# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 444**

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**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 04)**

**Mr W M Madisha (Cope) to ask the Minister of Health:**

(1) Whether the Government is ready to announce immediate steps to deal with the health crisis resulting from an excessive intake of sugar by the population at large through the direct consumption of sugar, as well as an indirect consumption through a very wide range of processed foods with hidden high sugar content; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;

(2) whether his department will secure the rights to a certain documentary (name and details furnished) for the public broadcaster to air on all its channels; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;

(3) whether his department will introduce legislation requiring the full sugar content of any packaged food to be given in terms of a standardised teaspoon; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?

###### NW498E

**REPLY:**

1. Yes, the Department acknowledges the increased health risks resulting from excessive sugar intake. The Department of Health, as well as our government partners, have already announced steps to deal with the excessive consumption of sugar by the population at large. For example the Treasury has recently announced a tax on sugar sweetened beverages that will come into effect in April 2016. The Department developed a multi-sectoral strategy to prevent and control obesity in South Africa. One of the actions in the strategy is to educate the public about healthy food choices including the risks of excessive sugar intake. The Department has developed a Nutrient Profile Model (NPM) which will be used to assess and classify foods as having excessive amounts of sugar, salt and fats. The NPM together with the labelling regulations will ensure that consumers are educated on how to make informed choices.

However it is important to note that while sugar is an important contributor to the rising incidence of Non-communicable diseases is South Africa, it is by no means the only contributor and other dietary risk factors as well as lack of physical activity, tobacco and alcohol use are also important risk factors. The Department of Health is thus dealing with the excess of sugar intake as part of a more comprehensive plan to deal with non-communicable diseases.

With respect to “indirect consumption” the Director General of Health has led a partnership with the Consumer Goods Council and its affiliates to ensure that the industry reformulates its products to be more healthy and that consumption patterns, including sugar consumption, decreases. Outcomes of these processes are expected to become evident soon.

1. No. It is the prerogative of the public broadcaster to secure the rights and air programmes and not that of the Department of Health.

The Good Life Network channel that was launched in December 2015 by the Department is one of the platforms used to inform and educate consumers about the importance of making Healthy food choices. Various other channels are being utilised where information is shared around the importance of healthy eating and the risks of excessive intake of sugar, salt and fat.

The Department of Health will be launching a public awareness campaign in late March for healthy lifestyles as part of World Health day activities under the theme “beat diabetes”.

1. Yes. Provision was made in the draft Food Labelling Regulations (R429/2014) for a front-of-pack labelling option, in addition to the fact that total sugars must always be declared in the table with nutritional information.  The new Labelling Regulations will make Nutritional information mandatory for most foods (a few exemptions are allowed).

The following is an example of a front-of pack labelling, following the principles of the Traffic light system: red means dangerous, yellow means caution and green means safe:



This example could be further developed into a simpler format which simply include the traffic light colours, the name of the nutrient, e.g. sugar, or salt and if possible a graphic representation of a typical household measure such as a teaspoon.  Further work is this regard is still being pursued with the food industry.

END.