

A click away

THE recognition that the private health sector has extensive infrastructure that can be used to serve public patients has been slow to take hold in SA. But thanks to the perseverance of the Clicks Group and open-mindedness of the Western Cape health department there is now a simple model for resource sharing. In a landmark agreement between the parties, 32 Clicks pharmacies across the province are now staffed with private nurses to provide immunisation, baby wellness and family planning services. On Thursday afternoons these services will be free for those without access to medical aid whose children were born in a state hospital. At other times, patients will pay a "convenience fee" of R75 for vaccines and R50 for their first family planning consultation. A follow-up family planning consultation will be R35. The official vaccinations babies are required to have add up to more than R3 500/child from birth to 18 months. The vaccines and contraceptives will be provided free by the provincial government to Clicks, which will pay the salary of the attending nurse. Western Cape health MEC Theuns Botha said the agreement would help to shorten queues at provincial facilities. He said the partnership had huge scope in improving service coverage in areas across the province, adding that he hoped to expand the agreement to other pharmacy groups.

So far the partnership is unique to the Western Cape. This came about because Clicks was able to count on the consistency and backing of the Western Cape health department - something that is frequently lacking in other provincial health departments. Clicks Healthcare head Dan Zinner said Clicks' non-profit organisation, the Helping Hands Trust, spent R5m in the past two years providing immunisation services through Clicks pharmacies to demonstrate the potential benefits to the state. Clicks sees the agreement as a model for future public-private partnerships in healthcare as SA gears up to implement National Health Insurance. Zinner said that specifically, it recognised that the private sector had a lot of health infrastructure that could be leveraged.

Claire Bisseker: The Financial Mail, 15 February 2013