

Media statement

SALGA calls for all organs of state to work together in preventing loss of further lives from preventable illnesses.

The South African Local Government Association is concerned about the escalating cases of suspected food poisoning in different parts of the country which have led to deaths and illnesses, especially among school children. This unfortunate situation does not only threaten health and wellbeing of the citizens but is a potential threat to peace and stability in communities.

While we commend municipalities together with other organs of state for acting swiftly to attend to the reported cases, we believe that there is a need to strengthen monitoring and enforcement in the entire food value chain to prevent similar occurrences in future. We acknowledge that municipalities have a major role to play in communities when it comes to food safety and do not have the required number of inspectors to inspect all food outlets in line with the prescribed norms and standards, considering other municipal health services such as water quality monitoring, surveillance and prevention of communicable diseases and other functions they are mandated to provide.

With the current South Africa population estimated to be at 63 015 904 (Stats SA Mid-year population estimates), about 6300 Environmental health practitioners are needed to ensure that there is regular surveillance, monitoring and control of potential health hazards at all places. This is according to the applicable norms and standards which prescribed for one Environmental Health Practitioner for every 10 000 population. The shortage of Environmental health practitioners in municipalities is sitting at 72% with one Environmental Health Practitioner servicing over 36 000 population with inadequate funding reported to be a major contributing factor to this shortage.

SALGA continues to work tirelessly in building the capacity of municipalities to deliver on their mandate as well lobbying and advocating for improved resourcing of the function. We have implemented several interventions aimed at strengthening the

delivery of municipal health by municipalities. These include portfolio-based councillor inductions aimed at building the capacity of councillors in providing an oversight on the function in all provinces in the new term of local government. We continue to create platforms for information sharing of information amongst municipalities on best service delivery models as well as lobby for resourcing of the function in the intergovernmental relations space. SALGA in partnership with the Department of health also convened a National Indaba in environmental health in September 2021 to discuss ways of improving the delivery of the function.

We remain committed to working with other organs of states and relevant role players in finding sustainable solutions to the challenges impacting of the delivery of this service including food safety. We have held meetings with some of the municipalities which reported the high number of cases to get more insight on the situation to can assist in managing the situation. Furthermore, we are currently engaged in the process of conducting municipal health performance capacity assessment. Over and above the meetings, SALGA is convening with municipalities in preparation for the planned the national indaba in environmental health in February 2025 where local, provincial and national government leaders will be expected to converge and put forward concrete commitment towards ensuring a safe and healthy environment for all.

We call upon other organs of state and relevant role players to work together in preventing further losses of lives from preventable illnesses.