

SAPPF supports healthcare reform

THE South African Private Practitioners Forum (SAPPF), which represents most specialist disciplines, recognises the need for healthcare reform and supports the strengthening of the private sector and, in particular, the public sector. To this end, it has prepared detailed submissions to the Department of Health on the draft Policy on National Health Insurance (NHI). Unlike the impression created in the Green Paper, which portrays the private sector in a very negative light, SAPPF strongly believes that an efficient private sector will facilitate and not detract from the efforts to reform the public health care system. Some highlights of SAPPF's submissions on the Green Paper are as follows:

- The Green Paper provides insufficient detail on a range of issues, which frustrates the ability of SAPPF and other stakeholders to make meaningful submissions on various aspects of the Paper. For example, the Green Paper identifies several weaknesses in both the public and private healthcare systems, yet provides little (if any) detail on how these weaknesses will be addressed under NHI. It also does not give any detail on important issues such as the make-up of the benefit package under NHI, the continuing role of the private sector, requirements for service provider accreditation, reimbursement levels as well as the envisaged referral system.
- We do not accept the approach in the Green Paper that suggests that the two-tiered system (of public and private healthcare) has caused the dysfunctional public health sector, and that the existence of the two-tiered system is thus a basis for introducing NHI. Extensive and well supported data is provided to demonstrate that the private sector is not overpriced or in danger of financial collapse. The private sector is a national asset that should be nurtured while seeking to address the most pressing concern: the reform of the public health sector.
- The much-needed reforms in the public sector are not dependent on the introduction of NHI. NHI is a financing model and the Green Paper does not provide any compelling basis to suggest that healthcare reform is dependent on the establishment of NHI. The paper also does not demonstrate that the NHI model that it proposes will be effective in, or that it is the best way of, addressing the concerns currently facing access to healthcare in this country. SAPPF is therefore unable to support the establishment of a single-purchaser NHI model as the best and most efficient model to support the needed reforms.
- The current tax-paying base of South Africans is not big enough to pay for such a complex and expensive restructuring of the health services, and current levels of taxation are already at very high levels that could result in negative unintended consequences for the economy should tax levels be raised significantly. It is doubtful that the NHI model envisaged in the Green Paper is affordable for South Africa, given the country's limited resources and the pressing demands on those resources. The Green Paper does not engage in any meaningful economic impact modelling and provides no compelling evidence to suggest that NHI is affordable.
- The Green Paper overstates the discrepancy in the distribution of human resources as between the public and private sectors. Serious human resource constraints exist in both sectors, which militates against the establishment of the NHI as envisaged in the paper. Consideration should therefore be given to expanding the private sector role in a reformed healthcare dispensation, including through public-private partnerships, contracting with private healthcare practitioners to service public sector patients, and the involvement of those practitioners in healthcare training. Efforts should also be made to attract local health graduates living abroad back to South Africa to further alleviate human resource constraints.
- The proposals to strengthen primary healthcare services are welcomed as are the plans to provide specialist support in the 52 districts in South Africa and to reintroduce a schools-based health service.
- We are concerned that the Green Paper does not provide for the independence of institutions contemplated in the paper, such as the NHI Fund, the Office of Health Standards Compliance and the body that will be responsible for the accreditation of service providers. These institutions should be independent of the Department of Health so as to avoid conflicts of interest that would otherwise arise, given the department's involvement in the provision of health services.

The SAPPF's submissions conclude with a number of recommendations on private sector reform that would, in its view, contribute to promoting access to healthcare across the country. Given the paucity of detail in the Green Paper, and the significance of the issues with which it deals, the SAPPF requests the publication of a revised draft of the Green Paper with suitable detail so as to enable SAPPF and other interested parties to comment in an informed and meaningful manner prior to the finalisation of the paper.