

## **BRIEFING NOTES FOR MS ZANELE MATLALA**

### **WEBINAR ON FIGHTING THE UNRECOGNISED PANDEMIC: Reprioritising TB, HIV and NCDs in the era of COVID-19**

**15<sup>TH</sup> October 2020**

Programme directors,

Honourable Minister and all our esteemed guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of Masoyise Health Programme, I thank you all very much for your interest and your participation at this webinar on Reprioritising TB, HIV, non-communicable diseases and other occupational diseases in the mining industry.

When we conceptualised this seminar it was in the middle of the Covid-19 storm and we purposely decided that we needed to remember and refocus our attention on the perennial diseases that have plagued our industry for decades. We cannot allow covid-19 to make us forget the commitments we had made as an industry and as the Minerals Council South Africa.

We therefore welcome and appreciate the panel we have assembled here today. We have with us world -class experts who will share and advise us as a country and as the mining industry across the continent, on how best we can still make a difference, this year, on our usual programmes.

2020 will be remembered worldwide for Covid-19. A small virus that has caused havoc in all our lives, with devastating social and economic consequences. As an industry, we did not survive unscathed. By this week, we have recorded around 17 500 cases and 190 deaths from Covid-19. This is out of a total population of around 350 000 employees that are back at work, and our total 455,000 workforce.

Although our case fatality rate is less than half that of the country, more than half of our deaths have been of employees who were more than 50 years old. Further, where medical history was known, 84% of those that died had comorbidities. This was despite risk-ranking for vulnerabilities having been done and some workers being kept away from work. There were no fool proof measures as even some of the vulnerable employees who were at home

contracted the disease and died. We were caught between a rock and a hard place and did our best in the prevailing circumstances.

At this stage I would like to refocus, starting with introducing you to Masoyise Health Programme. In a nutshell, Masoyise Health Programme is a Minerals Council-led, multistakeholder initiative whose genesis was in 2015. It was established with the purpose of improving the performance of the industry on management of TB, HIV, non-communicable diseases and other occupational diseases. It has been very instrumental in assisting us fast-track progress in meeting industry targets set by the Mine Health and Safety Council and by ourselves.

Our success as Masoyise Health Programme lies in the partnership we have with various stakeholders: the departments of Health and Mineral Resources and Energy, organised labour, the UN organisations, South African Business Coalition on Health and AIDS, Mine Health and Safety Council, the National Institute for Occupational Diseases and National Health Laboratory Services. Each and every one of these stakeholders has over the past 5 years, played a role in challenging us and motivating us to do better and we have found that there is strength in unity.

Some of our achievements have been:

- An efficient electronic reporting system that made it possible for the Minerals Council and its members to report on progress made regarding the 2024 milestones set by the Mine Health and Safety Council on TB and HIV. This enabled us to show consistent improvements in reporting and performance from 2016 to 2018 where a peak of 90% of employees were screened for TB and 83% counselled for HIV annually. We identified a slight regression in 2019, and there has been a major disruption in reporting and performance in 2020 due to the Covid-19 epidemic.
- Another improvement has been the strengthening of TB contact tracing in high prevalence districts and adding a contact tracing module to our electronic reporting system. Regular TB contact tracing meetings led to companies learning best practices from each other and they were galvanised to do more on contact tracing, which is one of the bedrocks of TB control.
- We pride ourselves in grounding our actions on empirical evidence. In line with this we have conducted a number of valuable studies, particularly in the past two years. To mention a few, we conducted a study on the TB and HIV services in the coal sector, a study on TB mortality in the industry and a study

on Health Promotion and Behaviour Change that would assist us with management of non-communicable diseases. The results of all these studies have shone a light in areas that needed strengthening and we are the better for having conducted them as we are now implementing recommendations made in those studies.

- Our most recent achievement was made possible by our partners, the ILO and UNAIDS, and is a publication on the Masoyise Health Programme, highlighting our journey since inception. Most attendees to this webinar would have received a copy. We thank the ILO and UNAIDS for their support.

As already stated, we shall not be defeated by Covid-19. All adversity brings opportunities. It is the opportunities on which we want to focus to improve our programmes. With Covid-19 we have been forced to innovate, and it is that same approach that we need to use, to innovate in our fight against the pre-existing diseases.

The Covid-19 screening Apps we use can easily accommodate TB screening. We can ensure that, going forward, all employees that attend our occupational health services or any health facility are counselled for HIV. The manner in which we scrupulously attended to our vulnerable employees with hypertension, diabetes and other chronic conditions is the same manner in which we can continue to manage them, to optimise their health for the future. We are in an even better position to support employees with chronic diseases as many who were previously unknown declared their conditions due to vulnerability to Covid-19.

We hope to hear and learn more at this webinar about what we can do to neutralise the impact of covid-19 and end the year on a positive note.

The health and wellbeing of our employees in the industry is paramount, and we will do all it takes to ensure that we save lives and improve health.

I thank you.