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## **COVID-19 Pandemic**

On 15 March 2020, our State President, the honourable Cyril Ramaphosa, addressed the country and declared a National State of Disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act.

The President announced a number of measures and made specific calls on how the corporate sector can help deal with the challenges of COVID-19, which includes measures such as:

- Mass gatherings are to be cancelled
- All non-essential domestic travel, particularly by air, is discouraged
- Schools and university term closures, with effect from 18 March 2020 until after the Easter weekend.
- SA citizens returning from high-risk areas are to be subjected to quarantine

The President specifically called on corporates to take necessary measures to intensify hygiene control and promote good healthy behavior.

Fortunately, our preparation had commenced when we anticipated the risk of the virus spreading into South Africa. We have had to adapt our approach over the past few days and have considered both the members and our staff.

Our staff are critical to delivering services to your members, hence a large focus has been placed on calming them and providing them with the tools to protect themselves. More than ever before, we have called on our staff to act responsibly and go the extra mile in delivering services to those in need. We are a critical cog in the support system for members and providers and our staff are encouraged to embrace this opportunity to shine, whilst managing the emotional stress of the situation.

This letter seeks to outline the Medscheme approach and response to COVID19 to provide you comfort regarding the services we provide to you and your members. The Medscheme Exco is meeting on a daily basis to ensure that the business is on track with all required mitigation and continuity measures required.

Regarding the staff, as they form the base for delivering services to your members, in order to truly understand their concerns, we mapped out the working day right from when they

wake up in the morning till when they return home from work. This highlighted a variety of objectives that we needed to try and address for them including understanding on how to mitigate their personal health risk and that of their family, especially noting that schools are closed; to transportation to work; to safety at work and to handling workload.

We have responded to all of these through various measures. The importance of social distance, yet also being present at work to service those in need, is key to the information provided to staff.

With regard to employee safety and well-being, the following measures have been put in place:

- Tracking on a daily basis all staff sent home or not at work due to potential infection. This includes the review of the status of the individual and informs whether or not further actions need to be taken to isolate others with whom they may have been in contact. We will update you should any material finding occur. We will be feeding our tracking information to the NICD using a central system that we are working to with collaboratively with other corporates on.
- Heightened hygiene measures and increased sanitization measures in all areas of the buildings are in place. We will also be providing masks to the staff who have high contact with the public, starting with those at walk-in centres.
- We are limiting all internal and external meetings to those that are essential.
- We have limited international and local travel essential travel only. Meetings are being conducted telephonically and via video-conferencing.
- We have had to call back all In-Hospital Case Managers from hospitals and deploy them into other roles that can be fulfilled from home.
- We have also had to call back all Provider Liaison Consultants (PLCs) from the field. No non-essential visits to Healthcare Providers rooms will be stopped for now. Some of the engagement will happen telephonically. There has already been some providers testing positive for COVID19. The PLCs will be utilized to bolster any gaps in operational resource pool.
- We have had requests by some corporates to reduce visits to them and we have equally seen a high cancellation of wellness days. We thus expect reduced CLO visits to pay points. The CLOs will be utilized to bolster any gaps in the operational member-servicing resource pool.

In order to further reduce staff exposure through some measure of social distancing, as well as to ensure that we mitigate and manage capacity in the operational areas and reduce

unplanned absenteeism, we are extending the opportunity to work from home. We are doing this in a controlled fashion as to not impact the call centres, which cannot be easily moved to home and are critical services. First and foremost we are moving staff with heightened health risk or vulnerability to have more severe illness if infected. Secondly, to expand “work from home” based on clear qualifying criteria and the need for backup processes to be in place to support the contact centres. The IT teams are working with us to make laptops and connectivity available for this expanded pool of people.

In addition, we will be increasing the distance between staff working in the office. This will be enabled in part by the space made available by those who will be working from home. We are also investigating the use of our disaster recovery offsite offices to house some of the operational teams and allow employee spacing. Thirdly, we are looking at flexible and alternative working hours for those who may need it.

In order to manage the services to your members and the healthcare providers caring for your members, we are addressing the following:

- Leave management tightly scrutinized each and every day with alternative working hours and work from home options considered where granting leave may significantly impact on service delivery.
- A ring-fenced contact centre is to be setup to handle member and provider queries relating to COVID-19.
- Communication to members and Healthcare Providers informing them of the benefits and process to follow when claiming from the Scheme.
- Websites to be updated with relevant information on COVID-19 and the associated supporting processes that should be followed.
- Walk-in centres will remain open at this stage, however staff will be provided with additional support to ensure hygiene is maintained. We foresee the possibility of having to close walk-in centres to the public as local transmission cases start trickling in. We are looking at ways to enable members to have easier and cheaper access to call centres during this time. The staff at walk-in centres will continue to work remotely as part of the staff pool.
- Scenario planning is in place for where we may be required to close-off an entire floor because of a staff member testing positive or if staff absenteeism increases without being planned or should further national restrictions be imposed.

Without invoking the formal business continuity plan, which has been reviewed, our current reality has changed and we are operating in a state heightened awareness for the need to

change into that scenario. We have project managers working with us to keep all actions on track, especially as the situation remains dynamic.

We will keep you updated on any material risks that evolve and our operational teams will continue to report on their service delivery. While we work through this massive challenge, we will need to prioritize critical services and may need to consequently adapt service level expectations to keep teams focused on the critical service delivery matters and declutter their worlds by removing unnecessary tasks and administration.

Lastly, we are also engaging with the pathology labs and hospital groups to negotiate better tariffs for tests and daily hospital rates. We will advise as soon as the negotiations are finalized.

We work in extraordinary times. No doubt this will challenge all of us to think differently and solve problems collectively. We are working closely with the Department of Health and the NICD and continue to engage them on effective strategies to manage the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

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