**Welcome Address:** **Director General of Health, Dr Sandile Buthelezi**

**Advancing Policy and Decision-Making for TB Vaccine Introduction in South Africa Workshop
23 July 2025, Sandton, Johannesburg**

Good morning distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, partners, and friends,

It is with great pride and hope that I welcome you all to this landmark workshop dedicated to advancing South Africa’s preparedness for the introduction of new tuberculosis vaccines. This gathering brings together a remarkable assembly of expertise, commitment, and shared purpose — reflecting the urgency and scale of the challenge before us, and the extraordinary opportunity we have to transform the future of TB prevention and control in our country.

We gather at a pivotal moment. The promise of new TB vaccines is within reach, and with it, the possibility to change the course of this epidemic in our country. TB remains one of South Africa’s greatest public health challenges — with high incidence and mortality affecting millions annually. Introducing a new vaccine is more than an additional tool; it represents a potential breakthrough that could dramatically reduce TB transmission, prevent disease progression, save lives, and ease health system burdens.

I warmly welcome all participants — representing the National Department of Health, the World Health Organization, National Advisory Group on Immunizations, National Treasury, NDoH officials from procurement, EPI and TB and HIV Clusters, research institutions, regulatory authorities, civil society organizations, community representatives, and many other stakeholders. We are fortunate to have this diverse and committed group of stakeholders. Such multisectoral collaboration is essential, as vaccine introduction requires coordinated efforts across many domains: supply chains, financing, regulatory approval, service delivery, and community engagement.

While the science behind new TB vaccine candidates continues to progress, our work here over the next two days focuses on ensuring that our systems — from policy and financing to service delivery and community engagement — are positioned to respond effectively when the time comes.

South Africa is leading the way by proactively preparing for promising TB vaccines still in clinical trials and expected to be available around 2028 or 2029. Most countries wait until after approval to begin planning; we are setting a model by starting now, so we can swiftly and effectively introduce these life-saving vaccines once approved. This early preparation allows us to build the necessary systems, policies, and partnerships well in advance—maximizing our readiness to rapidly and effectively introduce these life-saving vaccines once approved.

South Africa has long been at the forefront of the global fight against tuberculosis. In the arena of TB vaccines, we are proud to host multiple clinical trial sites for promising TB vaccine candidates. As a proud member of the TB Vaccine Accelerator, we actively contribute to shaping the global vaccine research agenda. We nominate Our National TB Programme Chief Director, Professor Norbert Ndjeka to co-chair the Finance and Access Working Group—ensuring that our voice is heard in international discussions on equitable vaccine financing and supply.

At home, the National Advisory Group on Immunizations (NAGI) is already translating emerging evidence into policy guidance, while our researchers advance implementation science to optimize vaccine acceptance, delivery platforms, and modelling for impact.

We recognize that as an upper-middle-income country, South Africa faces unique challenges. We are not eligible for Gavi support, which means we must ensure sustainable domestic financing, advocate vigorously for affordable vaccine pricing, and guarantee equitable access for all South Africans. Equity cannot be an afterthought; it must be a guiding principle. In this regard, we are committed to exploring innovative financing mechanisms, including global solidarity funding, to ensure no one is left behind.

Just last month, on 13 June, we proudly hosted a G20 side event focused on addressing financing and access issues, underscoring our leadership on the global stage.

The work that you will undertake over these next two days is of critical importance. Together, you will assess our readiness, identify knowledge gaps, forge collaboration, and develop a roadmap tailored to South Africa’s context. This roadmap will not only prepare us to rapidly and effectively introduce a TB vaccine but also ensure that we do so in a way that is sustainable, equitable, and impactful.

Let me emphasize: the Government of South Africa, represented by the National Department of Health, is firmly committed to ending TB. Our political will is strong and unwavering. We understand that TB is not just a health issue but a social and economic challenge that demands bold, decisive action. Your collective expertise, insights, and dedication will be instrumental in shaping a future where TB is no longer a threat to our people.

I encourage everyone to engage fully, bringing your expertise, your insights, and your voices. South Africa’s long history of leadership in TB research and response positions us well to take on this challenge. But success will depend on sustained collaboration, rigorous planning, and a shared commitment to making this work for the communities we serve.

Thank you for your commitment and participation. Let us make this workshop a landmark step toward a future where TB is no longer a public health crisis in South Africa.

Thank you.