

NHI WILL SEND PERSONAL PRIMARY HEALTHCARE TO ITS DEATHBED

Honourable members, members of the public and officials from all sphere of government, thank you for this opportunity to present on how the NHI will impact on this local government that manages its own primary healthcare services. I am Cllr Zahid Badroodien, the Mayoral Committee Member of Community Services & Health. The City Health Department falls under this directorate for which I am responsible.

The debate around the NHI features prominently on our country's National agenda. Analysts, commentators and several policy and health experts have shared both their opinions and concerns over the NHI and its proposed implementation plan.

What has been missing from this conversation is the impact the NHI will have on local government. Three of the country's biggest metros currently fund, operate and manage primary healthcare facilities, one of which is the City of Cape Town in partnership with the Provincial DOH.

The City's healthcare facilities lie within the heart of communities. They manage HIV, TB, chronic diseases of lifestyle conditions like diabetes, maternal and childcare as well as the dispensing of chronic medications. As primary healthcare providers, these facilities serve as a first point of access to services for communities across the City of Cape Town.

Section 156 (1) of the Constitution states that:

"a municipality has executive authority in respect of, and has the right to administer the local government matters listed in Part B of schedule 4 and part B of schedule 5 and any other matter assigned to it by National or Provincial legislation."

Municipal Health Services and Air Pollution are listed in Part B of schedule 4 and Noise Pollution is listed in Part B of schedule 5.

While Municipal Health is largely about Environmental Health and while Health Services are listed in schedule 4 part A as Provincial & National Competence, Section 156 (1) of the Constitution goes on to state that:

The national government and provincial governments must assign to a municipality, by agreement and subject to any conditions the administration of a matter listed in Part A of Schedule 4 or Part A of Schedule 5 which necessarily relates to local government, if-

- a) that matter would more effectively be administered locally; and
- b) the municipality has the capacity to administer it.

Section 32 of the National Health Act [61 of 2003] states that:

“every metropolitan and district municipality must ensure that appropriate municipal health services are effectively and equitably provided in their respective areas. The relevant member of the executive Council must assign such health services to a municipality in his or her province as contemplated in section 156 (4) of the Constitution. An agreement contemplated in section 156(4) of the Constitution is known as a service level agreement.”

The City of Cape Town contributes a significant portion of City-generated revenue to render personal primary healthcare services to their residents which amounts to R 734 277 063. In its current form the NHI Bill lacks a clarity on how current mixed funding models in the metros will be adapted.

Leading discussions on the NHI are limited to tertiary healthcare services typically offered by hospitals. The bill, in its current form, does not provide reassuring detail on how primary healthcare services operated by municipal governments will be affected, and therefore honourable members,

1. The bill is unclear in what the provision of Primary healthcare services will include. Instead prioritising preventative and promotive services, it focuses heavily on curative services. This goes against the very definition of personal primary healthcare, more over the bill does little to provide on the funding mechanism and models,
2. The NHI will nationalise healthcare services by enabling the national government to be the sole purchaser of all healthcare services. In so doing national government will hi-jack the responsibility of both local and provincial governments to the value of R225-billion.
3. Section 36 of the proposed bill references a “district health management office”. This office must manage, facilitate, support and coordinate the provision of primary healthcare services for personal, and non-personal healthcare, at district level in compliance with guidelines and relevant laws; however, currently no clarity exists on the role of the district health management office and It is unclear if this will be a competency of provincial or local government or both or neither,

4. More worryingly there is a confusing duplication of functions between the district health management office and the contracting unit for primary healthcare,
5. Furthermore, the social determinants of health have been overlooked in this bill. The aspects of personal primary healthcare, is not only addressed by personal primary healthcare providers, general practitioners, or clinics, but environmental health plays a critical role,
6. Honourable members, this brings me to further uncertainty relating to environmental health, it's role, function and funding. Currently the bill defines the healthcare services as
 - a. Healthcare services, including reproductive health care and emergency medical treatment, contemplated in section 27 of the constitution,
 - b. Basic nutrition and basic health care services contemplated in section 28(1)(C) of the constitution,
 - c. Medical treatment contemplated in section 35(2)(e) of the constitution, and
 - d. Where applicable, provincial, district and municipal health care service,
7. These definitions require clarity and there is ambivalence in terms of whether this definition includes environmental health.

The City of Cape Town categorically supports the objectives of a Universal Health Coverage approach and the development of a mechanism to reallocated resources from both the private and public sectors in order to equitably address the health needs of the total population and remove financial hardship at the point of care.

Given the concerns listed regarding the implementation of the NHI, as envisioned in the bill, and an unclear impact the bill on local government the City of Cape Town does not support the model of the NHI proposed in the bill to achieve universal healthcare coverage.