

Minister begins groundwork for NHI

HEALTH Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said yesterday that an audit of various health facilities across SA had begun ahead of implementing the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme. The first phase of the NHI scheme will be implemented from April next year, at 10 pilot projects in 10 districts. Critics of the plan have argued that it would not reach the required outcome of achieving quality healthcare for all because the public healthcare system is crumbling. Speaking after receiving the first report from the health data advisory and co-ordination committee, Motsoaledi said quality data were vital for the successful implementation of the scheme. He said the Department of Health was auditing infrastructure and financial management structures, and doing a head count of health workers in all facilities. The Minister said 2 800 out of 4 200 public health institutions in SA had been audited so far. Earlier in the day he told a World Health Organisation conference in Cape Town that district clinical support teams and ward-based, primary healthcare agents were being set up together with health services at schools. A national health data repository had been established and would be rolled out to provinces. Motsoaledi said it had also been recognised that there was a need for 3 500 data capturers, who were being employed and deployed across the country. The committee's report would assist SA in its drive to capture consistent and reliable health information, he said. The committee was set up last year with the mandate of improving the quality and integrity of health outcome data, establishing consensus on indicator values and identifying reliable data sources to be used in the future. The committee consists of experts from the Human Sciences Research Council, the School of Actuarial Sciences at the University of Cape Town, the Wits School of Public Health, the Financial and Fiscal Commission and Board of Healthcare Funders. Presenting its first report yesterday, committee chairman Khangelani Zuma said that the researchers had worked independently of the Health Department. He said the report presented consensus on a number of issues, adding that indicators needed to be clear and unambiguous, relevant to the subject at hand, as well as available at a reasonable cost and amenable to independent validation. The committee had "achieved its primary objectives would meet regularly to report on progress towards achieving the set targets as part of monitoring and evaluation, Zuma said. In its report, the committee recommended, among other things, that nursing and the public health systems be revitalised, which would also bode well for the roll-out of the NHI scheme. The committee's deputy chairwoman, Professor Debbie Bradshaw, said the proportion of HIV-positive pregnant women on antiretrovirals was 22 percent, and had to be raised to at least 80%.