



The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf),
the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and the
Organisation for Women in Science in the Developing World South African National Chapter
(OWSD SA NC),
invite you to a webinar on

“Advancing Equitable Healthcare Access for Women and Persons with Disabilities:
Bridging Gaps through Awareness, Inclusive Policy, and Practice.”

Date: 17 July 2025
Time: 12:00 - 14:00
Venue: Zoom
RSVP: [Click here](#) to register

Background

Healthcare is not a privilege, it is a basic human right that must be upheld for everyone, including women and persons with disabilities. Yet, despite this principle, many still face significant barriers when trying to access the care they need. These challenges are not accidental; they are a result of unfair societal attitudes and health systems that continue to exclude and marginalise . If we are to achieve gender equality, we must take action to change this. We must ensure that women and persons with disabilities have equal access to quality, appropriate healthcare. Only when everyone's health rights are respected and protected can we build a truly just and inclusive society.

Programme

Facilitator: Prof Leslie Swartz, SU		
12:00 - 12:05	Opening Remarks	Prof Leslie Swartz, SU (MASSAf)
12:05 - 12:35	Incorporating a disability lens into women’s reproductive health research and practice	Dr Noreth Muller-Kluits, King's College London
12:35 - 13:05	Bridging gaps of SRHR through inclusive Health Research	Prof Jill Hanass-Handcock, SAMRC
13:05 - 13:35	Ensuring Access to SRHR: The Role of Advocacy in Health Care Equity	Dr Melusi Dhlamini, healthforce
13:35 - 13:55	Q and A Session	All
13:55 - 14:00	Closing Remarks	Dr Kim Jonas, SAMRC



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Biographies



Leslie Swartz is a professor of psychology at Stellenbosch University and editor in chief of South African Journal of Science. He holds a PhD in Psychology from University of Cape Town and a PhD in English from Stellenbosch University. He is an A rated researcher in the NRF system. Much of his work focuses on disability rights and access issues, with an emphasis on southern Africa, and he currently edits the Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, having been founding editor-in-chief of African Journal of Disability. Current work focuses on language issues in mental health care in the context of migration and social exclusion.



Dr Noreth Muller-Kluits is a disability researcher, academic and social worker by profession. She is a research affiliate at King's College London for the Trajectories project (PI: Dr Michelle Pentecost) and an honorary affiliate at Stellenbosch University as part of the Early Intervention and Child Mental Health Public Square. Combining lived and professional experience, her research focuses on support to service users, especially persons with disabilities and their families in different sectors, including health care and social work.



Prof Jill Hanass-Handcock Over the past decade, she has focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights for vulnerable groups in Southern Africa, especially women, youth, and people with disabilities. She is recognised for her research on the sexual health needs of people with disabilities, using ethnography, statistics, policy analysis, and intervention development. Her work has improved understanding of HIV-related vulnerabilities and violence against women with disabilities, and the cost of disability, highlighted in UNICEF's top research of 2016. She developed “Breaking the Silence,” a sexuality education curriculum for youth with disabilities, recognised by UNESCO as a best practice. Her Forgotten Agenda project on SRHR for women with disabilities during COVID-19 won the 2023 Discovery Award. She also created the Disability Awareness Toolkit to make health services more inclusive. Currently, she leads the Disability Data Initiative Sub-Saharan Africa, a novel approach to monitoring disability rights through public datasets.



Dr Melusi Dhlamini is a medical doctor who graduated from Wits University in 2014. He has experience in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Dr Dhlamini previously served as the Director of Medical Services at Marie Stopes South Africa. Currently, he is the Clinical Lead at healthforce. In 2020, he was honoured as one of the Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans. His work continues to focus on improving access to comprehensive reproductive health services, particularly in underserved communities.



Dr Kim Jonas is a Senior Specialist Scientist in the Health Systems Research Unit at the South African Medical Research Council. She leads a portfolio of research which seeks to understand the factors influencing the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of adolescents and young people in South Africa. Her research specialty is on access and use of SRH services, HIV and unintended pregnancy prevention, and universal access to SRH services (UHC). She has over 10 years working experience leading (as a PI/co-PI) several large cross-sectional household/school surveys, including implementation science studies. She is a Y-rated NRF scientist (2024), a Review Panel (RP2) member for the WHO SRH Programme and Editor at the BMC's Reproductive Health Journal. She has co-authored over 50 peer reviewed journal articles.