



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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INTERNAL MEMO

Date:	20 July 2020		
To:	Minister ZL Mkhize, Honorable Minister of Health	From:	Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19

ENHANCING UPTAKE OF PREVENTION MEASURES FOR COVID-19

Problem Statement

With the move to alert Level 3 and switch to risk-adjusted levels, the uptake and adherence of the public to prevention measures has become even more important. The move to Level 3 has also resulted in a substantial shift from enforcement of rules to an emphasis on self-regulation, with enforcement only as a last resort. What strategies should the National Department of Health (NDoH) consider in its efforts to encourage self-empowered approaches to self-regulation related to prevention and mitigation measures?

Task to Committee

To produce an advisory with practical measures to encourage and enhance self-regulation in order to achieve consistent self-adherence to COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures.

Review

During the lockdown, the lack of information and clarity on the threat meant that people had to look towards authority figures to keep them safe. This led to a societal emotional and psychological state characterized by “anxiety and fear”, emanating from the phenomenon of “sickness and dying”, which stemmed from the COVID-19 health information and statistics of the rise in new infection and death cases. Power lay with the external locus of control that was employed to enforce adherence to the lockdown rules. The external locus of control created an impression that prevention is a priority of authorities over all else.

- As the pandemic advances with restrictions being eased, the same individuals are now being called upon to take personal responsibility for protecting themselves. People thus need to be helped to move from a disempowered and dependant position to an empowered and self-regulated state where they take charge of their own prevention behaviours.
- The key prevention measures selected for promotion were:
 - Wash your hands;
 - Practice social distancing;
 - Wear face masks; and
 - Check yourself for symptoms.

- Behaviour change is vital to mobilise personal and social change in the fight against COVID-19. In order to achieve this, the following 6 questions need to be answered:
 - Where are our people psychologically and emotionally in this moment?
 - What do we understand about human behaviour and how to change it? This calls for a collective strategy that is tailored or contextualized within existing behaviours.
 - Why do we need to mobilise our people into action?
 - How do we mobilise together in local settings, for each of us to take ownership of behaviour change?
 - What tools, resources and support can we provide to enable local actors to win?
 - How do we tailor our messaging to distinguish uptake from adherence?
- South Africa is a diverse country, and it is important to consider that every community is unique. Tailoring messaging for the differing communities is essential in ensuring it is received, related to and understood.

Strength and opportunities for the strategy:

- We witness the courage and selflessness of those on the frontline, from health care workers to ordinary citizens, who show a willingness to do their jobs and take on risks so that the lives of others may go on with some semblance of normality.
- We enjoy an unprecedented project of political-scientific collaboration, generating extraordinary hope for preventive and therapeutic breakthroughs, and containing mass fear and anxiety.
- We see in the countless daily acts of charity, care and social support by NGO's, CBO's, faith-based organisations and ordinary folk, our infinite capacity to give of ourselves in a spirit of altruism.
- We revel in our new-found opportunities to spend quality time with loved ones and draw on our disposition to engage and forge new social bonds.
- We find ourselves looking in the mirror, contemplating the meaning of life and the choices we make. This gives hope for a better future beyond COVID-19, marked by sober reflection and action on local & global challenges.
- We see an affirmation of trust in a range of social actors, including political leaders, scientists, cleaners, taxi drivers, etc. This offers opportunities to strengthen the social fabric far more than we could have imagined.
- In a short period of a few months, we have incontrovertible proof of our ability to adapt and regulate our behaviour, from social distancing to learning to work from home, in the interests of ourselves and those we love

Possible mitigation strategies to consider in communities with local COVID-19 transmission include:

- Promotion of behaviours that prevent spread;
- Maintaining healthy environments;
- Healthcare paths;
- Managing stigma in all settings;
- Coping with death, dying and illness;
- Encouragement of adapted ways of burial and mourning; and
- Coping with depression/anxiety/addiction/withdrawals/fears.
- In formulating a messaging and communication strategy, it is important to enable and support behavioural change. The communication strategy provides the foundation for how the public is invited to take up the preventative measures. A powerful idea is needed that moves people from anxiety to agency, dismantles stigma, promotes uptake and adherence as a social goal and uses trusted messengers.
- In reframing the messaging, it is recommended that a real and sincere approach be taken. Messaging needs to inform and listen, promote inclusivity, transform and contextualise, build understanding, mitigate and help, and inspire hope.

- To achieve this, the behavioural focus must be sharp, simple and clear.
- It is important to unpack behaviour and behaviour change upfront. In this regard, it is important to be mindful that:
 - The enablers and barriers to behaviour change are complex and systemic (socio-economic, cultural, social and personal); and
 - Changing behaviour therefore requires a multi-level strategy; this means that actions to induce personal uptake and adherence must be aligned with actions taken at a socio-cultural and political level.
- An impact assessment plan is vital for the communication strategy in ensuring that there is a feedback loop. Both platforms of human behavior (social media repositories), as well as, individual perceptions and opinions need to be tracked. The feedback loop should inform strategic decisions needed going forward, allow for reporting on all different audiences, evaluate uptake and application of behavioural messaging, and report efficacy on media/leadership platforms regarding driving the messages.
- The ultimate goal will be to mobilise an entire nation to know how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, know when to reach out for help, and know where to find trusted sources of help.
- A communication strategy will need to be multi-pronged with all segments dependent on each other.

Recommendations

It is recommended to the NDoH :

1. that this Advisory be presented to the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Social Change, for further collaboration and implementation.
2. implement practical strategies and measures to encourage self-empowered approaches to achieve consistent uptake and adherence to key COVID-19 prevention measures, with communities
3. That NDOH promotes

Changing behaviour requires a co-ordinated array of tactical interventions including:

- Appropriate education and training;
- Building personal skills and self-efficacy;
- Mobilising social networks and social influencers;
- A coherent communication strategy;
- Supportive policies and regulation; and
- Required provisions, facilities and other resources.
- Key imperatives in the journey to self-empowerment, which are elaborated on in this advisory (refer to attachment), include the need to:
 - Promote personal ownership and agency;
 - Enable people to discover purpose and meaning (My 'Why' for action);
 - Give voice to people by ensuring that they are heard rather than spoken to;
 - Capacitate people with the skills to plan, anticipate, organise and reflect on their actions;
 - Build trust and connection with social, political, scientific and health stakeholders;
 - Help people come to terms with a state of continuous dissonance and to be resilient;
 - Be value driven in everything we do, with social justice, transparency and fairness being non-negotiable;
 - Embed our efforts purposefully within our cultural context of Ubuntu and 'We' over 'I'; and
 - Promote inclusiveness as a unifying force, such that stigma is precluded and pre-empted.

Rationale for recommendations

It is envisaged that COVID-19 will be with society for the near future, it is thus vital that preventative measures are taken up by the public to ensure prevention of spread, and harm to our vulnerable populations. In promoting uptake of preventative measures, it is essential the public be encouraged to live safely despite the challenges faced, and accept and adapt to the new normal.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



PROFESSOR SALIM S. ABDOOL KARIM

OVERARCHING CHAIRPERSON: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19

DATE: 20 July 2020

CC:

- » **Dr S Buthelezi (Director-General: Health)**
- » **Dr T Pillay (Deputy Director-General: National Health Insurance)**
- » **Dr S Zungu (Project Lead: Sectoral Response to Covid-19)**
- » **Incident Management Team**