

For immediate release

28 July 2021

Transparency and secrecy do not go hand in hand: Ministerial Advisory Committees' (MACs) Advisories are finally released but South Africa's Vaccine Contracts remain hidden

As of 27 July 2021, South Africa has administered close to [7 million](#) Covid-19 vaccines. This is the incredible result of the hard work of many government and business officials, NGOs, faith organisations, health care and front-line workers as well as volunteers. But, even now, there is not enough information available on the contracts and delivery schedules we have agreed to with two vaccine manufacturers, who hold our lives in their hands.

The Health Justice Initiative ('HJI')ⁱ believes that a lack of information and secrecy – particularly on decision-making on vaccines – undermines the robust management of this pandemic and leads to distrust and even at times, vaccine hesitancy. This holds true for the management of all public health issues but are particularly vital in a time of a global health crisis.

After requesting information from government and other statutory bodies for some time, in the last two weeks, the HJI submitted several formal, access to information requests, asking for:

1. The disclosure and release of all **Covid-19 vaccine procurement contracts** with vaccine manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies and any other vaccine distribution bodies - such as 'COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access' ('COVAX') and the 'African Union Vaccine Acquisition Task Team' ('AVATT'); and
2. The disclosure and release of all **2021 Ministerial Advisory Committee on Covid-19 ('MAC') and Ministerial Advisory Committee on Covid-19 Vaccines ('VMAC') Advisories** and other correspondence - as these are meant to have informed all decision-making on, among others, vaccine selection and the risk or other age or special prioritisation frameworks (such as for 'professional athletes and sport administrators' and select government officials) and the principles adopted for use in the national roll out programme especially.

Fatima Hassan, Director of the HJI said:

"It cannot be that in a pandemic, where the public pays for vaccines, and are waiting for supplies, that the vaccine contracts with multi-national pharmaceutical companies (Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson) are secret – all procurement and delivery schedules must be open and transparent".

The HJI submitted access to information requests because we asked for specific sets of information for some time, but to no or limited avail.

Today, the National Department of Health finally released a slew of [MAC advisories](#) dating back as far as January 2021. While overdue, this is welcomed, because it lends itself to transparency and less secrecy. We will be studying these old and current advisories closely to see if it aligns with the (26 July 2021) ‘**Circular COVID-19 Vaccination Roll-Out – Next Steps**’, issued by the National Department of Health.

Dr Marlise Richter, Senior Researcher at the HJI said:

“This morning we noted with relief that key MAC advisories were published on the Department’s website, and that some of the rationales for far-reaching decisions on the country’s vaccine selection are now in the public domain. It is however regrettable that civil society had to resort to legal avenues in a pandemic to pressure the Department to release this information – information that we have a right to, as the public.”

The HJI firmly believes that in the context of a pandemic, that it is the duty of civil society and the media to ask questions and to hold government, statutory bodies, and the pharmaceutical industry accountable.

Pandemic transparency, accountability and a robust ecosystem of open decision-making are key to public trust and vaccine uptake and should be in line with international guidelines and best practice. We call on all stakeholders and especially the National Department of Health to routinely make available all information, and all contracts related to the management of this pandemic, as it is in the public interest to do so.

Ends

Contact: info@healthjusticeinitiative.org.za

¹ The [Health Justice Initiative](#) (‘HJI’) has been working to advance equitable access to vaccines for all people since mid-2020. We have [consistently](#) called for accountability, transparency and information-sharing from the South African government, pharmaceutical companies, and regional and international bodies. In the global context of intellectual property (IP) restrictions and the hoarding of vaccines and manufacturing knowledge by richer nations and vaccine manufacturers, and with the local [devastating violent unrest](#) in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng that has severely disrupted health and social services, the efforts to accelerate the country’s national roll-out programme are welcomed.