

CoRMSA Position on Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout

At a webinar organised by CoRMSA on the 11th March 2021. Mark Heywood was invited to present on ***“Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout Process and its implications/benefit thereof”***.

Over 25 people joined and participated in the discussion. What follows is an overview of the context of the discussion and key action points that came out of the discussion.

CoRMSA was mandated at its Members Meeting to organise such a discussion at its Members meeting that took place on the 5th February 2021.

In his previous address (01 February 2021), on progress in the national effort to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, President Cyril Ramaphosa stated that *“We all want to be free of this disease. We all want to be safe, and for those we love to be safe. We aim to make the vaccine available to all adults living in South Africa, regardless of their citizenship or residence status. We will be putting in place measures to deal with the challenge of undocumented migrants so that, as with all other people, we can properly record and track their vaccination history”*. He further alluded to the humanly fact that *“It is in the best interests of all that as many of us receive the vaccine as possible”*.

CoRMSA welcomes and commend the above strong, progressive, cohesive and nation building statement by the president of South Africa to extend and make the vaccine to be available to all who live in South Africa. Like any other country around the globe, South Africa hosts asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. This is a very strong democratic move Mr. President. CoRMSA would like to also applaud the Mr President by making it clear that, *“Nobody will be forced to take this vaccine. Nobody will be forbidden from travelling, from enrolling at school, or from taking part in any public activity if they have not been vaccinated”*. CoRMSA strongly believes that this statement sends and advocates for better and democratic human rights access and protection on both public servants (especially health care providers e.g. Nurses, Doctors etc.) and more importantly, the service users (rights holders). Constitutionally, access to health care services is a basic right for everyone and that no one may be refused emergency medical treatment. As such, Covid-19 Vaccine is an emergency medical treatment to which everyone is entitled (Section 27 (1) and (3) of the Constitution).

CoRMSA Members met and intensively discussed the Covid-19 pandemic, its impact and engaged the access to Vaccine thereof. Below is CoRMSA’s advocacy position on Covid-19 Vaccine Roll-out.

1. Covid-19 affects and impacts on everyone's life equally regardless of nationality and documentation status.
2. Everyone (asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants and local community) must voluntarily take the vaccine through accredited health facilities.
3. Undocumented migrants and statelessness persons must be afforded equal opportunities to access the Vaccine.
4. CoRMSA argues that, undocumented migrants and statelessness person form part of the larger community in South Africa. Therefore, segregating and excluding these groups of people will be a step back in achieving a society that is free and safe from Covid-19.
5. CoRMSA takes note of the different vaccines available for everyone, all these Vaccines must be registered and be facilitated through accredited health facilities.
6. CoRMSA to facilitate the establishment of Covid-19 Vaccination process Monitoring System to provide oversight and be used as a strategic intervention to mitigate against unfair discrimination of anyone attempting to gain access to be vaccinated. It is proposed that these be established in partnership and be set up in all accredited vaccination health facilities to ensure equitable access and human rights protection for all.
7. Simplified "Access to Covid-19 Vaccine" educational and awareness raising materials must be developed and circulated across the country. This must take the form of treatment literacy to assist in the education of all who live in South Africa about the names of the different vaccines and who makes them, what is a vaccine and related information to ensure we can all make an informed choice based on scientifically verifiable facts.
8. CoRMSA to take initiatives to establish that The Department of Health and Corona Virus Command Council works closely with all stakeholders from Civil Society Organisations to Labour and Private Sector throughout the vaccination process.
9. CoRMSA to work in collaboration with members to develop a framing document on managing outbreaks of communicable diseases in the region in the context of migration and movement of people with a focus on climate crisis and related factors that are contributing to the phenomenon of COVID relates outbreaks.

This covid-19 roll-out position is endorsed and adopted by CoRMSA Members.