

■ FUNDING

What would a lockdown extension mean for elderly?

NATHAN CRAIG

nathan.craig@inl.co.za

THE VULNERABILITY of the elderly to Covid-19 was stressed upon to the point where a voluntary lockdown until the end of September was suggested.

But with limited resources and dwindling funds, those caring for the aged said it would be difficult.

Professor Salim Abdool Karim, an internationally recognised epidemiologist and infectious diseases specialist who is a government adviser for the Covid-19 outbreak, made the suggestion earlier this week.

Abdool Karim outlined a worst-case scenario where the country delayed the inevitable outbreak peak to September with the lockdown extension.

“But a voluntary partial lockdown would be needed for the elderly and those with chronic conditions until the end of September to prevent infection.”

These chronic conditions included diabetes, hypertension and asthma.

This week, Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize, announced that at least six people between the ages of 71 and 91 had died in the province – some suffered renal failure, hypertension and diabetes.

Femada Shamam, chief executive of The Association for the Aged (Tafta), said they were already under strain from the lockdown. Tafta cares for 1 900 elderly people in 13 homes in and around Durban with 150 staff.

“We have already incurred over R150 000 in unbudgeted expenses since the lockdown began. We are desperately seeking financial support, but it is difficult given the pressure everyone is facing right now. Operational costs total around R7 million per month, and we must work towards fund-raising R21m annually to meet our operational deficit.”

Shamam said they were in discussions about logistics of what a partial lockdown would mean for Tafta and if they would survive it.

“Almost 80% of our elders have chronic conditions, and their well-being is vital, so we still press on in our mission. The lockdown is vital to keep our residents safe. But we don’t know if



PROFESSOR Salim Abdool Karim

we can do an extension,” said Shaman.

Vinay Nunthkumar, operations manager for the Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH), said they also realised that an extension was possible and started making plans to keep the doors open.

“We have sent out appeals to mosques, temples, churches, and anyone who can help us. We have had to stop all fund-raising events which was a large portion of our revenue, so we are trying to find alternatives.

“We pay R2.2m per month towards employee salaries. Plus, there are now unforeseen costs where we are personally fetching employees and bringing them to work. They are also given protective gear like masks and gloves.”

Nunthkumar said they were already taking strain, but hoped the plans they had in the works would allow them to survive the lockdown.

Kogie Govender, ABH’s senior social worker, said the suffering of the elders was compounded by the lockdown.

“No unauthorised personnel are allowed into our homes. This sadly includes their families, so they are depressed and miss them. They are also expected to practice social distancing, which can separate them from their friends in the homes. But we try our best to keep their spirits up with video calls to their families. It is just a very tough time for them.”