

### ***Government takes first steps to decent healthcare for all***

HEALTH Minister Aaron Motsoaledi yesterday unveiled the first practical steps in the roll-out of the National Health Insurance, more than four years after the ANC adopted the plan as a resolution at its Polokwane conference. Unveiling the first 10 pilot projects across South Africa, Motsoaledi said NHI was "no joke" and there was no turning back on its implementation. The Minister backed up his "no-joke" statement by insisting that the plan - designed to bring quality healthcare to all South Africans, particularly the many millions who do not have private medical cover - would be based on a set of non-negotiables. Fundamental healthcare issues such as infant mortality and maternal health would inform the roll-out plan. Motsoaledi said he would be meeting doctors in the private health sector soon to negotiate for them to work at least four hours a week in public hospitals and to be paid by the government. According to Motsoaledi, the duration of the pilot project will be reviewed annually. That Motsoaledi is approaching the roll-out with caution will reassure many South Africans that NHI will not come at the cost of other service delivery. He said implementation of the pilot phase, which begins next month, would take five years. This signals, at the very least, that the ANC government will ensure that thorough oversight and monitoring take place for this time. The NHI is a vastly ambitious project that calls for public and private health services to work together to ensure that all South Africans - irrespective of wealth level - receive the best of the most basic of treatments. If it succeeds, it will remove one of the most fundamental distinctions between rich and poor people in South Africa. And it will deliver on the most basic tenet that the ANC says it stands for - a better life for all.

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