecture, *The Centre for Health Systems Research & Development: Legacy, Impact and Emerging Frontiers*, on 11 November.



Dr Perpetual Chikobvu (Free State Department of Health and Department of Community Health, UFS), Prof. Marelize Rabe (Vice-Dean: Teaching and Learning, Faculty of the Humanities, UFS), Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Anthea Rhoda (Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic, UFS), and Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis was promoted to full professor.
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis was awarded a C2 NRF rating.
- 2024: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht was awarded a C2 NRF rating.
- 2024: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male was awarded a C3 NRF rating.
- 2024–2026: Bridget Smit completed a course presented by The Association for Office Professionals of South Africa, obtaining the designation of Certified Office Manager.

Staff departure

- Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht left the CHSR&D in September 2025 to join the Department of Psychology.
- Belinda Jacobs retired in mid-2024.

Research fellows

- 2024–25: Prof. Monique Brown, Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, USA
- 2023–25: Dr Ernest Peresu, Group Medical Specialist, Illovo Sugar
- 2023–25: Dr Raymond Tweheyo, Senior Resident Mentor, Master of Public Health Programme, Makerere University, Uganda
- 2023–24: Dr Marian Loveday, Senior Specialist Scientist, South African Medical Research Council
- 2023–25: Dr Asta Rau, retired, previously CHSR&D
- 2023–25: Prof. Edwin Wouters, Department of Sociology, University of Antwerp
- 2023: Dr André Janse van Rensburg, Centre for Rural Health, College of Health Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Registrar

- 2025: Dr Thejane Mosebi, Master of Medicine Registrar. Rotating at the CHSR&D during July–December.



Dr Thejane Mosebi, MMed Registrar

Completed research projects

Adapting an evidence-based intervention for Sesotho-speaking couples to promote male engagement in maternal and neonatal health

Principal investigator: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)

Co-investigators: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS) and Dr Ngwi Mulu (CHSR&D, UFS)

Although male partner involvement (MPI) in maternal health is recognised as one of many strategies that can work towards the improvement of maternal morbidity and mortality outcomes, it remains limited in many regions worldwide, not least in South Africa. Given the absence of a gender- and culturally sensitive intervention specifically designed to encourage Sesotho-speaking men to become constructively involved in maternal and neonatal health, the project sought to adapt an existing evidence-based intervention (Program P) for MPI in this area. Program P aims to engage men in active fatherhood from prenatal care through their children's early years and has been implemented in at least 18 countries.

This three-year, multi-phase project commenced in 2022 and followed the ADAPT-ITT Model, using a mixed-methods design. Based on the information collected during the situational analysis in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality among parents with children younger than six years of age, men and women of reproductive age, traditional leaders, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, the first round of adaptations to Program P was undertaken. In defining the MPI, particular attention was given to the influence of cultural beliefs, traditional practices, and gender norms. These deliberations were also discussed at a workshop with representatives from Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice (originally involved in the development of Program P), lovelife, Sonke Gender Justice, and the Free State Department of Social Development.

During 2024, the adapted Program P was theatre-tested with 15 participants (three couples and nine participants without a partner). All female participants were pregnant, and all male participants had a pregnant partner. The intervention was facilitated by lovelife and ran over five weeks, with weekly sessions lasting approximately 1.5 to 2 hours each. All sessions were observed by three community workers from NGOs working in reproductive health. After each session, the participants were given 'homework' for the week. They also received WhatsApp communication reminding them of the importance of male involvement in maternal and neonatal health. The intervention was offered in Sesotho and English, and all materials were available in both languages.

Overall, the feedback from participants, facilitators and observers was overwhelmingly positive. The major concerns were that more time should be allocated to each session and that participants should be allowed to send messages in the WhatsApp group. Participants were keen for the intervention to run over a longer period and maintained that it should be offered at PHC facilities so that more 'pregnant couples' could be exposed to the benefits of MPI in maternal health care. Following the theatre test, Program P underwent further adaptations and was renamed *Botswadi bo kopanetsweng – Let's be together on this: A manual for engaging couples in maternal and neonatal health*. Two topical experts from Equimundo provided additional feedback, and the manual was again adapted to incorporate their suggestions, including a new section on gender norms.

Funding for the project, amounting to R1 153 738, including R400 000 for a postdoc, was received from the National Research Foundation (NRF). An additional R70 000 has been secured from the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS. The intervention will be tested among two new groups of participants in more rural and traditional areas with a strong emphasis on cultural heritage and customs. The intervention will be shared with civil society organisations, social development practitioners, and healthcare providers. Training opportunities will be offered for new facilitators.



Front left to right: Lerato Masopha (Department of Psychology, UFS), Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS), Yvonne Kuli (loveLife), Dr Morogwana Shokane (School of Nursing, UFS), Aria Setouto (loveLife), Thapelo Mabule (Mosamaria)
Back left to right: Sello Mathafeng (loveLife), Patrick Godana (Sonke Gender Justice), Alfi Moolman (CHSR&D, UFS), Garcia Mofokeng (loveLife), Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

9 STEPS TO BE AN INVOLVED FATHER



01 SUPPORT

Attending antenatal visits with my wife helps us both make sure our family's health and wellbeing is taken care of, right from the beginning.

Encouraging and supporting my wife during pregnancy, labour and delivery helps to set the stage for a lifetime of connection.



03 PREGNANCY DANGER SIGNS

Every day, from this day forward, I get to choose to play a meaningful role in my children's lives. When I spend time with my kids, we all win.

02 ATTENDANCE



When I know how to tell my wife's pregnancy is in danger, I take her to the hospital. Together we are making sure that our child has a safe, healthy start.

04 QUALITY TIME



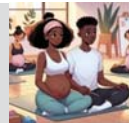
05 SHARED EXPERIENCES



Sharing pregnancy, birth and newborn experiences with other fathers provide valuable opportunities to learn and grow together.

It is essential that men participate actively during pregnancy by making their partner feel cared-for and emotionally supported.

06 ACTIVE PARTICIPATION



07 SUPPORT THE MOTHER



The father can respectfully remind individuals who want to place him in a secondary role that it is his responsibility to care for his baby and communicate with him/her.

08 TAKING RESPONSIBILITY



09 COMMITMENT



Are you committed to be a more involved father?

MEHATO E ROBONG (9) YA HO BAPALA KAROLO BONTATENG



01 Tshehetso

Ho ba teng ho di ketelano tsa thokomelo ya ho ima le mosadi wa ka ho re thusa ka bobedi ba rona ka ho netefatsa hore tsa Bophelo bo bottle le boiketlo diya kgathallwa ho tloha qalong.



03 Matshwao a kotsi

Letsatsi le letsatsi, ho tloha tsatsing le na, ke fumana ho kgetha ho bapala karolo enang le moelelo bophelong ba ngoanaka. Ha ke qeta nako le bana ba ka, ka ofela reya hlola.



05 Boiphihlelo bo aroelaneng

Ho bohlokoa hore banna ba kenye letshoho ka mafolofolo ka nako ya boimana ka ho etsa balekane ba bona ba ikutlwe ekare ba kgathalletswe ibile ba tsheheditse maikutlong.



07 Tshehetso

Ntate ka hlomphe a ka hopotsa motho ka bonngwe a batlang sebaka sa karolo ya bobedi hore ke boikarabelo ba hae ho kgathalla ngoana hae le ho bua le yena.



09 Boitlamo

Ho kgothatsa le ho tshehetsa mosadi wa ka ka nako eo e le moimana ka yona, ho pepa le phano ho thusa ka ho beha sethala sa kgokelo ya bophelo bohle.

02 Boteng



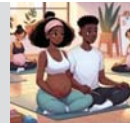
Ha ke tseba hore boimana ba mosadi waka bo kotsing, ke moisa sepettele. Mmoho re netefatsa hore ngoana rona o bolokehile ibile ona le Bophelo bo botle ho tloha qalong.

04 Nako ya boleng



Ho aroelana philelo ya boimane, tsolo le sa tsoa soaloa le bo tate ho fana ka bohlokoa ba monyetla wa ho ithuta le ho hola mmoho.

06 Ha bapala karolo



Karolo ebohlokoa haholo ya shebetso ya ho pepa ke ho fa mme tshehetso ya mmele le maikutlo a ahlokanang.

08 Honka mehato



O ikemiseditse hoba ntate ya amagama haholo?

State of public service delivery: A citizen-centred assessment

Principal investigator: Ismael Davids (Productivity and Capability Measurement Directorate, Department of Public Service and Administration [DPSA])

Co-investigators: Dr Perpetual Chikobvu (Information Management and Research Directorate, Free State Department of Health and Department of Community Health, UFS); Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS); M Tshiguvho (Productivity and Capability Measurement Directorate, DPSA); Moroosi Litheko, Tumelo Sebeela and Loyiso Gwantshu (Research Unit, Free State Department of Health); Bakang Oliphant, Lerato Madliki and Mafumane Malahleha (Strategic Planning & Policy Directorate, Free State Department of Health); Corne Schoeman (Limpopo Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs [COGTA])

Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public health service delivery is paramount to maximising health outcomes. Completed in 2023, this study aimed to establish a comprehensive baseline by examining the perspectives of healthcare workers (HCWs) and community representatives (CRs) on the efficiency and effectiveness of strategies to improve public health service delivery. The research study was conducted across the five districts of the Free State Province. Employing a cross-sectional mixed-method design, structured self-administered electronic and paper-based questionnaires were completed by 443 HCWs and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 136 CRs. The assessment focused on four dimensions: 1) citizen-centredness, 2) organisational capability and productivity, 3) service delivery improvement, and 4) operations management. Quantitative analysis demonstrated strong correlations between healthcare workers' positive perceptions of citizen-centredness and key organisational dimensions, including capability, service delivery enhancement, and operational management. Qualitative analysis indicated an overall positive outlook among CRs. However, there was potential to enhance organisational capability, productivity, service delivery, and operational management. While most HCWs and CRs rated public health system strategies positively, further research is needed to capture the perspectives of public health service users. This study offers foundational insights into public health service delivery from the perspectives of HCWs and CRs. By highlighting strengths and gaps, the findings inform policies and strategies to improve efficiency, citizen-centred care, and operational performance, while emphasising the need for ongoing stakeholder engagement to ensure responsiveness to community needs.

Health research priorities for the Free State Department of Health and research community

Principal investigator: Dr Deirdre van Jaarsveld (School of Nursing, UFS)

Co-investigators: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS); Dr Perpetual Chikobvu (Department of Community Health, UFS and Free State Department of Health); Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS); and Moroesi Litheko (Free State Department of Health)

In August 2022, the Free State Provincial Health Research Committee used the online nominal group technique (NGT) for Health Research Priority Setting (HRPS) for the Free State Department of Health (FSDoH) and the research community, considering various stakeholders' perspectives. The research explored and described the identified health research priorities. It also assessed their alignment with the National Health Research Strategy. Additionally, it provided an opinion on the feasibility of using the online NGT for collaborative co-creation of provincial-level health research priorities. Most of the identified health research priorities resonate with the national health research priorities identified by the National Health Research Committee. However, research to "strengthen surveillance" was identified by participants in the Free State HRPS exercise as a priority. A plausible reason for this might be their heightened awareness of the vital role optimal surveillance systems play in coordinating intersectoral responses to pandemics, particularly considering the serious challenges emerging during the initial stages of the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings were published in an article in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Ongoing research projects

Older adults' experiences of HIV in the Free State Province: A biopsychosocial and health systems perspective

Principal investigator: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

Co-principal investigator: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)

Co-investigators: Prof. Monique Brown (University of South Carolina, USA) and Dr Lerato Makhele (Department of Psychiatry, UFS)

The large-scale rollout of antiretroviral treatment (ART) has led to early treatment initiation, improved life expectancy, and reduced mortality rates among people living with HIV (PLHIV). Consistent use now allows PLHIV to live nearly as long as the general population, significantly reducing AIDS-related morbidity and mortality. Over one-fifth of PLHIV are aged 50 years and older, facing unique challenges, such as polypharmacy, multimorbidities, cognitive impairment, frailty, and mental health conditions. There is evidence of increasing HIV

prevalence, high-risk behaviour, and low HIV literacy levels among older persons. Additionally, Older People Living with HIV (OPLHIV) increasingly face stigma and discrimination, including ageism, resulting in a heightened prevalence of social isolation and loneliness. It is thus crucial to understand the relationship between HIV and geriatric syndromes. The research aims to examine the biopsychosocial factors influencing the health and well-being of OPLHIV on ART in the Free State Province. The project is partially funded by the UFS Directorate Research Development (R150 000) and the CHSR&D (R150 000).



Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS), and Prof. Monique Brown (University of South Carolina, USA)

Prevalence and determinants of medical and mental health comorbidities among older adults admitted to the Free State Psychiatric Complex, South Africa

Principal investigator: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

Co-principal investigator: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)

Co-investigators: Prof. Monique Brown (University of South Carolina, USA) and Dr Lerato Makhele (Department of Psychiatry, UFS)

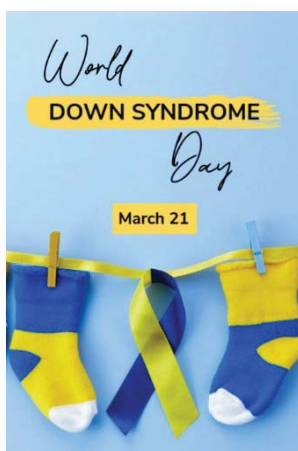
The proportion of older people in South Africa has been steadily increasing. The intersection of ageing, chronic disease, and mental health is particularly concerning for older adults requiring psychiatric care. While data on the age distribution of patients at the Free State Psychiatric Complex (FSPC), the largest specialised mental health facility in the Free State Province, is limited, a substantial number of older adults are likely to be admitted, given the high prevalence of mental health conditions. The research is aimed at reviewing comorbid medical and mental health conditions among older adults who accessed mental healthcare at the FSPC between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2024. Prevalence factors and factors associated with comorbidities will be compared across sub-groups defined by age, sex and HIV status. The project is funded by the CHSR&D (R50 000).

Understanding the perspectives of parents, occupational therapists and advocacy group representatives on the Developmental Resource Stimulation Programme for Children with Down syndrome: A qualitative study

Principal investigator: Dr Olive Khaliq (Department of Paediatrics, UFS)

Co-principal investigators: Dr Dorothy Russell (Department of Paediatrics, UFS) and Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

The Developmental Resource Stimulation Programme (DRSP) is vital in supporting the holistic development of children with Down syndrome. While the programme has been tested and shows promise in meeting their needs, it is important to gather insights from parents, occupational therapists, and advocacy group representatives to understand how effective the DRSP is and where improvements could be made. This research is aimed at exploring the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by parents, as well as the perspectives of occupational therapists and advocacy group representatives on the DRSP. The project received R150 000 from a UFS interdisciplinary grant.



Capacity building for the use of implementation science in various typologies in low- and middle-income countries for the prevention and/or management of the quadruple burden of disease

Principal investigator: Dr Phindile Shangase (Division of Public Health, UFS)

Co-principal investigator: Dr Lebogang Mogongoa (Department of Paediatrics, UFS)

Participants: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male and Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)

This initiative aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 3 (Good health & well-being), Goal 4 (Quality education), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the goals). The multidisciplinary nature of the project is expected to inform both curriculum development and research activities with a strong emphasis on community engagement to enhance public health outcomes. As part of this initiative, a multi-stakeholder training programme was conducted for participants from the UFS, the Central University of Technology, Free State and various community stakeholders. The programme focused on building capacity in implementation research and strengthening the ability of diverse actors to design, apply, implement and scale evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at improving public health in the Free State Province. The training was supplemented with field visits within Mangaung and an Implementation Science symposium. The project is jointly funded by the Directorate Research Development, UFS and the Department of Research Development, Central University of Technology, Free State, for a total amount of R280 000.

Factors influencing nursing students' involvement in mental health care in the Free State Province

Principal investigator: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

Co-investigators: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS), Dr Deirdre van Jaarsveldt (School of Nursing, UFS), and Prof. Stephen Walker (Department of Psychology, UFS)

Over the past decade, mental health has generated significant public health concerns in South Africa, prompting calls for integrating mental health into PHC services. However, this implies that non-mental health specialists must care for mental health users (MHUs), potentially negatively affecting service delivery and patient outcomes. Assessing providers' perceptions of mental health care can improve service delivery and patient outcomes. Moreover, introducing new programmes in South Africa has reduced the focus on mental health training for nursing students, potentially affecting their attitudes and recruitment into mental health care. Research among nursing students in the African context is limited. Thus, it is essential to investigate their attitudes, awareness, experiences, and preparedness for mental health care to inform training and support interventions and promote positive health outcomes for MHUs in the Free State Province. This study explored nursing students' and educators' perspectives on nursing students' involvement in mental health care. The project was supported by a UFS interdisciplinary grant in the amount of R100 000.

New Research Proposals

Context adaptations for scaling community health worker screening of non-communicable diseases in South Africa, Uganda, and Ethiopia

South Africa research team: Prof. Christo Heunis (Principal investigator, CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (Co-investigator, CHSR&D, UFS), Dr Raymond Tweheyo (Co-investigator, School of Public Health, Makerere University [MakSPH], Uganda) and Prof. Monique Brown (Co-investigator, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, USA), Dr Perpetual Chikobvu (Implementer, Free State Department of Health – Health Information), Bandile Ntombela (Implementer, Free State Department of Health – Health Communication) and Francis Sekola (Implementer, Free State Department of Health – Community Health Workers)

Uganda research team: Dr Raymond Tweheyo (Principal Investigator, MakSPH), Prof. Angelina Kakooza-Mwesige (Co-investigator, MakSPH), Prof. Elizeus Rutemberwa (Co-investigator, MakSPH), Catharine Kabahuma (Potential PhD student, UNICEF – Health Information), Dr Meddy Rutayisire (Implementer, Ministry of Health – Monitoring and Evaluation), Paul Mbaka (Ministry of Health – Commissioner Health Information Systems) and Dr Charles Oyo (Ministry of Health – Commissioner NCD Control)

Ethiopia research team: Dr Resham Khatri (School of Public Health, The University of Queensland, Australia) and Dr Eskinder Wolka (International Institute of Primary Health Care – Ethiopia [IIPHC-E])

The CHSR&D, in partnership with Makerere University (Uganda) and the University of Queensland (Australia), has been invited to submit a second-stage proposal under the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases' (GACD) 10th Funding Call (2025) for a five-year project on strengthening health systems for equitable, high-quality care in the context of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Building on Uganda's Ministry of Health-supported pilot integrating epilepsy, diabetes, and hypertension screening into the electronic Community Health Information System (eCHIS), the project aims to explore how contextual adaptations from Uganda and Ethiopia can inform the redesign and feasibility testing of integrated eCHIS-based NCD screening in South Africa's Free State Province, aligned with the re-engineering of PHC and National Health Insurance (NHI) implementation. Using a stepped-wedge quasi-experimental design and guided by the RE-AIM and the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), the aim is to train community health workers to deliver NCD education and screening while assessing feasibility, acceptability, adoption, and sustainability. Expected outcomes include earlier case identification and treatment initiation, improved medication adherence, strengthened continuity of care,

enhanced workforce capacity, digitalised community health work, and integrated services, thereby advancing health system resilience and equity in chronic care delivery.



Dr Raymond Tweheyo (Co-investigator,
MakSPH, Uganda)



Prof Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)

Adapting a group-based psychotherapy intervention to improve mental health and HIV treatment outcomes of older adults living with HIV in the Free State Province, South Africa

Principal investigators: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Monique Brown (Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, USA)

Co-investigators: Prof. Laetus Lategan (Central University of Technology), Dr Lerato Makhele (Department of Psychiatry, UFS), Dr James W Hardin (Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, USA)

HIV remains a major public health challenge in South Africa and globally. Advances in antiretroviral therapy (ART) have substantially extended the life expectancy, resulting in a rapidly growing population of older people living with HIV (OPLHIV; ≥ 50 years old). This demographic transition highlights the urgent need to adapt HIV services to address age-related medical and psychosocial challenges. OPLHIV often experience comorbid conditions, including depression, which adversely affect quality of life and HIV treatment outcomes. Despite this need, evidence-based psychosocial interventions tailored to OPLHIV in low- and middle-income countries remain scarce.

This project seeks to strengthen integrated HIV care by leveraging community health workers (CHWs), trusted frontline providers who have been shown to enhance retention in care, ART adherence, clinic attendance, and viral suppression. Using representative

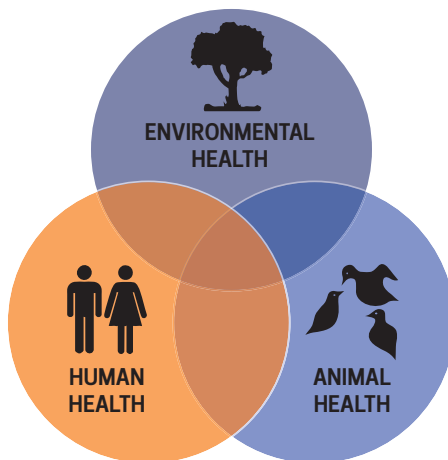
community-based data, the project has three aims: 1) adapt Group Support Psychotherapy (GSP) for delivery by CHWs to the specific needs of OPLHIV in the Free State Province; 2) evaluate the effectiveness of GSP intervention in reducing depressive symptoms and improving HIV treatment outcomes among OPLHIV; and 3) assess feasibility, acceptability, and implementation processes, including CHW training and identify multilevel factors influencing effectiveness.

Application of a One -Health framework to prevent Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever and other zoonotic diseases in high-risk farming communities of the Free State, South Africa

Principal applicant: Dr Nigel Makoah

Co-applicants: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS), Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS), Dr Ayanda Maqhashu (Animal Sciences, UFS), Dr Joseph Sempa (Department of Biostatistics, UFS)

The Centre is also engaged in a transdisciplinary collaboration with the Departments of Virology, Biostatistics and Agricultural Economics at the UFS to develop a five-year NRF grant application to survey Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever. Surveillance of this severe disease, caused by a tick-borne virus with a case fatality rate of 10% to 40%, is currently constrained by limited diagnostic capacity and insufficient data on disease prevalence and community awareness. This project seeks to address these gaps by integrating innovative assay development, advanced epidemiological methods and community engagement within a One Health Framework.



Postgraduate supervision

Completed PhD supervision

- 2025: Johannes Jurie Jansen van Vuuren. *Internship model for South African post-qualification emergency care practitioners*. PhD in Health Professions Education (Module: HPET9100), UFS. Supervisor: Dr René Botha (Department of Clinical Sciences, Central University of Technology, Free State); Co-supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024: Mariëtte van Straaten. *Developing disaster social work guidelines to bridge policy-practice gaps based on the COVID-19 response in Mangaung Metropolitan, South Africa*. PhD in Disaster Management (Module: DSMT9100), UFS. Supervisor: Dr Alice Ncube (Disaster Management Training and Education Centre for Africa [DiMTEC]), UFS; Co-supervisors: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS); Prof. Joerg Szarzynski (Global Mountain Safeguard Research [GLOMOS] Programme, United Nations University)
- 2023: Esther Nako. *The capabilities of male migrant miners in preventing and managing HIV: A case study in Lesotho*. PhD in Development Studies (Module: EMDS9100), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Lochner Marais (Centre for Development Support, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)

Ongoing PhD supervision

- 2025-: Mutshinye Manguvhewa. *Developing positive psychology intervention guidelines to improve South African visible police members' mental health: A mixed-method study in Mpumalanga Province*. PhD in Psychology (Module: PSDA9100), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2025-: David Sehloho. *Improving primary health care in Lejweleputswa District, South Africa: The role of facility committees in service quality enhancement*. PhD Development Studies (Module: EMDS9100), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Lucius Botes, Department of Development Studies, North-West University
- 2024-: Agnes Wechoemang. *A study to develop an integrated guiding framework to manage tuberculosis-diabetes mellitus-human immunodeficiency virus co-infection in Ekurhuleni, South Africa*. PhD in Public Health (Module: PBL9100), UFS. Supervisor: Dr Perpetual Chikobvu (Department of Community Health, UFS and Free State Department of Health); Co-supervisors: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS) and Prof. Thabiso Mofokeng (Department of Internal Medicine, UFS)

- 2023-: Markes Butler. *Developing a framework for community health education on climate change adaptation and resilience: A case study in Xhariep District, Free State Province*. PhD in Public Health (Module: PBL9100), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Bernard Hlalele (Division of Public Health, UFS); Co-supervisors: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS) and Dr Nico Nel (Central University of Technology, Free State)
- 2023-: Lennox Tapera. *A framework for primary healthcare workers to engage men in maternal and neonatal healthcare*. PhD in Development Studies (Module: EMDS9100), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisors: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS) and Dr Ngwi Mulu (CHSR&D, UFS)

Completed master's supervision

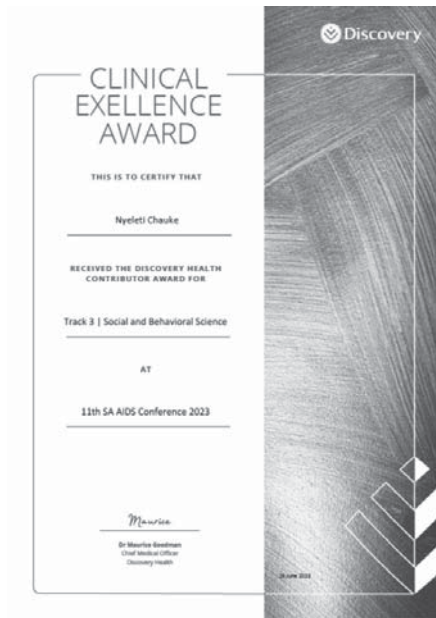
- 2025: Palesa Leshaba. *Barriers and facilitators of perinatal mental health care for mothers in Sharpsville*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Dr Ngwi Mulu (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024: Helen-May Johnston. *Predictors of external TB and HIV/AIDS stigma among healthcare workers in the Free State Province, South Africa*. Master of Social Science in Clinical Psychology (Module: CLIN7900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024: Naum Maeko. *Sexual and reproductive health services: Experiences and views of young adults and providers in Soshanguve*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Nyeleti Chauke. *Barriers to and facilitators of male uptake of HIV testing services in Orange Farm Township, Gauteng Province: User and provider perspectives*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD 8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)



Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male and Nyeleti Chauke



Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male, Palesa Leshaba, and Dr Ngwi Mulu



Master of Health Systems Studies graduate, Nyeleti Chauke, was awarded the Discovery Clinical Excellence Award: Social Behaviour Sciences for a presentation titled *Patients and providers' perspectives on barriers and facilitators to male uptake of HIV testing services at primary healthcare facilities in Orange Farm* at the 11th SA AIDS Conference, Durban, 20-23 June 2023.

Ongoing master's supervision

- 2024-: Thenjiwe Dlomo. *The feasibility of telemedicine in South Africa*. Master of Health Systems Studies, UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024-: Lerato Masopha. *The well-being of orphans and vulnerable children's caregivers: A case study in Mangaung Metropolitan*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023-: Faith Leinaeng-Tsatsi. *The psychosocial care of children and adolescents diagnosed with disorders of sexual development: A case study of experiences of clinical personnel, parents and caregivers at Universitas Academic Hospital*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. André Janse van Rensburg (Centre for Rural Health, University of KwaZulu-Natal); Co-supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024-: Mosa Mokhachane. *Male involvement in maternal health: A qualitative study in Mangaung*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024-: Sikilisiwe Siko. *The well-being of pregnant women attending primary healthcare facilities in Mangaung*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024-: Asiya Tarr. *The well-being and coping of private sector emergency medical services professionals in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023-: Danilo Harkers. *Accessibility of mental healthcare services to members of the LGBTQIA+ Community in rural South Africa*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Dr Ngwi Mulu (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023-: Vimbainashe Nyakudya. *Socio-ecological factors associated with vulnerable families' quality of life during COVID-19*. Master of Health Systems Studies (Module: HSSD8900), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS); Co-supervisor: Dr Ngwi Mulu (CHSR&D, UFS)

Completed honours supervision

- 2025: Nondumiso Makhoba. *A critical review of the impact of mental health stigma on individuals living with bipolar disorder (outpatients) and their families*. Honours

Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

- 2025: Zethembiso Mthethwa. *Exploring the impact of social media use on self-esteem among university students*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2025: Londeka Ngcobo. *Coping strategies of parents with children living with disabilities: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2025: Zandile Ngwenya. *Understanding the psychological burden and coping experiences of parents and caregivers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2025: Kayla Saul. *Exploring the relationship between childhood trauma, emotional invalidation and Borderline Personality Disorder in adolescents: A literature-based critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2025: Yonwaba Thantsi. *Exploring the socioeconomic disadvantages of parental styles in Black communities*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024: Zanell de Bruin. *Exploring the impact of school-based mental health support on learners' psychosocial well-being in South Africa: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024: Eza Ketse. *The role of support systems and communication access in enhancing the resilience of deaf individuals: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024: Zanell de Bruin. *Mental health support systems for adolescents in South Africa: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2024: Candice Kobran. *The impact of COVID-19 on the psychological well-being/mental health of first-year university students: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Lerato Masopha. *The relationship between unemployment and mental health in South Africa: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Samryn Muller. *The impact of music intervention on the mental health of university students. A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology

Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male (CHSR&D, UFS)

- 2023: Siphephelo Buthelezi. *Exploring the psychological well-being and coping strategies of mothers with premature infants in the neonatal intensive care unit: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Brenique January. *Burnout-associated job dissatisfaction and mitigating strategies among healthcare providers: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Skhumbuzo Maseko. *The negative impacts of social media on adult romantic relationships: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Naha Maqhasa. *The psychological impact of single parenting: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Khanya Mbawu. *Exploring the psychological well-being and coping strategies of mothers with premature infants in the neonatal intensive care unit: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D, UFS)
- 2023: Noluvo Mncwabe. *An investigation of the contributory and preventative psychological factors that influence recidivism among ex-offenders: A critical review*. Honours Research Project in Psychology Research (Module: PSHR6808), UFS. Supervisor: Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D, UFS)

Engagement

International engagement

- 2025: Prof. Mufaro Kanyangarara, from the University of South Carolina in the USA, visited the CHSR&D on 14 September to explore opportunities for potential collaboration. On 13 September, she presented an Implementation Science for Global Health Seminar, which Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male attended.
- 2024: Prof. Monique Brown, also from the University of South Carolina, visited the CHSR&D from 18 to 30 August. As part of this visit, she delivered a lecture titled *Trauma, HIV and aging: A mixed-methods approach*, contributing to the local scientific discourse on HIV and ageing. She also visited the Mosamaria AIDS Ministry to explore community-based HIV and psychosocial support initiatives.



Prof. Monique Brown (University of South Carolina, USA) helping to distribute lunch packs to the children at the Mosamaria AIDS Ministry

- 2023–25: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Associate Editor, *African Journal of AIDS Research*
- 2023: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Proposal reviewer, Medical Research Council, United Kingdom
- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis and Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male attended the World Conference on Lung Health 2023 on ‘Transforming Evidence into Practice.’ Paris, France, 15–18 November. They also visited Prof. Edwin Wouters at the Department of Sociology, University of Antwerp, Belgium, on 14 November.
- 2023: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male visited Prof. Monique Brown at the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Arnold School of Public Health, University of South

Carolina, USA, 10-12 July, to initiate a collaboration on research of mutual interest in the areas of HIV treatment outcomes.

- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis – Exhibitor, *The Centre for Health Systems Research & Development (CHSR&D) at the University of the Free State (UFS): Research collaboration with the Free State Department of Health (FSDoH) and the Health Systems Studies Master's Programme*. Continental celebration of the 2023 African Public Service Day, 9th edition on The African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) will require a fit-for-purpose African public administration to succeed. Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 21-23 June

National engagement

- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis – Participant, Health Systems Trust Strategic Planning Retreat and Organisational Transformation Discussion, Durban, 8-9 December
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis – Organising team member, National Research for Health Summit on Towards 2030: Accelerating Action on Health-Related Research – towards achievement of SDGs in South Africa, National Health Research Committee, Johannesburg, 28-29 November
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis and Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Engagement with the University of Pretoria regarding the incorporation of the CHSR&D in the South African Health Research Consortium
- 2025: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Reviewer, SAMRC Extra-Mural Unit Application
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis – EXCO member: National Health Research Committee
- 2024: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Reviewer, NRF Rating Application
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – Convenor, National Health Research Committee Subcommittee on Monitoring and Evaluation
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – Member, National Health Research Committee
- 2023-24: Prof. Christo Heunis – Member, South African Alliance for the DHS (SALAD)
- 2023-25: Prof. Christo Heunis – Member, Board of Trustees, Health Systems Trust (HST) – Subcommittee on Governance
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – Participant, South African Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS) High Level Technical Meeting, Pretoria, 25-26 April
- 2023-24: Prof. Christo Heunis – Reviewer, NRF South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) 5-Year Application Review
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – Reviewer, NRF Rating Application Review
- 2024: Patrick Godana (Sonke Gender Justice) visited the CHSR&D from 3 to 4 September to train loveLife facilitators to present the adapted Program P for the *Adapting an evidence-based intervention for Sesotho-speaking couples to promote male engagement in maternal and neonatal health project*
- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis – Reviewer, NRF Rating Application Review

- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis – Reviewer, South African Academy for Science and ARTS Selection Committee for the Stals Prize for Social Sciences
- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis – Panellist, Workshop: Towards system-wide strengthening of the District Health System for healthy leadership and governance: Why, What, Who, How? South African Learning Alliance on District Health Systems (SALAD). Public Health Association of South Africa (PHASA) Conference, Gqeberha, 10–13 September
- 2023: Dr Wessel van den Berg (Equimundo) visited the CHSR&D from 7 to 8 August to discuss the adaptation of Program P for the *Adapting an evidence-based intervention for Sesotho-speaking couples to promote male engagement in maternal and neonatal health* project

Provincial engagement

- 2025: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Abstract reviewer, 13th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on Advancing Health in South Africa Together: Tackling Challenges, Strengthening Systems, and Embracing Digital Innovation. Free State Department of Health, UFS and the Central University of Technology, Free State, Virtual, Bloemfontein, South Africa, 21 November
- 2025: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Abstract reviewer and author, 13th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on Advancing Health in South Africa Together: Tackling Challenges, Strengthening Systems, and Embracing Digital Innovation. Free State Department of Health, UFS and Central University of Technology, Free State, Virtual, Bloemfontein, South Africa, 21 November
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis – Organising team member, speaker notes, abstract reviewer and author, abstract book editor, session chair and presenter, 13th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on Advancing Health in South Africa Together: Tackling Challenges, Strengthening Systems, and Embracing Digital Innovation. Free State Department of Health, UFS and Central University of Technology, Free State, Virtual, Bloemfontein, South Africa, 21 November
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – Organising team member, speaker notes, abstract book editor, session chair, vote of thanks and presenter, 12th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on Health and Healthcare on the Brink of National Health Insurance. Free State Department of Health, UFS and Central University of Technology, Free State, Virtual, 22 November
- 2024: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Abstract reviewer and session chair, 12th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on Health and Healthcare on the Brink of National Health Insurance. Free State Department of Health, UFS and Central University of Technology, Free State, Virtual, 22 November
- 2024: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Abstract reviewer and session chair. 12th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on Health and Healthcare on the Brink of

National Health Insurance. Free State Department of Health, UFS and Central University of Technology, Free State, Virtual, 22 November

- 2023-25: Prof. Christo Heunis – Vice-Chair, Free State Provincial Health Research Committee (PHRC)
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – Organising team member, speaker notes, abstract reviewer, abstract book editor, session chair, vote of thanks and presenter, 12th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on Health and Healthcare on the Brink of National Health Insurance. Free State Department of Health, UFS and Central University of Technology, Free State, Virtual, 22 November
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – *Digital Health Webinar, Free State Department of Health, Virtual, 21 November*
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – Organising team member and session chair, Lejweleputswa District Health Summit 2024 on Partnerships and collaborations towards district health strengthening to promote healthy lives and well-being in Lejweleputswa. Welkom, 13-15 November
- 2023-24: Prof. Christo Heunis, Chair – Mosamaria AIDS Ministry Non-profit Organisation
- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis – Organising team member, track/session chair and closing remarks, 11th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on District Health Systems Strengthening: Towards universal quality healthcare services and disease management. Free State Department of Health and UFS, Virtual, 23 November
- 2023: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Abstract reviewer and session chair, 11th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on District Health Systems Strengthening: Towards universal quality healthcare services and disease *management*. Free State Department of Health and UFS, Virtual, 23 November
- 2023: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Abstract reviewer, 11th Annual Free State Provincial Health Research Day on District Health Systems Strengthening: Towards universal quality healthcare services and disease management. Free State Department of Health and UFS, Virtual, 23 November

Institutional engagement

- 2025: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Panellist, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences Research Day, UFS
- 2025: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Assessor, School of Nursing, UFS
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis – Member, Scientific Committee for the Social Sciences
- 2024: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Internal reviewer, NRF Thuthuka Application Review
- 2024: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Committee member, Senate Research Ethics Committee (SREC)
- 2024: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Committee member, General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC)

- 2023-24: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Evaluation committee member, School of Nursing, UFS; Public Health Division, UFS
- 2023-2025: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Chairperson, Scientific Committee for the Social Sciences
- 2024-2025: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – Committee member, General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC)
- 2023-25: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Evaluation committee member, School of Nursing, UFS; Public Health Division, UFS
- 2023-25: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Faculty of the Humanities representative at the Faculty of Health Sciences Faculty Board, UFS
- 2023: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – Adjudicator, Faculty of the Humanities 3-Minute Thesis Competition

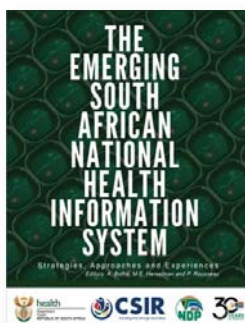
Journal manuscript review

- 2025: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – *BMC Infectious Diseases*
- 2025: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – *Health SA Gesondheid*
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis – *BMC Public Health*
- 2025: Prof. Christo Heunis – *Sage Open Nursing*
- 2025: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – *African Journal of AIDS Research*
- 2024: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – *Frontiers in Health Sciences*
- 2024: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – *British Medical Journal*
- 2024: Prof. Gladys Kigozi-Male – *African Journal of AIDS Research*
- 2024: Prof. Christo Heunis – *International Journal for Environmental Research and Public Health*
- 2023: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht – *South African Health Review*
- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis – *Systems*
- 2023: Prof. Christo Heunis – *BMC Health Services Research*

Publications

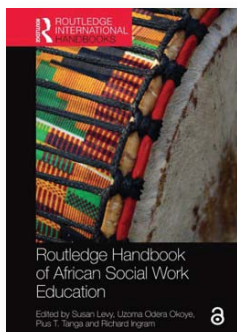
Book chapters

- 2024: Tshilo TR, Heunis JC, Chikobvu P, Ntombela B & Litheko M. Chapter 12: Development and implementation of the Master Health Facility List (MHFL): Insights from the Free State's 2021 COVID-19 vaccine rollout. In: A Botha, ME Herselman & P Rousseau (Eds.). *The Emerging South African National Health Information System: Strategies, Approaches and Experiences*. Pretoria: National Department of Health and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, pp. 327-351. ISBN 978-0-7988-5670-6 ISBN 0-7988-5670-X. <https://www.csir.co.za/emerging-south-african-national-health-information-system-strategies-approaches-and-experiences>
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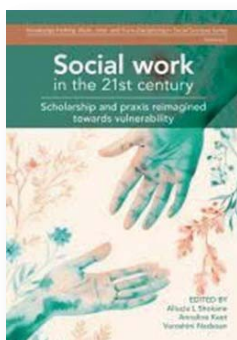


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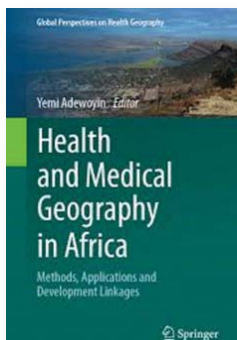


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