

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **MINISTER ZULU CALLS ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS PUBLIC ENTITIES TO IMPLEMENT MEASURES TO MINIMISE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19**

**Pretoria, 17 March 2020:** Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a national disaster, the Minister of Social Development - Ms Lindiwe Zulu, met with the executives of the National Development Agency (NDA), the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and the South African Council for Social Service Professions to deliberate and agree on sector-wide precautionary measures to prevent further transmission and to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 at service delivery points.

The service delivery points which comprise of Social Development, SASSA and the NDA provide much-needed services to the most vulnerable groups, including children, youth, women, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Speaking at the meeting, Minister Zulu emphasised that Social Development - working jointly with the Department of Health and other key stakeholders - must be in the forefront of national efforts to contain the further spread of COVID-19.

Minister Zulu is part of the inter-ministerial committee tasked with tackling COVID-19 and she is also part of the National Command Council which is the centre of information sharing regarding the virus and interventions.

“Our efforts will be directed at ensuring that we protect the most vulnerable who will continue to require our services at this difficult time. While we do so, we must take all necessary precautionary measures to protect our staff and our clients, especially at access points in order to contain the spread of this contagious virus and to slow its spread,” said Minister Zulu.

Minister Zulu has directed that all Social Development, NDA offices and SASSA pay points remain operational during this period and further urged all facilities to adhere to Occupation Health and Safety guidelines and to ensure that basic protective measures against the virus are provided.

There is no doubt that the spread of COVID-19 will exacerbate the vulnerability of poor households and that it is likely to increase the demand for social services in the form of social grants, Social Relief of Distress, food relief and psychosocial services for affected individuals and families.

As part of its interventions, Minister Zulu directed the Department of Social Development and its public entities to implement the following precautionary and mitigation measures:

#### **Immediate intervention measures**

In line with President Ramaphosa's declaration, Minister Zulu has activated the Disaster Relief Fund to provide immediate assistance to affected individuals and families. An amount of R96 million is available from the Fund.

#### **Payment of social grants**

Minister Zulu has directed SASSA to explore various options to ensure that pay points, including the South African Post Office (SAPO), implement precautionary measures that will assist in minimizing and mitigating the spread of the virus as these facilities become overcrowded during pay days. One of the proposals SASSA is currently considering is the staggering of payment dates to avoid gathering of large numbers of people at South African Post Offices. This is in line with the disaster management plan regulations.

#### **Provision of psychosocial care and support services**

All social service professionals will provide psychosocial care and support services to affected individual and their families. This includes trauma counselling, integration and re-unification of persons who have been isolated/quarantined to mitigate stigmatisation.

#### **Early Childhood Development Centres**

As per President Ramaphosa's directive, Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres will close on 18 March 2020. Parents/caregivers are advised to make alternative care arrangements during this period.

"We understand the huge inconvenience this will bring to parents/caregivers throughout the country because ECD centres are also safe places of care where in addition to education, children receive protection, healthcare and nutrition. The protection of our children should remain uppermost during this period," added Minister Zulu.

Suspension of external visits to Child and Youth Care Centres, drug rehabilitation and treatment centres, shelters and old age centres

As a precaution, all external visits to Child and Youth Care Centres, drug rehabilitation and treatment and old-age centres and shelters will be suspended until further notice. This is to protect beneficiaries in the DSD facilities.

All large, events and mass gatherings in the sector have been suspended with immediate effect.

### **The role of the Non-Profit sector in preventing spread of COVID-19**

Minister Zulu identified Non-Profit sector organisations which are registered in terms of the Non-Profit Act (Act No. of 1997) as critical stakeholders in the provision of social services. She appealed to the sector to continue playing their part by disseminating correct information to members of the public.

Minister Zulu emphasised the role of the community and faith-based organisations in the early identification, early intervention and referral of COVID-19 cases.

Over the coming days, Minister Zulu will engage with representatives of community and faith-based organisations to brief them on ongoing measures and to consolidate a sector-wide response plan.

To ensure the effective implementation of all the measures outlined above, Minister Zulu has consulted with Members of the Executive Council (MECs) in all nine provinces.

The aforementioned measures will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT