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MEDIA STATEMENT

DEPUTY MINISTER BOGOPANE-ZULU PROVIDES UPDATE ON MEASURES AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AMID COVID-19 AND LOCKDOWN

Pretoria, 27 March 2020: As the spread of COVID-19 surpasses the 1000 mark amid the 21-days lockdown period in South Africa, Deputy Minister of Social Development Ms Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu calls on the public to recognise the particular vulnerability and needs of persons with disabilities.

“We want to remind the public that persons with disabilities are among those who are particularly vulnerable to the negative impact of COVID-19 especially during this period of national disaster and the lockdown. We must not leave persons with disabilities behind” says Deputy Minister Bogopane-Zulu.

To ensure that persons with disabilities and their families continue to receive services during the lockdown, residential facilities, including centre and community-based respite facilities will remain operational during the lockdown as they form part of the essential services.

“All the workforce and organisations operating these centres have been declared essential services and must be allocated permits to continue providing services. The outbreak of COVID-19 threatens the safety and wellbeing of persons with disabilities as some of them depend on support from others to maintain their independence. As a Department, we are putting measures in place to ensure the protection and continuity of support to persons with disabilities amid the 21-days lockdown and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic”, said Deputy Minister Bogopane-Zulu.

“It is important that persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them be considered not only as beneficiaries, but should also be included as partners in the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We call on organisations that provide family support and services to persons with disabilities to take all necessary measures to protect their personnel and those they serve at this critical time”, added Deputy Minister Bogopane-Zulu.

As part of the precautionary measures, the Department has suspended all visits and new admissions to residential and respite care facilities for persons with disabilities, with the exception of persons with disabilities in distress.

Deputy Minister Bogopane-Zulu also stressed that it is important that information on COVID-19 must be available in sign language and accessible means, modes and

formats, including accessible digital technology to cater for the information needs of persons with disabilities.

To ensure that persons with disabilities receive accessible information during this critical time, the Gender Based Violence (GBV) Command Centre (0800 428 428) has a Skype Line (add “**Helpme GBV**” to your Skype contacts) and “**Please Call Me**” facility: ***120*7867#**. An SMS Based Line: **31531** for persons with disabilities also exists.

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