**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**HEALTH COMMITTEE WELCOMES REPORT ON EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL ON HEALTH SERVICES**

**Parliament, Thursday, 16 July 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health has welcomed the report by a broader group of scientists and researchers on the effects of alcohol on South Africa’s health services.

Briefing the committee, Prof Glenda Gray and Prof Charles Parry from the Medical Research Council (MRC) said some of the alcohol-related incidents impacting on the pandemic are trauma patients presenting themselves to healthcare facilities, thereby contributing to overcrowding and increasing the risk of transmission of Covid-19 between patients and staff in emergency rooms. In addition, trauma patients requiring surgery consume resources, including theatre time and skilled staff, which could be deployed to other areas of need in the hospital.

Committee Chairperson Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo was encouraged by the MRC presentation. “The committee must now dissect the information and look into the recommendations made. All in all, the report talks to the interest of all South Africans. We need to balance the rights of individual alcohol users against the rights of the rest of the people of the country.”

The committee noted the point in the presentation that relatively few South Africans consume alcohol, but many of those who do consume alcohol excessively. It also noted with concern the finding in the report that the behaviour of these consumers is impacting negatively on other South Africans and the Department of Health’s budget plans.

The committee is of the view that South Africa cannot continue to debate the gross domestic product (GDP) benefits of alcohol sales and not talk about the costs of cleaning up after alcohol has been abused. Hospital admissions, intensive care usage, gender-based violence and death all escalate as a result of excessive alcohol consumption.

The committee has agreed to meet next week to formulate an action plan on the basis of the report. This is in line with a letter sent to the Speaker of the National Assembly by a group of academics, researchers and policy specialists offering advice on steps to curb the abuse of alcohol in South Africa. The letter has since been referred to the committee for consideration.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, DR SIBONGISENI DHLOMO.**