

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 26 MAY 2025

TO:

MINISTER OF HEALTH

DR. PAKISHE AARON MOTSOALEDI

(NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH)

FROM: UNEMPLOYED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS

SUBJECT: URGENT IMPLEMENTATION OF AT LEAST 1,000 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS EMPLOYMENT TO ADDRESS PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY CRISIS

PURPOSE

National Department of Health in South Africa have several key responsibilities one of which being prevention of diseases and Environmental Health Practitioners are custodians of **Preventative Healthcare** which is part of a comprehensive healthcare program in South Africa. It is for this reason that we believe the memorandum is relevant to National Department of Health (NDoH). Public Health issues must be maintained by National Department of Health and that includes effective delivery of Environmental Health Services (EHS).

Recent reports and field observations confirm a severe under-provision of Environmental Health Services directly linked to shortage of deployed EHPs. According to WHO standards and the National Environmental Health Policy, a ratio of 1 EHP for every 10 00 people is essential to ensure public health safety, but with only 1 712 EHPs employed in South Africa there is a shortage of 6 203 EHPs in the whole country, and the current ratio is 1 EHP per 35 000 people. This undermines the public's constitutional right to healthcare and possesses escalating risk in food safety, water sanitation and disease prevention.

This memorandum serves to urgently request the expedited implementation and funding of at least 1,000 Environmental Health Practitioners posts across South Africa. This is in response to the growing national crisis of foodborne illnesses and other preventable public health risks, particularly in underserved provinces.

The request is firmly grounded in Section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, which states that:

"Everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being and to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures...."

Our profession safeguards public health through inspection, education, surveillance and enforcement also ensuring environmental and food safety standards are upheld in communities across the country. Just as the food we eat impacts our mental and physical health, the state of planet does, too. Environmental health looks at various aspects of our environment, including pollution, access to safe drinking water and infrastructure issues that impact people's health.

CURRENT CRISIS AND WORKFORCE READINESS

Foodborne cases have worsened highlighting critical gaps in local health enforcement and communities are left stranded with insufficient number of EHP's it impossible to reach everyone. The standard ratio is 1: 10 000 but even if a country is unable to comply with the standard for now at least 1: 20 000 can make a difference because currently one individual must serve a bigger community.

Over 1,000 qualified and registered but unemployed EHP's are currently available for immediate deployment.

Provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and North West are mostly affected with high disease burdens and inadequate number of Environmental Health coverage. Urban centres like Johannesburg also remain overstretched due to high population density and informal food economies.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF EHP DEPLOYMENT

Deploying EHP's will enable the following:

- Disease Prevention

Regular inspections of food premises, water sources and waste management facilities will reduce outbreaks.

- Public Health Surveillance

EHP's provides early detection and swift response to environmental hazards and epidemics.

- Economic Stability

A healthy environment supports tourism, agriculture and food industries building consumer trust and operational compliance.

- Constitutional Compliance

Fulfilling the government's constitutional obligations to protect public health and well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We respectfully request the following immediate actions:

- Approval of funding of at least 1,000 Environmental Health Practitioners posts and employment to be distributed nationally based on health risk assessments.
- Prioritised deployment to high needing regions with history and ongoing of under resourced health services and environmental risks.
- Integration of EHP's into local disaster and health emergency response frameworks as a permanent preventative force.

CONCLUSION

We strongly believe the Department will address this matter. The unemployment of EHP's is not just a professional issue, it is a public health issue and risk. South Africa requires a fully equipped workforce to combat rising health challenges and reinstating all suspended EHP's is a necessary step towards strengthening of our Environmental Health System.

We respectfully request formal written feedback from your office within (7 working days) from the date of this letter.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and we are hoping for positive feedback.

Yours in struggle

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