



The South African Pharmacy Council reacts to looting of pharmacies

During July 2021, violent unrest spread through KwaZulu-Natal, and rapidly spread to Gauteng. The unrest was marked by rampant looting of business premises, including pharmacies.

Reaction of statutory health regulatory bodies

A joint statement was issued by the South Africa's statutory health regulatory bodies, condemning the ongoing looting and violence, especially those acts targeting healthcare facilities and the medicines supply chain. These bodies are the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA), Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), Office of Health Standards Compliance (OHSC), South African Nursing Council (SANC) and South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC), together with the National Department of Health.

The destruction of healthcare infrastructure and disruption of provision of health care is likely to have long-term consequences on the health of communities.

The impact of the destruction of healthcare facilities on public health was felt in communities, with members of the community deprived of health care, chronic patients unable to access medicines, and COVID-19 vaccine sites and the vaccines themselves being lost to destruction and looting.

All statutory health councils, in collaboration with the National Department of Health, worked closely to ensure that the provision of health care and essential medicines, including chronic medicines and vaccines, were restored.

SAPC distraught at the looting of pharmacies

Vincent Tlala, Registrar and Chief Executive Officer of the SAPC, expressed dismay and disappointment at the looting sprees

that targeted pharmacies, resulting in temporary or permanent closure.

In KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, more than 100 pharmacies have been destroyed and looted beyond revival, with KwaZulu-Natal being the hardest hit.

"Among the looted items are COVID-19 vaccines and scheduled medicines, which when used without proper pharmacist counselling on storage and dosage may result in harm to one's health," warned Tlala. He cautioned members of the public to only source medicines from legitimate health establishments such as pharmacies.

"We are also distressed by the possible loss of employment and livelihoods for pharmacists and the support personnel employed by the affected pharmacies," concluded Tlala. We call on South Africans to refrain from destructing healthcare infrastructure or disrupting health care services for any reason. Such actions reverse the difficult gains we have made in increasing the accessibility of health care services to previously underserved communities in our country. It also puts the lives of citizens in these communities at risk.



eNCA screenshot – (left) a looted pharmacy; (right) Vincent Tlala