

WORLD AIDS DAY MESSAGE BY ANDILE SANGQU

The Minerals Council South Africa participates in International World AIDS Day every year. HIV/AIDS has been an issue of concern to the mining industry since the emergence of the disease around the world in the early 1980s.

So, for more than 35 years, the organisation and its members have been addressing the HIV/AIDS challenge in South Africa and southern Africa. Throughout this period, the focus has been on prevention initiatives, counselling and testing for employees, and various services for community members in mining and labour-sending areas.

Further, starting in 2002, companies in our industry took the lead in South Africa by providing antiretroviral therapies to employees who met the World Health Organization protocols.

Starting in 2016, the Minerals Council launched, together with organised labour and government, the Masoyise iTB campaign to promote HIV counselling and testing, and TB screening and treatment among employees and their communities. The goal was to make these services available to every employee. This multi-stakeholder initiative, which ran for three years, was a response to then Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa's national call in 2015 to reduce TB incidence in high-risk sectors.

One of Masoyise iTB's two main goals was to reduce TB incidence on the mines to the national average or better. Gratifyingly, that goal has been achieved in most locations both through Masoyise, and the many other initiatives around the country and in our industry.

That campaign's success has now given rise to the Masoyise Health Programme, which, in addition to a continued focus on HIV and TB, is also addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and other occupational lung diseases (OLDs) in addition to TB. The NCDs that Masoyise focuses on include heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, mental health, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma.

Masoyise's vision is to create a mining industry that protects and maximises the health and wellness of its employees. The programme was approved by the Minerals Council's Board and will run from 2019 to 2021.

Masoyise is working hard to break the stigma attached to HIV, TB and NCDs. That is one of the reasons why Masoyise supports this year's International World AIDS Day theme: "Communities make a difference". Reducing the incidence of all these diseases requires community support, commitment to changing lifestyle choices, and support for those who do become afflicted to ensure they monitor their health circumstances and make the adjustments needed to fight these otherwise deadly diseases.

A central issue in addressing HIV/AIDS is respect for the rights of women and girls to be free of sexual harassment and violence.

By making free HIV counselling and testing available, the industry aims to achieve the 90:90:90 targets. This means that 90% of people living with HIV know their HIV status, 90% of all people living with HIV receive antiretroviral therapy where indicated, and 90% of those receiving antiretroviral treatment have viral suppression. In 2018, Masoyise counselled 310,872 employees for HIV, an increase of 13% to 84% since 2016.

TB is of course the biggest opportunistic disease for people who are HIV positive, and addressing this issue is an abiding priority for the mining sector. In 2018, 334,321 employees were screened for TB, a marginal increase of 0.3% since 2016. In addition, the number of mine employees diagnosed with TB decreased by 38% to 1,610 cases from 2016 to 2018.

The organisations with which the Minerals Council and its members work on Masoyise are: the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, the National Union of Mineworkers, Solidarity, UASA, the Department of Health, the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, the International Labour Organization, the Mine Health and Safety Council, the National Health Laboratory Service, the National Institute for Occupational Health, the South African Business Coalition on Health and AIDS, UNAIDS and the World Health Organization.

I call on all Minerals Council members, and all other mining companies, along with our partners in labour and government, to participate enthusiastically in the Masoyise Health Programme, primarily for the good of our employees and their communities, and also because a healthy workforce is a productive workforce.