

### ***Health budgets first to go when crises hit***

HEALTH and education budgets are cut in times of financial crises despite the fact that the opposite should be happening, according to South African health department Director-General Precious Matsoso. Addressing the plenary at the 3rd People's Health Assembly Matsoso said that while the country was supposed to be rolling out National Health Insurance (NHI), it had to do so with only R11-million per pilot district from Treasury. She said social services should not suffer when there is a crisis, the opposite should happen. But we see that when there is a financial crisis, there is a cut in social spending and health. Last week Professor Di McIntyre, who is also a key NHI advisor to the Health Minister, reiterated that NHI was about the comprehensive reform of the health system. She said one of her key concerns while establishing NHI was the underfunding of the NHI pilot sites by Treasury and the "enormous pressure to protect the positions of the high income groups and private sector profits". Matsoso said success stories of universal health coverage in countries such as Brazil, Rwanda and Thailand had two things in common - the roll-out of teams of community health workers in communities and a focus on the social determinants of health (access to water, sanitation, housing, etc). She said South Africa needed a social solidarity movement whereby the young subsidised the old, the healthy subsidised the sick and the rich subsidised the poor. Speaking in the same plenary, Dr David McCoy said one of the greatest health systems in the world, the UK's National Health System (NHS) was "sadly no longer". The NHS was fundamentally a public health system that provided universal and equitable healthcare to the entire population. McCoy said legislation instituted months ago in essence abolished NHS, resorting to "reckless vandalism driven by a neo-liberal agenda". McCoy, an academic who specialises in public health and works part-time in the NHS, said the UK was facing a growth in private insurance (as in the United States), a massive expansion of private providers and an increase in the commissioning private companies. He cited the example of the Virgin group who had been contracted to supply services linked to sexual health. He said this was a devastating setback for the UK, warning that big companies were realising that there were profits to be made from health.

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