



INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE AGAINST EPILEPSY
SOUTH AFRICA

27 June 2026

POSITION STATEMENT ON AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS TO PHENOBARBITAL IN SOUTH AFRICA

The International League Against Epilepsy South African (ILAE-SA) chapter is the national member chapter of the ILAE, and shares the organisation's vision of a world where no person's life is limited by epilepsy.

The ILAE-SA aims to serve health professionals via its link to the premier international resource for current and emerging standards and best practice, and to support South African healthcare professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills in the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care of epilepsy. Our organisation also advocates for epilepsy as a public health imperative, given the significant burden of epilepsy among children and adults in South Africa.

The ILAE-SA is aware of the recent challenges in access to and availability of enteral phenobarbital across South Africa in both the public and private health sectors. Phenobarbital is included under the national and World Health Organisation's Essential Drug List of antiseizure medications. The agent has a critical use for our population with particular utility among paediatric populations and for emergency use in status epilepticus. While multifactorial in nature, the interruption in supply of phenobarbital has had a significant impact on the health and epilepsy care of many children and adults across the country.

Efforts are underway at national and regional level to address the interruption in supply, including applications via Section 21 applications to the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority to import the medication into both the public and private sectors. **Clinicians are encouraged to reach out to their local pharmacies and complete further Section 21 applications to expand importation of and access to phenobarbital.** In addition, safe and affordable treatment alternatives that can be used for both children and adults, such as levetiracetam, are being explored but are not yet widely available at all levels of the healthcare sector. There have been variable degrees of success in achieving either of these objectives to date despite the significant efforts being made.

Patient safety and continuity of care are paramount. We commend the efforts of clinicians and advocates working towards a sustainable and widely available supply of phenobarbital for all people living with epilepsy in South Africa. We also support those initiatives to secure equally safe and effective alternatives to phenobarbital to ensure that people living with epilepsy have access to a range of medications that can be provided at all levels and sector of healthcare within South Africa.

Chair: MV Gule

Secretary: Serini Murugasen

Treasurers: Regan Solomons and Prakash Kathan

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Website: <https://www.ilae.org/regions-and-countries/national-chapters/south-africa>