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## Namdeb to provide AIDS drugs

HUGH ELLIS

**NAMDEB diamond corporation is to provide anti-retroviral drugs to its HIV-positive employees, becoming one of the first major private sector employers in the country to do so.**

Managing Director Inge Zaamwani made the announcement at a handover ceremony for beneficiaries of the corporation's social fund.

"We will provide anti-retroviral drugs to all (HIV-positive) employees and their spouses," she said to applause from the audience.

The decision was taken by Namdeb's board on August 8.

The drug provision will be run as a two-year pilot project, starting January 2003, after which Namdeb will review the programme.

In common with the AIDS drug programme of sister company Debswana, employees will have to fund "a small proportion" of the drug cost themselves.

The drugs will be provided separately from the company's medical aid scheme.

Zaamwani later told The Namibian that about N\$46 million had been budgeted for the programme, to be spent over five years.

This was based on an infection rate of about seven per cent, and assumed that all HIV-positive patients would want the treatment, she said.

In a voluntary saliva test taken by 52 per cent of Namdeb employees last year, just under seven per cent were found to be HIV positive.

"The provision of drug treatment is a moral and social responsibility issue, aimed at extending the lives and improving the quality of life of our employees," Zaamwani said.

The MD added that the company's efforts to control the AIDS pandemic included free voluntary counselling and testing, treatment of opportunistic infections and awareness programmes on AIDS and other diseases.

Last month it was revealed in The Namibian that the half-state-owned diamond mining company, which employs over 3 000 workers, had begun a study to determine the long-term costs and benefits of providing such drugs.



In South Africa, mining giant Anglo American announced earlier this month that it would provide AIDS drugs to its employees. It was followed shortly afterwards by De Beers, to which it is closely linked.

De Beers also owns half the shares in Namdeb and the Botswana diamond company Debswana.

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