

High-level Panel on COVID-19 and older persons

This submission is made from The Association for the Aged, or TAFTA in Durban, South Africa and focuses around the need for a Global Disaster Management strategy to respond to health crises in the aged care sector.

Tafta, as a non-profit organisation and residential care facility supporting the needs of approximately 5 000 older persons, is the largest NPO of its nature in South Africa.

In March 2020, the South African Government declared a National State of Disaster supported by a risk-adjusted Lockdown Alert level strategy to manage the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country. This strategy was formulated by a National Covid-19 Command Council acting as an expert advisory body to the government in consultation with various industry associations and appropriate medical experts.

No consultation however, was had with non-profit entities, particularly the aged care sector, who were identified as a vulnerable group. Yet, Lockdown regulations necessitated the sector to put in place various restrictive measures to ensure Covid-19 compliance within our facilities. These included the restriction of movement of, and visitation to, older people in care facilities.

This lack of consultation extended to a lack of disaster relief funding to the sector also, to mitigate against Covid-19 Risk. And, unfortunately, the consequences of this exclusionary process has impacted on the sector's stability dramatically. This, to the point of older people aggressively denouncing regulations that restricted their freedoms. In addition, a destitute Non-profit sector was forced to take legal action against the State to seek the financial support.

To date, no funding has been allocated to support the Aged sector and as an NPO, we seek the legitimacy of a Global Body to establish a disaster relief response plan to guide governments' consultation with the sector and to include older persons too in decision making processes impacting on their rights and freedoms in the context of a global pandemic.

The question we would like to pose today is: "Are older people not deserving of consultation in the financial and social decision making processes around their care?"