

May 2021

Dear, Hon. {Minister for Health Name},
{Name of Country}

Adoption and use of COVID-19 antigen testing to boost pandemic response in {insert name of country}

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented disruption to people's lives globally. The social and economic aspects of life continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic. As African countries and {insert name of country} in particular begins/continues to deploy vaccines, we call upon your leadership to ensure that testing and tracing are prioritized as critical interventions in the ongoing efforts to contain the pandemic. This will enable health authorities to provide guidance based on reliable epidemiologic data so that the government, businesses, and the public can better manage the pandemic, save lives, and keep economies open.

Without testing we are fighting the pandemic blindly. Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Tests (Ag-RDTs) are affordable, easy to use, and provide a result within 15 minutes at the point-of-care. The World Health Organization (WHO) has approved and recommends COVID-19 rapid antigen testing for individuals experiencing symptoms, high risk populations, healthcare workers and other essential workers, and contacts in settings where nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs), like polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, are not available or where turnaround time for NAAT results is prolonged. They are also recommended for use in settings such as points of entry (e.g., borders, workplaces and educational institutions), and correctional or other closed facilities with suspected or confirmed outbreaks to help provide rapid detection and effective containment of the virus. The Antigen tests however, are not in any way a replacement of PCR tests but should constitute part of holistic national testing strategies.

Inadequate testing inhibits proper understanding of the prevalence and incidence of COVID-19, thus enhancing the risk of undetected community spread. For this reason, we write to call upon your leadership to adopt and enhance use of quality-assured Antigen tests to help scale-up testing levels in {Insert Name of Country}. Although the WHO recommends using PCR tests to confirm COVID-19 cases when possible, using Antigen tests widely across the continent will vastly improve governments' ability to respond to the pandemic based on sound data.

To ramp up testing in {Insert Name of Country}, we urge your office to:

- **Work with the relevant government agencies to order quality-assured antigen tests through the Africa Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP) and ensure a regulatory process is in place to prevent low-quality and falsified products from entering the market.** As part of the efforts to make quality-assured antigen tests available to AU member states, Africa CDC and partners under the Partnership for Accelerated COVID-19 Testing (PACT) umbrella have procured over 21 million antigen tests and nearly 10.5 million have been delivered to different member states in Sub-Saharan Africa as at end of April 2021.
- **Work with other government agencies to ensure that adequate public budget is allocated for procurement of antigen tests and testing this fiscal year.** Given the

importance of testing to the pandemic response, it is critical that adequate funding be earmarked specifically for diagnostic efforts moving forward.

- **Work with other government agencies to ensure that adequate public budget is allocated for procurement of PCR tests for COVID-19 and that volumes are leveraged to negotiate lower prices for PCR tests across diseases.** Due to the multi-disease application of PCR test instruments and the high cost of these tests, it is important to leverage COVID-19 test volumes in addition to test volumes for TB, HIV, HCV, and other diseases when negotiating with manufacturers for better prices, service and maintenance terms, and delivery models for PCR instruments and tests.

Hon. {Minister of Health Name}, testing is one of the critical tools to fight this pandemic because it saves lives, allows economies to re-open and stay open, and is vital for the introduction of vaccines and therapeutics. The antigen tests accord your great country the opportunity to significantly scale-up testing levels and demonstrate leadership in protecting your communities.

Yours Sincerely,



Center for Global Health Security and Diplomacy, FIND Diagnostics, GFAN Africa, Pandemic Action Network, PATH, Population Services International, Right to Health Action, Treatment Action Group, WACI Health

CC:

{Minister of Finance}

{National COVID-19 Task Force/Committee}