### Address by Honourable X. Harvard, ANC (MP) during the Debate on Debate on Budget Vote No 18: Health

Honourable Chairperson, let me start by saying the ANC support this Budget Vote.

Indeed, it has been a challenging year ever since the tabling of the 2020 budget spending priorities, that have changed significantly due to the advent and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic and health impact of COVID-19 has forced us to adapt to the new normal, resulting to readjustments of allocation in the budgets in all sectors, including Health. But in Health, this new normal has hit us badly the most, as it is this Portfolio that is in the frontline of  the mammoth task of fighting the pandemic.

It is no different in the tabling of the 2021 budget, where our priority remains in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Honourable Chairperson, the President highlighted the need to intensify prevention efforts and strengthening the health system. A massive vaccination programme is being rolled out with millions of vaccines having been procured and being delivered, and more effort is being done to scale this up. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that a scientific approach will continue to be used, for all medication and vaccines being imported into the country.

Honourable Chairperson, I am here today to talk about the great work that the Department of Health, supported by its Entities has done and continues doing within the 2021/2022 financial year in advancing the priorities of the Department. The key priorities and achievements of the Department and the entities is a clear indication of the ANC manifesto commitment of ensuring “quality health for all” and the response to the priorities as set out in the January 8 statement and SONA 2021 in the fight against COVID-19.

The **South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA), whose**key priority areas are the clearance of backlog applications for the registration of medicines and the registration of COVID-19 vaccines. As of 31 March 2021, the backlog was cleared by 79%. An emergency authorisation mechanism was put in place to fast-track the registration of COVID-19 vaccines, and three (3) vaccines were authorised by the end of March 2021.

The**Compensation Commissioner for Occupational Diseases****(CCOD),** will expand the electronic claims management system and also extend its database to cover current workers in controlled mines and works.

The **National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS)**has been impacted negatively by the pandemic on the priority programmes of this entity, as evidenced by the decrease in the number of tests performed for many of the priority programme tests, compared to the same period in the previous financial year. This was due to patients not accessing health facilities during the lockdown period. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the NHLS continued to implement the processes of enhancing the provision of rapid, reliable and efficient service delivery at low cost.

The **Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) on the one hand**has adopted a new vision that seeks to promote affordable and accessible health cover towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC), for all citizens of South Africa.

Honourable Chairperson, the**South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC)**is also playing a critical role of advocating against vaccine nationalism, it held a Virtual conference on a framework for fair, equitable and timely allocation of COVID-19 vaccines in Africa. The SAMRC received funding from Open Society Foundation for South Africa to look at equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in the African Region, and established the Bio-Ethics Advisory Panel. The entity is working with the African Union and Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention.

Lastly with regards to the **Office of Health Standard Compliance (OHSC)**, this entity will ensure that all priority areas are aligned with the proposed National Health Insurance (NHI) by intensifying the inspection of health establishments (both for public and private hospitals), and also, certify compliant health establishments. As at the end of the 2020/21 financial year, 33 certificates of compliance were issued by the OHSC and more work will be intensified during the 2021/2022 financial year.

Honourable Chairperson, it is through such great strides of working together that we will overcome our challenges. Now is the time to work towards the NHI. Let us work together to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to access quality health care in our country. **We therefore ask this House approve this Budget vote.**

Thank you!