



# NATIONAL VACCINATION PROGRAMME CONTACT CENTRE SERVICES

## Impact Report

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PROJECT	AMOUNT ALLOCATED	AMOUNT DISBURSED	RETURNED TO WAR CHEST
<i>NDOH Contact Centre</i>	R 68 148 546,24	R 60 863 346,19	R 7 285 200,05

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### CONTEXT

The National Department of Health (NDoH) is tasked with the responsibility of planning and managing the rollout of the South African vaccine programme to eradicate the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and return to a fully functional economy where livelihoods are restored. The government established a National Vaccine Coordinating Committee with various work streams and collaborated with the private sector and other social partners to implement the programme.

Our key partner and funder in the coordinating committee and overall programme was the Solidarity Fund. Their mandates include supporting the national health response, contributing to the humanitarian relief efforts and mobilising South Africans in the fight against COVID-19.

One of the key requirements of the overall programme was to establish a comprehensive, adequately enabled, and well-coordinated call centre capability to assist in the management of voice and digital interactions between the government and its citizens, and amongst the key actors who will roll out the vaccines across all areas of the country. This included building awareness amongst the population of the Vaccination Programme and driving up the level of participation, offering citizens answers to frequently asked questions, supporting health workers, support for scheduling and booking processes, and communications across a range of government stakeholders.

Given the complexity, sensitivity and importance of the programme, different levels of engagement with citizens were considered necessary. The following table outlines the range of levels and the type of services to be delivered to the citizens at each level.

**Table 1: Range of levels and type of services to be delivered.**

Centre	Level	Service type	Description
Vaccination Registration Services	1	Enquiries about registration	Enquiries about when I can register or how to register for a vaccination.
		Registration for vaccination	Support with vaccination registration in the EVDS – either online or guidance on how to use other channels, e.g. WhatsApp.
		Appointment queries	Enquiries about appointments, covering date, time, location, age groups or associated communications (e.g. SMS and texts).
		Rescheduling appointments	The cancellation and rescheduling of vaccination appointments on behalf of citizens.
		Queries about vaccination	General queries about vaccinations that can be answered by referring to the knowledge base or FAQs.
	2	Escalations	Queries that cannot be answered immediately that require further investigation and a call back to a citizen.
		EVDS change of personal details	Ability to change certain personal details for a citizen before the vaccination.
Health Services	3	Clinical emergency (this assumes that doctors will not always be immediately available)	Any urgent call related to life-threatening symptoms (difficulty breathing, collapse and loss of consciousness or seizures).
		General COVID-19 health queries	COVID-19 queries related to an individual's specific health conditions.
		Pre-vaccination queries	Related to potential side effects and concerns about pre-existing medical conditions.
		Escalations from tier 1	Complex or individual-specific questions about vaccine appropriateness or efficacy.
		Provision of COVID-19 test results	It needs to be ring-fenced either as a separate line or a separate group of nurses.
Post Vaccination Services	4	Management of clinical emergency (rapid referral where necessary from Tier 3)	Any urgent call related to life-threatening symptoms (as above, and any other symptoms that tier 3 personnel find alarming).
		Post-vaccination events reporting	Any COVID-19 related health queries post-vaccination. Adverse events reporting.
		Pharmacovigilance	Any complex or unusual adverse event. Any call requiring active clinical management or a possible referral.
		Other escalations from tier 2	Complex health related questions about vaccine appropriateness or efficacy.

## A SUITE OF ORGANISATIONS TO DELIVER ON THE CONTACT CENTRE

Given the range and complexity of the services outlined above, it was considered that one organisation would not be ideally placed to effectively and efficiently provide the services required. Therefore, the solution was that the delivery of the services would require an eco-system of several different organisations to provide the full range of services outlined above. The following is a description of the organisations involved and their respective areas of expertise.

**Table 2: Organisations involved in delivering on the contact centre.**

Area	Organisation and role	Information on the organisation
<b>Overall support to NDOH</b>	DGMT deliver overall support to NDOH and chair the steering committee.	DGMT is a public innovator committed to developing South Africa's potential through strategic investment. Their goal for South Africa is a flourishing people, economy and society.
<b>Level 1 and Level 2</b>	BPESA was appointed on a pro-bono basis as the contract manager to procure and manage the services of specialist providers for L1 and L2 services.	BPESA is a not-for-profit organisation that serves as the industry body and trade association for Global Business Services in South Africa, serving the international and domestic markets.  Its purpose is to market South Africa to the world as an attractive place to offshore their business processes, thereby stimulating local job creation, particularly for the unemployed youth.  Furthermore, they coordinate industry role players to provide a sustainable supply of suitably skilled people to enable the sector to remain competitive and grow.
	TKG were appointed as the design and assurance experts to provide and manage a supplier eco-system.	Fresh thinking and disruptive sourcing firm that uses technology to solve complex customer experience needs who also sustain operational assurance of the supply chain and manages governance and operational performance of third-party providers.
	Deon Scheepers Consulting as the technical architect.	An independent specialist consultant who is a well-established technical architect within South Africa.
	Following a competitive procurement process CCI were selected as the lead service provider (LSP).	CCI is the largest international contact centre provider in South Africa. The business focuses on delivering effective communication between clients and customers.
	Regional Service Providers (RSP).	Following a further competitive procurement process, three regional service providers were appointed under the management of the LSP; Altron, Sigma and SA Commercial.
<b>Level 3</b>	NHLS delivering all Level 3 services.	The National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) is the largest diagnostic pathology service in South Africa, with the responsibility of supporting the national and provincial health departments in the delivery of healthcare.
<b>Level 4</b>	Originally RTC provided some Level 4 services but were never funded by the Solidarity Fund.  From January 2022, NHLS took on the responsibility of delivering the Level 4 services.	See above.

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**WHAT THE PROJECT ENTAILED**

The project entailed the swift setup of the National Vaccination Programme Contact Centre Services, supporting NDOH in creating an overall service offering to citizens for the vaccination programme. Once the contact centres were established, service delivery was enabled and delivered on an ongoing basis, seven days per week.

With RTC's initial involvement and subsequent withdrawal, the service delivery structure did evolve slightly during the first six months of the project. The diagram below depicts the current structure and flows between the individual centres from a voice perspective. The same principle applies to all interactions between the centres.

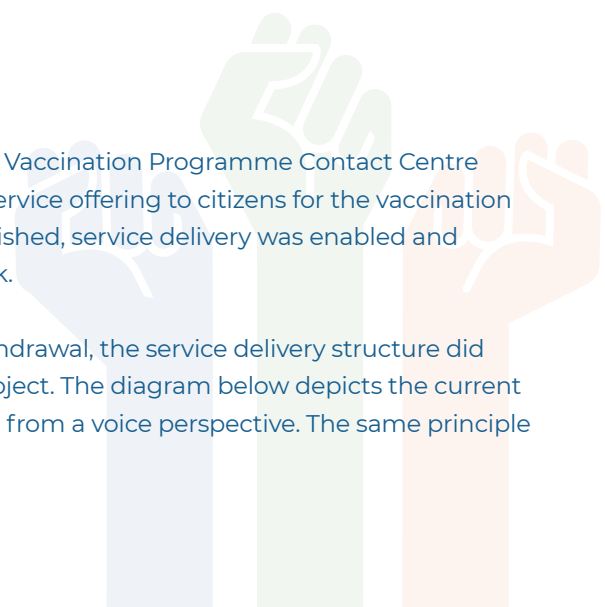
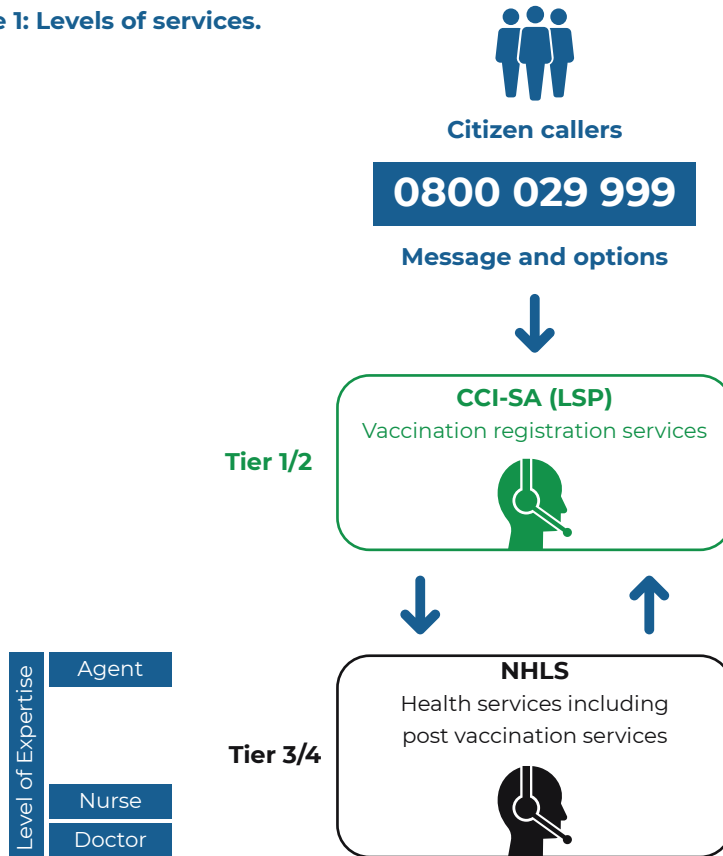


Figure 1: Levels of services.



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PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project were to:

- Mobilise a team of industry experts to work with the NDoH to develop a detailed design, implementation plan and budget for a suitable call centre service to support the vaccine rollout.
- Conduct competitive procurement exercises to select specialist customer experience partners to deliver the services to citizens.
- Assist in the management of voice and digital interactions between government, people and the key actors who will roll out the vaccines across all areas of the country.
- Provide the people of South Africa who have specific health issues related to COVID-19 access to professional nurses.
- Provide the people of South Africa with real-time information and responses to their inquiries about vaccinations.
- Support vaccine literacy uptake, ensure consistency of messaging, and allow 'on the ground' issues expressed to be escalated and addressed at the appropriate level and fed back into public communication channels; and
- Scale up and down over the duration based on demand, required service levels, and budgeted headcount, provided that all costs do not exceed the budgeted amount.
- Provide omni-channel interaction management service that supports the communication of different digital interactions (calls, instant messaging, chat platform, emails, web, other) to a range of devices typically used by citizens.
- Create and maintain knowledge management capabilities that support agile content collation, development, packaging, and presentation (e.g., creating frequently asked questions).

## TARGETED BENEFICIARIES

The targeted beneficiaries are all citizens of South Africa over the age of 18. The purpose is to allay fears and concerns of citizens and to promote the uptake of vaccinations by:

- Answer frequently asked questions from the public.
- Assist individual members of the public in making registrations for bookings using the Electronic Vaccination Data System.
- Cancel and renew registrations for bookings.
- Assist callers virtually with medical enquiries and give proper advice.
- Ease the burden on medical institutions by having telephonic access to health care workers.
- Reduced risk of a citizen becoming infected and possibly spreading the virus should a citizen have visited a medical institution.
- Providing information on available health facilities and care provided for infected individuals.
- Educating the public on regulations during the pandemic.

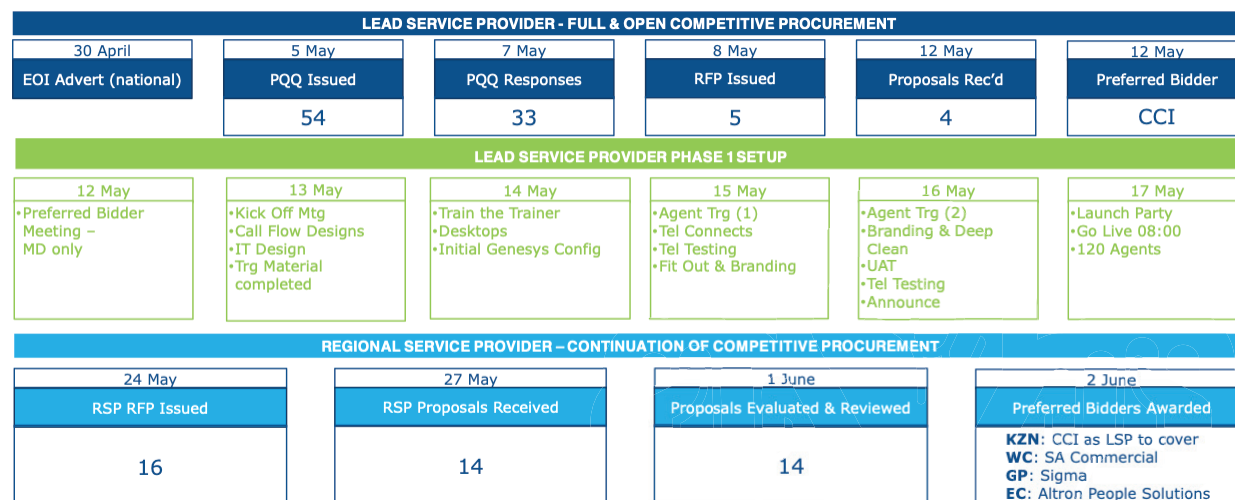
## ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

The programme commenced in April 2021 with the immediate requirement to formulate an overall solution for service delivery, for all to understand the different levels of service and roles for each organisation. Initial solutions were completed within a three week period that was sufficient to initiate a competitive procurement exercise to select the service providers. Soon after:

- Robust processes were followed for the appointment of Lead and Regional Service Providers
- An evaluation team and separate evaluation panel, including a representative from DTIC, were established to conduct the evaluation.
- Requirements, responses, criteria, and evaluation scores have been recorded and stored.
- PQQ responses were used to compete for both LSP and, subsequently, RSP roles

The outline of the entire selection process is below.

**Figure 2: Outline of the selection process.**



It is important to highlight that given the urgency associated with establishing and implementing the Level 1 and Level 2 services to align with the ministerial announcement in the launch of the vaccination services, the setup was completed in five days, as depicted in the middle of the picture above. Notwithstanding the pace of setup, attention to detail was not overlooked. For example, below is a summary of the 'go/no-go' checklist to enable the services to go live on 17 May 2021.

**Figure 3: Vaccination Programme.**

**Vaccination Programme Public CC- Go / No Go Decision as at 16h00, 16 May 2021**

Area	Requirement	Status	Confirmation / Outstanding Actions
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operational space ready</li> <li>Branding in place</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100 desk setup already (extra 20 as contingency to be finished late Sunday)</li> <li>Branding delivered and installed. Deep clean (fog for COVID) at 20h00</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100+ Agents allocated to campaign</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>120 plus TMs and ops staff</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All agents trained and <b>signed-off</b></li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All agents signed off by training and Ops</li> </ul>
Ops/Trg – Logins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Agents able to Login to ' Campaign'</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100 agent logins successful and test calls received. Final checks by 17h00</li> </ul>
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agents allocated to Teams</li> <li>Call Scripts signed off (Ops perspective) &amp; FAQs available</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team allocation complete</li> <li>Scripts agreed &amp; within Dialer</li> <li>Top 10 FAQs printed/laminated for each Agent.</li> </ul>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedules issued for Day 1 (and Week 1)</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issued for the week</li> </ul>
IT – Desktops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desktops in place and configured</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100 desktops configured; team leader workstations completed cop Sunday</li> </ul>
IT- Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connections to NHLS and RTC in place and transfers tested</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All transfers completed and tested.</li> <li>Same tests again on Sunday for added comfort</li> </ul>
IT – IVR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NHLS, RTC and CCI IVR in place and Tested</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tested and confirmed Sat evening. Same again on Sunday for added comfort.</li> </ul>
IT – Dialer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dialer Build Complete and Scripts tested in Production</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Installed and Baselined</li> </ul>
IT – UAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UAT complete and signed-off by Ops</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 different users tested and completed</li> </ul>
MI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Day 1 - MI Dashboard ready</li> <li>Day 1 – MI reports created</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Real time dashboard – links created through Browser for external project team</li> <li>To be distributed once live. Standard Day 1 MI to be available overnight Day 1.</li> </ul>
Day 1 Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go live Mon 17 Schedule agreed</li> <li>IT Cutover Timings &amp; Bridge Agreed</li> <li>Ops Bridge &amp; Issue Management Forum Agreed</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Go live plan Agreed, with detailed timetable</li> <li>Invites to Teams meetings already sent.</li> </ul>
Comms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of when Minister will announce</li> </ul>	Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20h00 Press Briefing through TV.</li> </ul>

At the time of the launch of the integrated contact centres, 110 agents were delivering Level 1 and Level 2 services, 70 Nurses delivering Level 3 and 14 specialists offering Level 4 services using the voice channel only. The services were then embedded, and subsequent enhancements to service delivery have been:

- Ramp to 170 agents for Level 1 and 2 services.
- The ability to answer queries in 5 different languages: English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho.
- Robust quality assurance framework across all elements of service delivery.
- Enhancement of channels to include email, webchat, chatbot and WhatsApp
- Creation of a knowledge management system that is shared across all service levels.
- Extension of opening hours to be 07:00 – 22:00 Monday – Friday, and 08:00 – 18:00 Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays.

All the above elements have operated as a business-as-usual service delivery.





## PROJECT CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

There have been two key challenges that have been addressed during the project:

1. The need to conduct a full competitive procurement process and an immediate operations setup in a very short period. This was mitigated by using specialist and experienced consultants who had previously delivered similar services in other countries, who then selected and directed an in-country service provider to work at an unprecedented pace, getting things right the first time and achieving the required standards within the very demanding time constraints.
2. In a very short space of time, the NHLS had to identify multiple available office environments that could safely accommodate teams of professional health care workers whilst remaining within COVID-19 protocols. Outsourced nursing employment agencies were consulted to assist with the recruitment of the nurses. In addition, all equipment and operational requirements identified involved in setting up a call centre had to be acquired quickly.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The key lessons learned are:

- With clear communication, very close working at the steering committee level and dedicated project teams, different organisations can work together to establish and deliver important services to demanding timescales for the benefit of citizens of South Africa in times of national need.
- The citizens of South Africa welcome (embrace) a national contact centre that can provide information, guidance, and support with their health queries across various channels.

## IMPACT AND REACH OF THE PROJECT

The COVID-19 call centre has proven very successful and quickly became a well-known source for information during the pandemic. The COVID-19 public hotline number is advertised on multiple sites and public domains, giving the citizens of South Africa access to real-time health advice. During the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in regulations, the COVID-19 call centre was synonymous with disseminating information relating to multiple aspects of the pandemic. Many public sectors used the COVID-19 public hotline to direct enquiries where they could not assist, especially during the initial stages of lockdown in South Africa.

The project's reach has been right across South Africa, providing a toll-free national telephone number that has handled almost two million calls plus interactions with over 33 000 citizens by email, chat or WhatsApp – as these channels were added later in the project.

### 1. Impact on employment

The direct impact on job creation as a result of the programme is as follows:

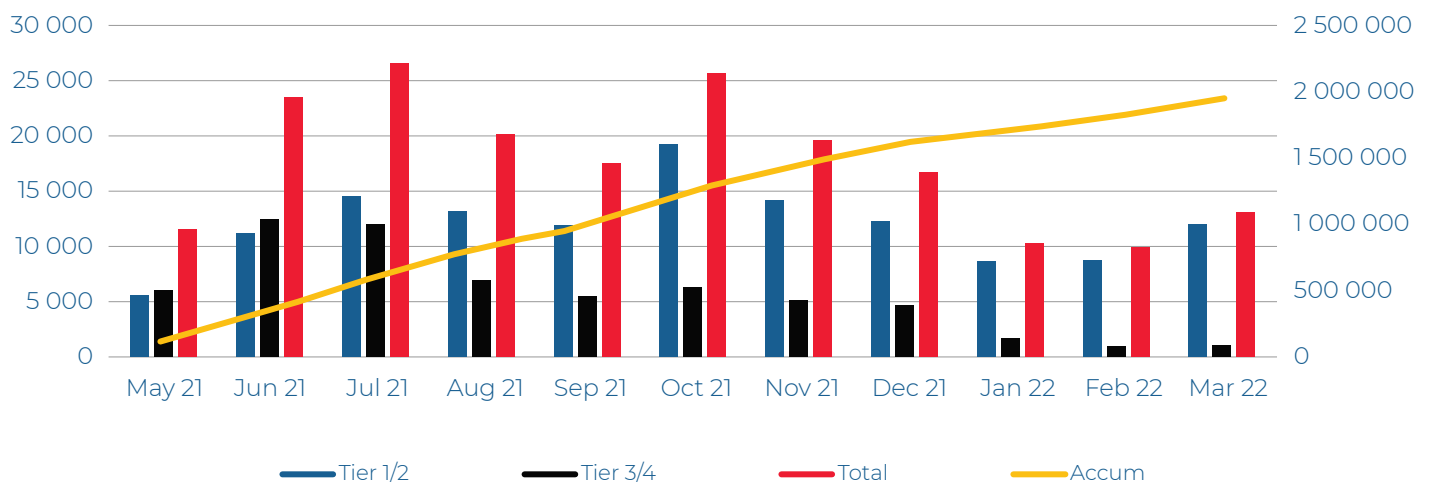
- Tier 1 and 2 (4 contact centres) – 170 call centre agents
- Tier 3 and 4 (1 contact centre) – 70 nurses and doctors

## 2. Calls – Volume (reach) and types (impact)

The calls handled per month per tier show that:

- Call volumes peaked:
  - » In July 2021, when vaccinations started in full force for various age groups, and the deadly third wave hit South Africa.
  - » In Oct 2021, when the digital vaccination certificate was launched.
- Tier 3 and 4 calls were higher than Tier 1 and 2 initially due to uncertainty and queries regarding the medical requirements and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Call volumes dropped in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2022 due to a large portion of the older population being vaccinated (low vaccinations amongst the youth is still a problem).

**Figure 4: Calls handled per month.**



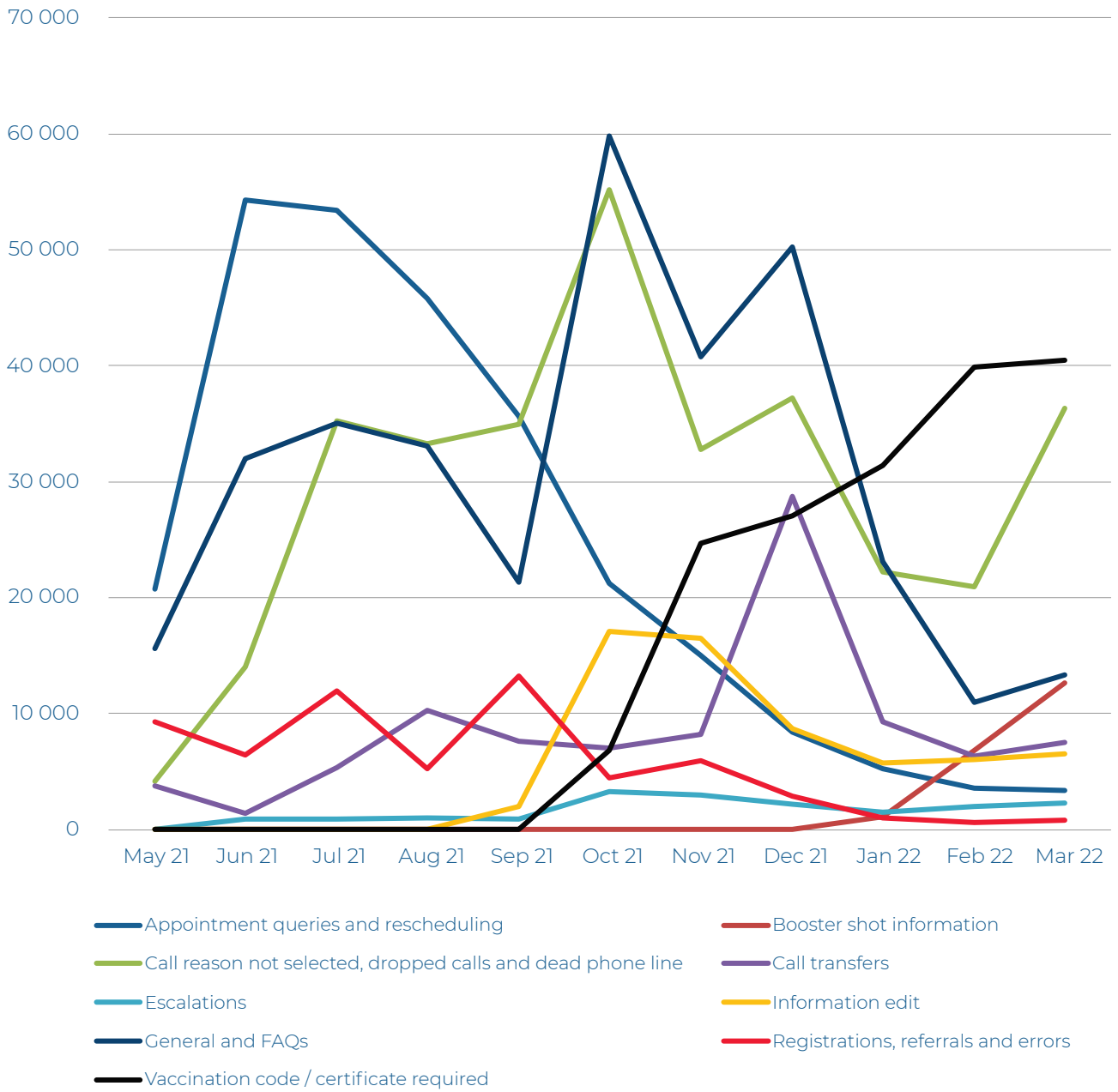
The call reasons per month below show how the citizens' behaviour changed during the course of the pandemic and how the contact centre was utilised accordingly. These include:

- Registrations were high in the earlier months but have tapered off.
- Vaccination codes and certificate queries increased towards the end of 2021 as the NDoH launched the digital vaccination certificate.
- Dropped calls and dead phone lines were an issue throughout this period.

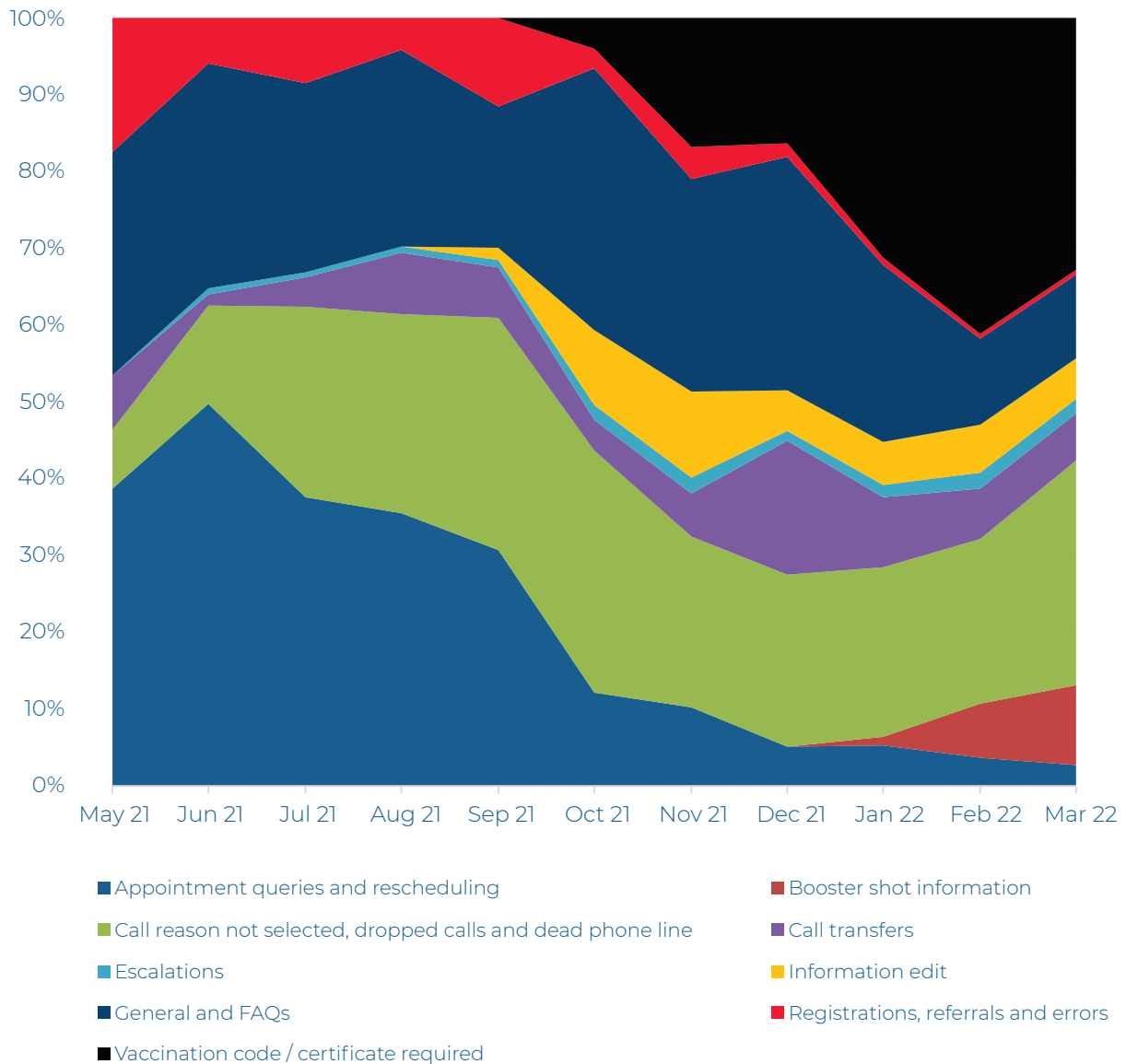




**Figure 5: Call reasons (number of calls).**



**Figure 6: Call reasons (percentage of calls).**



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**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROJECT**

The project’s highlight is establishing the full range of services envisaged at the start of the project, supporting millions of citizens of South Africa in addressing their concerns and queries, booking the appointment and enabling the take up of vaccinations.

By providing real-time access to public health information, the NHLS contributed to mitigating the spread of infection. The public health platform also assisted many citizens in addressing their fears and concerns relating to post vaccination effects.

The net result is that the National Vaccination Programme Contact Centre Service has made a significant contribution in supporting the delivery of 33,3 million vaccinations across South Africa.

Figure 7: Launch of the service – CCI contact centre.



Figure 8: NHLS contact centre.

