

Quality healthcare must be for all

South Africa must move beyond the era of exclusively preserving quality healthcare for those with deep pockets, said President Cyril Ramaphosa.



President Cyril Ramaphosa and Health Minister, Aaron Motsoaledi

Addressing the Stakeholder Consultative Meeting on the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme, the president said the scheme is meant to ensure all South Africans receive the quality health services they need without the imposition on them of financial hardship.

“The NHI is therefore also fundamentally about social justice. Providing universal and quality healthcare for all is not only a matter of moral principle. It is also a financially responsible decision that will save a lot of money while keeping our people healthier,” Ramaphosa said.

He said South Africa needs to build on the strengths of the public health system as it has helped improve the life expectancy rate, successfully turned the tide in the battle against HIV and Aids as well as rolled out the massive health infrastructure across the country.

“Our people should be able to access a comprehensive range of health services, including prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and others. These services – no matter who is providing them – should be of good quality,” he said.

According to the president, South Africa spends R420bn or 8.5% of domestic funding on healthcare.

“This is more than any other middle-income country, and it is very close to advanced economies such as the United Kingdom and Canada. We have decided to cover the whole country on an incremental basis,” Ramaphosa said.

This means that from 2019, once the bill is passed, South Africa will start to incrementally implement the NHI and by 2025 everyone will be covered.

“We are determined to work together to overcome our two-tiered health system, which is the major barrier to achieve a universal health system.

“We must be clear that the resources needed to provide quality health care services represent investment rather than consumption, particularly if you consider the benefits of a healthy population and a productive workforce,” he said.

The President said challenges that need to be addressed include over-worked and exploited workers as a result of staff shortages.

“We must accept the reality that the quality of service cannot be improved by a fatigued and demoralised workforce. The challenges related to the shortage of medical equipment as well as theatre and intensive care unit beds in our public hospitals also requires urgent attention.

“The massive backlog of operations in our hospitals owing to the dysfunctionality of our operating theatres must also be dealt with,” Ramaphosa said.

He said doctors must not be put in the brutal position of having to fight among themselves, seeking to convince one another on who must be operated on first, and by implication, who must be allowed to perish.

“We must change this situation,” the President said.

Acting Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi said the province has taken steps to resolve some of the challenges that the province has had in the public health sector.

“This follows the unfortunate incident of Life Esidimeni that we are correctly responding to its recommendations that were given us. We have already appointed a new head of department so that we can deal with the challenges of health in our province.

“The Gauteng province runs the biggest health system in Southern Africa which caters for over 21 million visits per annum,” Lesufi said.

He said the province is a major centre for the training of health professionals for the country and the continent.