# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 2753**

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**Ms N N Chirwa (EFF) to ask the Minister of Health:**

(a) What plans are underway to ensure that communication around vaccination is not fueled by fear mongering, but that it emphasises personal care and survival and (b) how is the communication translated for different age groups, genders, races, sexuality, geographical occupation and other factors that contribute to language, discourse and understanding that is cognisant of social factors?

**NW3268E**

# REPLY:

(a)-(b) The responsibility of the Department of Health is to ensure that the public receives accurate and factual information from reliable sources in a manner that is reassuring and builds national trust. Part of that accurate information is to ensure that everyone understands the risks of not getting vaccinated and not adhering to personal protective practices like mask- wearing, handwashing, good ventilation and social distancing. It is also vital that older people and their families understand the substantially higher risk of Covid-19 related hospital admission and death, should they not get vaccinated as 58.4% of hospital admissions and 81.5% of deaths recorded by the end of the end of October 2021 were among people aged 50 and above.

The most effective reassurance which the National Department of Health can offer the general public is substantially reduced risk through vaccination and adherence to the personal practices described above. At the same time, the Department understands that the ‘messenger is as important as the message’ in persuading people to be vaccinated. For that reason, together with GCIS and other social partners, it engages extensively with national and provincial leadership of faith-based organisations, labour unions, traditional and Khoi-San leadership, community organisations and the business sector. It has also launched a Vooma Vax Champs initiative to encourage ordinary South Africans to become advocates among their friends and colleagues in an effort to tap into personal networks of trust.

The Department makes use of both regional radio stations of the SABC and over 65 Community based organisations to convey messaging in all 11 languages. It also distributes print material available in all 11 languages. Over 30 million brochures have been distributed through the Department of Health and partner retail stores. Print material is also available in Braille and large-print for the partially sighted and a video has been developed for people with hearing disability.

Every effort is to made to ensure that non-binary pronouns are used in the public communication to ensure inclusiveness with respect to gender identity. Where required, information is tailored for specific gendered audiences (e.g. dealing with concerns about male virility and clarifying that the vaccine is safe for men and for women who are pregnant).

A Risk, Community and Community Engagement Committee is responsible for synthesising the feedback from provinces to better understand and respond to regional issues.

The messages we disseminate are based on verified facts and we deliberately do not focus on giving airtime to the myths and misperceptions around the vaccine. Our current campaigns such as Zwakala, GenV Who You Doing It For? And the Vaccine Diaries are all based on positive reinforcement, demonstrating social proof that vaccines are safe and the continual encouragement of taking preventive behaviours.

We develop communication campaigns that are targeted to specific segments of our population, be they in a specific geography or age cohort. For example, the Zwakala campaign is targeted at youth and is primarily on social media and digital mediums. GenV is targeted at the 35+ year olds, and is on national radio and TV.

We also of course create communications for the mass market, but even when we do that, we create that content in multiple languages. Our new safer holiday campaign will be on community and national radio in all 11 official languages.

Finally, all of our communication is based on insights and data that we receive from our social listening and community engagement teams to ensure we are addressing real concerns people have around COVID-19 and the vaccine. We know that if we do this, our messages will resonate better.

Through regular coordination between the national level, provincial, sub-district level and the range of RCCE partners, we are confident that we are doing everything in our means to reach all South Africans in mediums and messages that are understandable and relatable.

The National Contact Centre has branches in six provinces to ensure a good spread of call centre operators fluent in all languages.

At the same time, we appreciate the limitations of nationally designed messaging and communication. Working with social partners and private foundations such as the DG Murray Trust and Tshikululu Social Investments, a network of close to 100 community- based organisations is supported, involving every district, to ensure that information can be contextualised and conveyed in a style and language suitable to all audiences. Partner organisations with the Department of Health, such as the AIDS Foundation of South Africa, NACOSA and Beyond Zero, assist in reaching hard to reach groups (including sex workers and other socially marginalised groups).

The Department has worked with NEDLAC, the business sector and trade unions to ensure that information is both targeted and specific to different occupational groups. The Mining Sector has done exceptionally well in attaining coverage levels of over 70%, while there is active mobilisation of the agricultural sector through joint engagement of agri-business and trade unions.

END.