

SUPPORT FOR TRADITIONAL HEALERS

New initiative promotes traditional medicine and conservation in KZN

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A groundbreaking initiative that aims to promote the use of traditional medicine while also supporting conservation efforts has been announced for the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (Edtea) has announced the establishment of the Empilweni Herbs Distribution Pharmacy in Mtubatuba.

MEC for Edtea Musa Zondi made the announcement recently, highlighting the importance of traditional medicine.

Zondi said traditional health practitioners (THPs) are vital in delivering culturally rooted and accessible healthcare to many communities in KZN.

"In recognition of this, and in alignment with our commitment to biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use, we are proud to announce the establishment of the Empilweni Distribution Pharmacy for Traditional Health Practitioners, located at the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve."

The initiative is led by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. The pharmacy will serve as a regulated hub for the sourcing, certification, training, and sustainable distribution of traditional medicinal materials, Zondi said.

The MEC highlighted the key features of the pharmacy:

- ◆ **Certified supply of medicinal plants and animal by-products:** Ethically sourced from Ezemvelo's protected areas.
- ◆ **Quality control:** Improving the safety and reliability of traditional medicine.
- ◆ **Training programmes for THPs:** Focused on sustainable harvesting, biodiversity protection, and conservation-compliant practices.
- ◆ **Collaborative engagement:** Involving local communities and other stakeholders.

"This is not just a health intervention, it

is a sustainability solution. By reducing illegal harvesting pressures, the pharmacy protects biodiversity while preserving the integrity and dignity of traditional healing," the MEC said.

"The Empilweni Pharmacy will empower practitioners, support community health, and ensure that KwaZulu-Natal remains a leader in harmonising indigenous knowledge systems with conservation imperatives," he said.

Hannah Lidgett, the DA spokesperson on Edtea said, "We support the legal, ethical, and sustainable access to materials that this project will offer traditional healthcare practitioners."

Chairperson of the Edtea committee Mafika Mndebele said they viewed this initiative not only as a health-sector breakthrough but as a flagship economic development project that must be closely monitored, supported, and expanded.

"Empilweni is a welcome development – an innovation that could become a model for other districts in KwaZulu-Natal and even beyond. The committee will ensure proper oversight and support to guarantee that the project meets its intended objectives and benefits the people of Mtubatuba and surrounding areas," he said.

Vuyi Hadebe, biodiversity conservation executive manager at Ezemvelo, said he was excited about the planned establishment of the pharmacy.

"Traditional healers play a vital role in the lives of many black South Africans, and their work often depends on access to a variety of plant and animal-based products. Once operational, the pharmacy will provide a reliable and ethical source for these materials.

"We are confident that this initiative will also contribute to the conservation of biodiversity by reducing the illegal harvesting of plants and discouraging the purchase of animal products through the black market. It is important to emphasise that no wildlife will be harmed in support of this project," Hadebe said.