

The rise of the 'nursepreneur' scoops prestigious CSI award for Imperial Logistics' Unjani Clinics

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Imperial Logistics' Unjani Clinics have been named the winner of the prestigious Trialogue Strategic CSI Award 2021. The award was launched in 2014 to recognise projects that find an ideal balance between delivering social impact and corporate benefit. The award encourages corporate social investment (CSI) practitioners to think more strategically when designing and implementing their programmes.



Unjani Clinics NPC is a unique non-profit company set up to serve the underinsured market, namely 80% of South Africans who are employed but cannot afford private-sector healthcare, and black women with professional nursing qualifications and dispensing licences who are keen to run their own small businesses.

Unjani Clinics began as a CSI initiative of Imperial Health Sciences – a division of Imperial Logistics – in 2013. The franchise model saw six container clinics established, with the aim of exploring the fee-for-service model within the primary healthcare arena. The pilot programme aimed to build sustainable microenterprises. It was so successful that Unjani Clinics NPC was registered as a separate legal entity in 2014, and Imperial Logistics funded 25 clinics to ensure that proof of concept was working before bringing other investors on board.

The success of the project has demonstrated how private service providers can play an important role in helping to achieve universal health coverage, removing some of the pressure from overburdened state facilities.

The rise of the 'nursepreneur'

Today, 29 of the 94 clinics in the network are sponsored by Imperial Logistics. The total investment cost in an Unjani Clinic – as well as the professional nurse and the community she will serve – is just over R1 million. By the end of June 2021, the NPC had received sponsor funding amounting to R139 million – a testament to the sponsors' confidence in its transformative value to society. The NPC aims to have 100 clinics in place by the end of 2021.

Unjani Clinics' partnership with National Treasury's Jobs Fund helps to promote its unique entrepreneurial model, which provides 'nursepreneurs' with business management training and mentorship in addition to funding, empowering them to sustain and grow their businesses. Each clinic employs people permanently and aims to achieve an average of 350 consultations a month.

The name 'Unjani' means "How are you?" in both Zulu and Xhosa and highlights the importance of providing personalised, hands-on service to patients accustomed to being little more than a number at state facilities. The clinics provide access to quality primary healthcare at affordable prices – a vital service at all times, but even more so during a pandemic.

Judging criteria

The award judges were Gugu McLaren-Ushewokunze, who leads the Social Transformation programme at the National Business Initiative (NBI), Anthony Wilson-Prangle, who lectures on leading social change at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), and Bhhekinkosi Moyo, adjunct professor at Wits Business School and director of the Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI). Each entry was scored against the project's objectives, social benefits, and corporate benefits.

"The development of the nursepreneurs concept in container-based micro-clinic form is a brilliant, much-needed innovation," the judges said. "The excellent data, and the work done with independent evaluators to assess health and financial impact, is commendable and makes this initiative a strong winner this year. This is one of the strongest examples we have received over the years, in terms of the effort to build a business model that is sustainable in the South African context."

The judges went on to point out that the initiative is closely aligned with the company infrastructure and partner/supplier network, bringing quality affordable healthcare to multiple communities.

"Unjani Clinics provides a good example of how a project can deliver benefits to multiple stakeholders, strengthening the brand while delivering social return," said Trialogue MD Nick Rockey. "This is what strategic CSI is about – creating a sustainable business model that generates employment, serves a gap in the market, and feeds back into core business objectives."

Speaking on behalf of the winner, Lauren Rota – vice-president environmental, social and governance at Imperial – said the award was a wonderful recognition of a project very dear to the business. "We have walked a long journey with Unjani Clinics and have seen the initiative grow from strength to strength," she said. "Our target for the year is to have 100 clinics rolled out by our 'nursepreneurs' – trained nurses skilled in running and managing their own businesses – who are stalwart representatives in their communities and provide excellent service at a very fair cost."

Rota went on to say that the project demonstrates that the private sector can play a meaningful role in rolling out affordable, quality healthcare. "We are delighted to partner with Unjani Clinics, and other companies are very welcome to join – the vision is to roll out an even larger network of clinics," she said. "This is an open invitation from the partners to bring other partners on board."

The judges named Anglo American Platinum's Mogalakwena Water Project, Shoprite Group's Retail Readiness and YES4Youth programmes, Eskom's Expo for Young Scientists and GrowthPoint's Growsmart Educational Programme as high-scoring commendable projects in 2021.

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