

Media Release

Association for Savings and Investment South Africa (ASISA)

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Free telephonic HIV pre-test counselling for SADC

Residents of Southern African Development Community (SADC) member countries who apply for life insurance policies requiring HIV testing from South African life insurers have been given access to free telephonic pre-test counselling before taking the HIV test.

Telephonic pre-test counselling via a toll free number was launched in South Africa as a world first in July last year. Internationally in the long-term insurance environment, life insurance applicants receive only written pre-test counselling information before consenting to the HIV test.

Peter Dempsey, deputy CEO of the Association for Savings and Investment South Africa (ASISA), says since South African life insurers are increasingly expanding into neighbouring countries it made sense to extend the telephonic pre-test counselling service to SADC countries at no additional cost.

Access to telephonic counselling

Dempsey explains that the service is available to consumers who have applied for a policy requiring an HIV test with a South African life insurer. Clients need to provide their name, the insurance company's name and their policy or policy quote number. Counsellors are trained in everything relating to HIV/AIDS, as well as the relevant insurance aspects.

The service can be accessed from neighbouring countries by sending an SMS to a dedicated number (00 27 82 334 0515). A counsellor will return the call during operating hours, from Monday to Friday between 07h00 and 19h00. All information will be handled with utmost confidentiality.

Counsellors will explain to callers their rights when it comes to HIV testing for insurance policies and also explain the implications of taking an HIV test. This is available in South Africa's eleven official languages.

Dempsey says in South Africa the toll free pre-test counselling services was launched as an additional counselling service, because written and individual pre-test counselling is not easily accessible to clients living outside major centres.

In South Africa, life insurance applicants can access the telephonic pre-test counselling service by calling 0800 562 562.

ASISA quality assurance

Dempsey also announced that ASISA will start doing on-site inspections and quality assurance of laboratories in the following cities as from next month: Mbabane, Maseru, Gaborone, Maun, Harare and Bulawayo.

He says the Medical and Underwriting Standing Committee (MUSC) of ASISA was recently requested by member companies conducting business in neighbouring countries to investigate the HIV testing methodologies practiced by laboratories in these countries.

He adds that a number of laboratories in neighbouring countries are in favour of receiving ASISA accreditation as it could lead to increased business flow.

“More life offices are now starting to conduct business in neighbouring countries, but business volumes are restricted by the fact that most offices will only accept an HIV test done within South Africa. It therefore makes sense to determine whether the HIV testing standards of laboratories in neighbouring countries are acceptable.”

Dempsey says this is ultimately in the best interest of the consumer, as these quality standards are aimed primarily at preventing false positive tests.

Dempsey says starting next month two members of ASISA’s Medical and Underwriting Standing Committee will visit the facilities in neighbouring countries where HIV testing is done.

He says laboratories will be assessed in line with the standards set by ASISA’s HIV Testing Protocol. The aim of the protocol is to ensure that the life industry follows the highest standards in all aspects of HIV screening of applicants for life insurance. It applies to all HIV tests performed by ASISA member offices and addresses issues such as identification, confidentiality, informed consent, pre- and post-test counselling, transmission of test results and accreditation of test kits and laboratories.

“As ASISA has no legal jurisdiction in SADC countries, we will not be able to force compliance with the protocol. However, life insurers that want to expand business into these countries will be encouraged to manage areas of concern through their service level agreements with these laboratories.”

Dempsey adds that compliance with ASISA’s HIV Testing Protocol is also in the interest of the laboratories as they are likely to see an increase in business from South African insurers.

Ends

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ASISA represents the majority of South Africa’s asset managers, collective investment scheme management companies, linked investment service providers, multi-managers, and life insurance companies. ASISA was formed in 2008 by members of the Association of Collective Investments (ACI), the Investment Management Association of South Africa (IMASA), the Linked Investment Service Providers Association (LISPA) and the Life Offices’ Association (LOA).