

MEDIA STATEMENT

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REPRIORITISING TB, HIV AND NCDs IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

Johannesburg, 16 October 2020. The Masoyise Health Programme yesterday held an online seminar aimed at giving impetus to ensuring that the battles against HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in mining are not further distracted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Participants included a number of local and international experts.

The tripartite Masoyise Health Programme was originally launched in 2016 after a call by then Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa on government, organised labour and the Minerals Council South Africa to intensify the battle against HIV and TB in the mining industry. Its work has expanded to deal also with hypertension, diabetes and other noncommunicable diseases prevalent in the industry.

Opening the seminar, Minerals Council Vice President and Masoyise Health Programme Chair Zanele Matlala highlighted the opportunities it is possible to draw from the innovative work done by the industry to counter COVID-19 and use it better to manage HIV, TB and NCDs.

In his opening address, Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize quoted published research which states that the diversions away from other medical priorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic could mean that deaths worldwide due to HIV, TB and malaria in low- and middle-income countries could increase by up to 10%, 20%, and 36%, respectively.

Further, he added that NCD screening and testing has fallen by half this year for the same reason.

He said the Department of Health (DoH) has devised a strategy to address these challenges. The DoH would also study the recommendations of today's seminar and align with them.

Dr Lucica Ditiu, executive director of the Geneva-based Stop TB Partnership, said her organisation had carried out a study in May 2020 which showed that the global TB incidence



had increased by 7 million. The programme Stop TB had been working on in SA since 2012 had performed particularly well in 2018/19. However, the lockdown and other factors has led to a drop of 30-40% in TB screening and testing. This will lead to increase in TB incidence next year.

“TB screening and prevention needs urgently to be restored to previous levels,” she said.

Dr Shannon Hader, Deputy Executive Director, UNAIDS, applauded SA leadership for its managing of the pandemic. She added that the Masoyise initiative had shown how the private sector can contribute to tackling public health challenges.

Dr Marijke Wijnroks, Chief of Staff at the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria observed that COVID-19 had affected 75% of services previously devoted to these diseases.

The World Health Organisation’s representative to SA Dr Owen Kaluwa said building resilient health systems is critical to address the HIV, TB and NCD challenges. This means that “government stewardship and longer-term investments in the health sector are needed now more than ever”.

The SADC’s Dr Willy Amisi, congratulated SA for its management of the pandemic. “It gives rest of SADC hope we can suppress the pandemic,” he said.

Paliani Chinguwo of the Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council told the seminar the pandemic had exacerbated the phenomena of insecure and informal work, inadequate social protection, and rising unemployment. He also pointed out the hardships borne by migrants in various countries.

Closing the seminar, in a message conveyed by the DMRE’s Lindiwe Ndelu, Mineral Resources and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe assured attendees that he would ensure that he would “carry the resolutions and recommendations of the seminar resolutely forward.”

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