

# PHASA 2025

Partnerships for Public Health:  
Sculpting a Healthier Future Together



## DR. BULELA VAVA

PRESIDENT, PUBLIC ORAL HEALTH FORUM

Dr. Bulela Vava is the founder and president of the Public Oral Health Forum (POHF), a Global Atlantic Fellow (Atlantic Institute, UK), and a community dentistry registrar at Wits University. With more than a decade of experience in the South African public oral health sector, he has been a strong advocate for health equity, particularly in rural and underserved communities. His early involvement with organisations such as the Rural Doctors Association, Section 27, and the Rural Health Advocacy Project helped shape his activism in healthcare leadership and management.

As a student, he co-founded the Tuks Rural Health Society at the University of Pretoria to promote rural healthcare careers. Early in his career, he served as a student liaison for RuDASA and was elected Vice-President of the South African Dental Association's Young Dentist Council, where he championed the interests of young dentists. While working as a rural dentist in Libode, Eastern Cape, his contributions were recognised by the Atlantic Institute, leading to his selection as a Global Atlantic Fellow for Health Equity in South Africa in 2019. This experience inspired the creation of the POHF, a member-based organisation committed to advancing oral health equity in South Africa.

Dr. Vava has elevated oral health as a critical public health issue, regularly contributing to platforms such as the Daily Maverick, Spotlight NSP, and Health-e News, and engaging on radio stations like Metro FM, Cape Talk, and SAFM. Under his leadership, POHF has gained international recognition, joining the WHO Global Oral Health Coalition at the inaugural WHO Global Oral Health Meeting in Bangkok.

Beyond oral health, Dr. Vava is committed to addressing broader health inequalities, particularly advocating for the rights of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He serves as Clinical Director for Special Olympics South Africa's Special Smiles program and continues to contribute to several initiatives aimed at raising awareness about and responding to the healthcare needs of persons living with IDD. Despite the neglect of oral health in general healthcare, he remains dedicated to ensuring oral health rights for all in South Africa and beyond.