



# New medical watchdog to focus on policy

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PROMOTING access to essential medicines, advancing research and development in the medical sector, and keeping the government and private sector accountable to local policies within the field.

This is the role a new advocacy alliance, the SA Health Technologies Advocacy Coalition, plans to play in the arena of medical research and development (R&D).

Launched in Joburg yesterday, the 21-member group said it would focus on improving the country's policy and funding environment for R&D of new health technologies such as medicines, vaccines, devices and diagnostics.

Dr Konji Sebati, chief executive of the Innovative Pharmaceutical Association of SA, said: "This launch comes at a very crucial time. Civil-society organisations are increasingly playing an important part in our country. They are a vital organ of government and at times play a mediation role between the individual and the state.

## Civil bodies playing a critical role

"It's timely that civil organisations move towards R&D as it is part of the chain in promoting access to medicine and technology."

Sebati praised the government for initiating a number of programmes, policies and strategies to bolster science and innovation, particularly the Department of Science and Technology, with initiatives such as the new state-owned pharmaceutical firm, Ketlaphela (which aims to manufacture HIV medication), and Biovac (a public/private partnership focused on vaccine supply).

But Sebati said the government still needed to invest more in R&D to build confidence in the country's intellectual capital. "We do have intellectual capital in this country, which we should showcase to the world, and investing in R&D is key to that."

Sibusiso Hlatjwako from Aeras, a non-profit biotech company, said the amount going into R&D – globally and locally – was "not what it should be, as TB is one of the diseases we feel is not getting the attention it deserves, yet in South Africa it's the leading cause of death".