

Dear Tiyese

I hope you are doing well, please find attached below comprehensive responses to your media questions.

Mental health is an important aspect of health and is crucial to the overall well-being of individuals and society. The World Health Organization put this well in their dictum which says “There is no health without mental health”. The Department of Health has prioritized mental health towards achieving of a “Long and Healthy Life for all South Africans”.

The burden of mental ill-health is felt not only through the primary presentations of mental disorders which on its own is huge, but the burden is also felt through the high co-morbidity of mental illness with other illnesses such as HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and non-communicable diseases like diabetes, cancers and heart conditions. Mental ill-health also features prominently as a cause or effect of violence, trauma, abuse and injuries and results in negative outcomes for maternal and child health. The comorbidity has a negative effect on help seeking behavior and compliance with treatment.

Evidence shows that the occurrence of mental disorders are a result of complex interaction of biological, psychological and social determinants. Intervening upstream in collaboration with other key role-players will have a huge impact in reducing the incidence of mental disorders. Mental health is therefore a public health issue requiring a public health response. The Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2013-2020, which is being reviewed and updated adopted the public health approach to mental health promotion, prevention, care, treatment and rehabilitation.

Question 1

What was the process of putting the framework together and how long did it take, who was involved in this process?

Response

The Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2013-2020 is a culmination of a number of processes and activities that were undertaken over time. These includes review of existing mental health policies, services and systems through various methods such as interviews of key informants from the relevant stakeholder literature reviews was developed through an extensive consultation process with relevant government stakeholders. Data was gathered through a collaboration with the Mental Health and Poverty Project.

This was followed by the provincial (held in all nine provinces) and national mental health summits in 2012, around the theme “Scaling up investment in mental health for a long and healthy life for South Africans”. Stakeholders were engaged to review progress made to transform mental health services since 1994, identify best practice that emerged, determine challenges and recommend actions to be undertaken to further strengthen mental health services in the country.

More than 4000 stakeholders who participated in the provincial and national summits were drawn from research groups, academia, professional associations and statutory health institutions, the World Health Organization, Mental Health Review Boards, private health care sector, non-governmental organizations, mental health care user groups, clinicians, Judges and national and provincial departments that play a role in mental health.

A task team of experts was convened by the Department to integrate inputs which culminated into the adoption of the Ekurhuleni Declaration and draw from the summit inputs to finalize the Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2013-2020, which was adopted by the National Health Council in July 2013.

Question 2

The framework has lapsed, do you think the department achieved what it intended to achieve with the framework and if not what were some of the challenges, please outline some of the hits and misses of the framework and how the department plans on improving this?

Response

The Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2013-2020 (Policy Framework and Strategic Plan) played a pivotal role as a blueprint and roadmap that guided the reorganization, further transformation and strengthening of the South African mental health system.

The eight action areas contained in the Policy and Strategic Plan were selected and prioritized among many other inputs from the 2012 Mental Health Summit, based on consensus that they were catalytic and more strategic to further strengthen the mental health system towards delivery of quality, accessible, equitable, comprehensive and integrated mental health services at all levels of the health system and also being in line with the recommendations of World Health Organization (WHO) and the objectives of the Mental Health Care Act, 2002.

Although there were strides made in the implementation of the Policy and Strategic Plan, there had been identified and reported challenges, which varied among provinces.

Various initiatives were undertaken by stakeholders to review the implementation of the Policy and Strategic Plan. These includes, among others:

- The National Health Council (NHC) resolved the NDoH as part of the oversight and support role, visits provinces to determine the status of implementation of the Policy Framework and Strategic Plan and generate recommendations to improve the system. The visit team comprised of relevant officials from the National Department of Health, academia, members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Mental Health and experts in the field. Reports with recommendations were made for each province based on the findings from the visits.

- The investigative hearings conducted by the South African Human Rights Commission in 2017 on the status of the mental health system in South Africa.
- The research study by the National Department of Health that commissioned the University of Cape Town and the Medical Research Council Between in 2018 to evaluate the health system costs of mental health services and programmes in South Africa using the 2016/17 financial year budget allocations and expenditure.

The above-mentioned reviews as well as reports from provinces revealed some progress as well as challenges (“hits and misses”) in the implementation of the Policy Framework and Strategic Plan. These includes the following:

- The Policy Framework and Strategic Plan provided a much needed framework and roadmap to guide mental health service delivery in the country.
- Eleven of the 52 health districts had appointed District Specialist Mental Health Teams as one of the catalytic objectives terms of the Policy Framework and Strategic Plan. These team teams are responsible for planning and organizing mental health services in districts including capacity building on mental health services. Provinces cited budgetary constraints for not being able to appoint a team for each district as planned.
- There is progress in the integration of mental health into primary health care. Mental health has been integrated into the Ideal Clinic Programme and all primary health care facilities are providing mental health services according to the package of services with referrals for further care to higher levels. In order to further strengthen mental health service delivery at primary health care level, the National Treasury allocated additional funds through the NHI Grant with effect from the 2018/19 financial year to contract selected mental health professionals to provide personal mental health services at primary health care level.

This grant is being used for strategic purchasing of health services through the contracted psychiatrists, psychologists and registered counsellors to complement the existing public sector staff component. Two hundred and forty seven (247) professionals were contracted in 2020/21 through this grant, which is also aimed at increasing the human resource capacity towards improved forensic mental health services.

- Three of the nine provinces have established a mental health directorate, with an additional province having advertised a dedicated director post for mental health. Provinces cited budgetary constraints as the main bottleneck towards establishing the directorates in all provinces. In the meantime, the mental health programme is located in other provinces under various programmes with an overseeing director, although not dedicated for the mental health programme.
- Mental Health Review Boards are established in all provinces in keeping with Chapter IV of the Mental Health Care Act, 2002. A National Mental Health Review Board Forum was established with oversight and support from the national and provincial departments of Health.
- The Ministerial Advisory Committee on Mental Health has been established in terms of Section 71 of the Mental Health Care Act of 2002 comprising of representatives from the mental health care practitioners, researchers in the mental health field, academia, legal experts, traditional health practitioners, government departments, mental health care users and civil society.
- There has been improvement in mental health information management systems before the Policy Framework and Strategic Plan. The mental health data indicators has been increased to 5 with nine data elements in the National Indicator Dataset, which provides a richer and comprehensive picture of the mental health systems in the country and informs future policies and plans on mental health.
- Not much had been achieved in the establishment of a national mental health research agenda that is envisaged by the Policy Framework and Strategic Plan. To address this gap, this function will be undertaken by the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Mental Health.
- A health sector drug master plan including a monitoring framework was adopted by the National Health Council in 2018. The Plan among others, adopted implementation of the Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) to deal with the increasing opioid abuse in the country especially among young people. The Plan also require development and implementation of guidelines on the prevention of substance abuse disorders by the health sector. The development of the OST implementation plan and the prevention guidelines are underway.
- Regarding construction and revitalization of mental health infrastructure, mental health has been included in the infrastructure plans at national and

provincial departments of health. The mental health infrastructure standards guideline (IUSS) was promulgated in order to ensure that infrastructure is fit for purpose and appropriate for mental health services. Significant progress has been made in attaching mental health units to general hospitals and in the renovation of specialized psychiatric hospitals since the adoption of the Policy and Strategic Plan. There are currently forty-five (45) psychiatric units attached to general hospitals and twenty one (21) renovation projects were undertaken in specialized psychiatric hospitals in the last two financial years. Planning for mental observation units is underway in Gauteng, Limpopo and KZN provinces to improve forensic mental health services. It is evident that more still needs to be done especially for child and adolescent mental health services and community based day care and residential facilities mental health services.

- There are 262 residential and 128 day care mental health facilities that are licensed by the provincial Departments of Health in terms of Regulation 43 of the General Regulations to the Mental Health Care Act, 2002 (Act no.17 of 2002) in the country, which are largely run by NGOs funded by the Department. The challenges on this area were largely pointed out in the Health Ombuds report following the Life Esidimeni Marathon Project in Gauteng Province.

One of the interventions to improve this area is the development of the Regulations for licensing Day Care and Residential Care Facilities for People with Mental Illness and or Severe or Profound Intellectual Disability by the National Department of Health in consultation with provinces. This Regulations will form the first line of protection for the mental health care users as recommended in the Health Ombuds report.

- Psychotropic medication (medicines for treatment of psychiatric disorders) are included in the Essential Medicine List for all the levels of the health care system. Systems are in place to monitor the stock levels together with all drugs for other conditions. Alternative products are used where necessary.
- The Policy Framework and Strategic Plan acknowledges the need and the importance of intersectoral collaboration in mental health promotion, prevention, care, treatment and rehabilitation. Collaboration is critical in proactively addressing the social determinants of health by other stakeholder departments, which contribute to the persistent health inequities and poor mental health outcomes. An intersectoral forum comprising of relevant government departments and civil society has been established and the national Department of Health and in some provinces and local levels.

Health, together with other key Departments such as Correctional Services, Education, Social Development, Justice and Constitutional, SAPS, Legal Aid South and NPA at national and provincial levels are in ongoing collaboration on issues pertaining to forensic mental health services, which includes implementation of the mandates emanating from the Criminal Procedure Act, Child Justice Act and the Mental Health Care Act.

- Training of key health care professionals to improve skills pertaining to early identification and management of mental disorders is underway. This is a collaborative effort with stakeholders including the Foundation for Professional Development, Regional Training Centers in Provinces and Pharmaceutical Companies such as SANOFI. In 2019, over a thousand professional nurses and medical doctors from facilities listed to conduct 72-hours assessments and the designated psychiatric unit attached to general hospitals in terms of the Mental Health Care Act including health officials from Correctional Centers and academic institutions were trained.

To date, more than 300 professionals have been trained. Also, the training of primary health care nurses in mental health skills using the APC manual is also ongoing however the schedule and training plan were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Training programmes have been implemented in the 2018/19 and 19/20 financial years to improve the skills capacity on forensic mental health services.

- Recognizing the importance of language competency among mental health care professionals, the Policy and Strategic Plan propagated for improvement of language competency of mental health professionals by among others drawing the attention of and galvanizing relevant stakeholders involved in training of mental health care practitioners. Language competency is one central requirement for effective rapport and relationship between the health professional and the user in the field of mental health.

Question 3

The framework mentioned that there was a need to train nurses and increase capacity, was that done, how many health care workers are there for mental health across the country and how is the distribution between the private and the public sector and why is that so?

Response

Training of nurses working in primary health care is conducted in provinces on a continuous basis using the Adult Primary Care (APC) manual (formerly known as PC101). Over and above this training 1 120 nurses and doctors from district and regional hospitals, Health Facilities in Correctional Centers as well as from University

campus clinics have undergone training on clinical management of mental disorders including the relevant legislative requirements. The training is continuing in in this year, however virtually due to the pandemic and total of 427 doctors and professional nurses have been trained so far.

According to the Health Professions Council of South Africa Registers there were 930 psychiatrists, 8 996 psychologists, 1 470 registered counsellors and 5 667 occupational therapists by December 2020. The data is not separated according to the public or private sector.

Question 4

Now that the framework has lapsed what's next, what happens in the meantime, is it being reviewed, is there are new one coming, how far is the process, when will it be ready, who are the stakeholders involved in this process? (Please explain).

Response

The Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan lapsed in December 2020. The process of reviewing and updating the framework is underway so that it is adopts a whole life, public health and intersectoral approach to respond to the social determinants of mental health. An intersectoral forum has been established in this regard and consultations are underway to determine the key issues and content to be included in the revised Policy Framework and Plan, which will include mental health responses to disaster and pandemic situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another key input to the Policy Framework and Plan is the Mental Health Investment Case report with recommendations, which provides a bold vision for accelerating Economic Growth, Universal Health Coverage and Human Rights Protection through Integrated Investments in the Mental Health and Well-being of the Nation. This report has been recently released and internal processes are underway for adoption and implementation of the key recommendations.

The Policy and Plan will remain aligned to the Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030 by the World Health Organization. It is envisaged that the revised and updated Policy Framework and Plan will be in place in the next financial year.

Question 5

How much was budgeted for mental health in the last 2 years and how much was actually used, what is the actual cost of mental health and how is the budget distributed in the provinces, what determines which province gets what?

Response

The National Department of Health receives only a proportion of the overall health budget allocation for the development of policies, norms and standards and the oversight role to provinces. The funds for mental health care, treatment and rehabilitation gets allocated to provinces through the Equitable Share, which is distributed accordingly for service delivery based on the identified priorities and needs in each province.

In line with the country mental health legislation and policies including the WHO recommendation for on integration and decentralization of mental health services into the general health system, the budget for these services is integrated within the general health services, except for services rendered in specialized psychiatric hospitals, Care and Rehabilitation Centers and NGOs.

To determine the budget expenditure of mental health services delivery, the National Department of Health commissioned a study to evaluate the health system costs of mental health services and programmes through the University of Cape Town and the Medical Research Council using the 2016/17 financial year equitable share allocation to provinces.

The cost of inpatient and outpatient mental health services across all provinces in the country was estimated at R8.6 billion representing 5% of the total 2016/17 national health budget.

Approximately 86% of this budget was attributed to inpatient services, suggesting that mental health care treatment and rehabilitation is still following a more hospi-centric approach in this country. Interventions are in place to reorganize mental health services as well as strengthening primary mental health care services.

The study further found that 45% of the budget allocated to mental health was spent at the specialized psychiatric hospitals, 11.7% at district hospital, 13.9% at regional hospitals and 7.5% at tertiary and central hospitals.

Furthermore, the study found a huge variation between provinces in terms of per capita mental health expenditure (uninsured). For an example the per capita mental health expenditure (uninsured) for Mpumalanga Province was estimated at R48 compared to Limpopo at R91, Western Cape at R300 and R233 in Gauteng Province.

Question 6

It is noted that the policy did not make any provision for resource allocation, resulting in poor implementation of the policy at a provincial level, is there enough resources for mental health and facilities, how are resources allocated to provinces and did the provinces do what they were meant to do according to the policy?

Response

The National Department of Health does not provide resources for service delivery in provinces. Resources are allocated by the National Treasury directly to provinces through the equitable share. Provinces then allocate the funds according to the determined needs including the provisions of the Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan and the Mental Health Care Act. Progress made in provinces on the implementation of the Policy Framework and Strategic Plan has been reported above.

Question 7

The framework states that there is enormous inequality in the distribution of mental health services and resources, which provinces have more of services and resources and which ones have less and why is there inequality in this?

Response

Regarding human resources, the number of mental health professionals is limited in the country, especially the specialist psychiatrists and psychologists whose distribution is not consistent among the rural and urban areas. Availability of academic institutions in a province further adds to the inconsistencies as most professionals would like to be linked to academic institutions. This impacts on the availability and quality of mental health services rendered.

Question 9

District health services were supposed to conduct mental health training programmes for all general health staff for basic screening, detection and treatment as well as referral of complex cases, did the provinces achieve this, how was it monitored, who provided these trainings and how did the provinces do on the uptake of these programmes.

Response

Training is conducted by the Regional Training Centers in districts. To complement the training conducted by provinces, the National Department of Health in collaboration with the Foundation for Professional Development initiated a project to train more professionals (Nurses and doctors). 1120 professionals were trained in 2019. The training was halted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however virtual trainings resumed in 2021 and an additional 427 have been trained this year (2021). The training target in this financial year is 500 doctors and professional nurses through the virtual platform.

Question 10

Mental health facilities are also a challenge, some provinces don't have child and adolescents outpatient clinics while some have a few, there is also a few mental hospitals across the provinces, how is the department addressing the issue of facilities and has the number of facilities increased from what was stated in the framework?

Response

Currently there are infrastructure projects that have been completed and others are in planning phase in provinces. The plan is to incrementally attach psychiatric units in all general hospitals in line with provincial infrastructure plans which should include beds for children and adolescent. This is to improve access and ensure that people receive mental health care, treatment and rehabilitation nearer to their communities as envisaged by the Mental Health Care Act, 2002 and the Policy Framework and Strategic Plan.