

MEDIA STATEMENT

MASOYISE HEALTH PROGRAMME CALLS FOR REPRIORITISATION OF PRE-EXISTING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH THREATS IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

Johannesburg, 7 October 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a threat to global health systems and forced the restructuring of resources for health care the world over, including in respect of tuberculosis (TB), HIV and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This is of serious concern to the Minerals Council South Africa, and should be of concern to all South Africans.

On Thursday, 15 October 2020, the Masoyise Health Programme – a multi-stakeholder initiative led by the Minerals Council to reduce the impact of occupational and other health threats, including TB, HIV and NCDs – will be hosting a virtual seminar to address the disruption of fundamental care in these areas and to refocus attention on existing diseases during the era of COVID-19. NCDs are diseases that are not transmitted from person-to-person, and include cancer, diabetes and auto-immune diseases.

The Masoyise Health Programme traces its origins back to 2016 when the mining industry, labour, the Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC) and other government health institutions, first launched the Masoyise iTB campaign, under the auspices of the Minerals Council, to address the impact of TB on industry employees and communities. In 2019, Masoyise iTB became the more broadly focused Masoyise Health Programme.

The diagnosis and treatment of TB has been a significant success story for the mining industry. For many years, the mining industry experienced a TB incidence rate far higher than the rest of South Africa. Thanks to Masoyise, that is no longer the case illustrating the profound progress made to date. Similarly, finding and caring for employees with HIV has been a major industry drive, with a great deal of success achieved in ensuring that employees know their HIV status, and are treated so that they may live well with the disease.

Dr Thuthula Balfour, Head: Health at the Minerals Council notes: “Over the past decades our industry and its stakeholders have had to develop substantial expertise in dealing with the



spread of infectious diseases, and over the past few months, the industry has put that experience to good use. More than that, we place a great deal of emphasis on general employee wellness, a factor that we have seen has been to be very important during the pandemic. That said, the COVID-19 pandemic has been unprecedented and extremely challenging in many ways, not only for the mining industry, but the world over. And, particularly in South Africa, a country where health resources were already under pressure before the outbreak of COVID-19.

“Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on mining employees and communities required the reallocation of health resources which impacted existing programmes and services. Naturally, this was the right thing to do at the right time and we believe the industry did well under the circumstances to achieve a testing rate almost double, and a death rate almost half of the national average.

“But, we must not lose sight of pre-existing health threats including occupational diseases such as pneumoconiosis and other diseases like TB, HIV and NCDs which have a serious impact on employee and community health. It is for this reason that we have partnered with key local and international stakeholders to refocus our attention on existing diseases; to share our experiences in dealing with COVID-19; to listen to the experiences of experts who have dealt with COVID-19 in the rest of the world; and to ensure that the lessons we have learnt and the technologies we have developed in our efforts to address COVID-19 are put to good use going forward,” she concludes.

Details for the seminar

The ***Fighting the unrecognised pandemic: Reprioritising TB, HIV and NCDs in the era of COVID-19*** seminar will take place on Thursday, 15 October.

Key stakeholders include labour, government comprising the Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE), the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), and leading international health organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNAIDS and StopTB.

Speakers are available for interviews on request and include:

- Dr Zweli, Mkhize, Minister of Health, Republic of South Africa

- Ms Zanele Matlala, Vice President of the Minerals Council and Masoyise Health Programme Chair
- Dr Shannon Hader, Deputy Executive Director, UNAIDS
- Ms Alette van Leur, Director Sectoral Policies Department, ILO
- Dr Own Kaluwa, WHO Representative to South Africa

Members of the media who wish to register to attend the seminar may do so by clicking on the link below

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMlcu-sqzljHdBHtcnG5-sM8XC2sW75oolt>

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