

NHI project to focus on healthcare for pupils

THE National Health Insurance (NHI) pilot project for the Western Cape will emphasise providing healthcare to schoolchildren in the Eden district, particularly those in grade R and grade 1. However, provincial health MEC Theuns Botha said at the launch of the pilot in a packed George town hall that the project's main purpose would be to look at how primary healthcare could be "re-engineered" in the future. The Integrated School Health Programme includes health assessments for hearing, sight, gross motor functions, weight, height and oral health. Six nurses from the Western Cape health department will visit selected schools in Eden. The national Department of Health has donated three mobile clinics to support the pilot project - one for eye services, one for oral health and one for primary healthcare. The project is the latest to be launched among the 10 targeted districts across the country. In his State of the Nation address last week, President Jacob Zuma said an NHI fund would be established next year, the year in which the insurance programme was to start nationally. Botha said there was no final model yet for the NHI, but believed the province could contribute to seeing what worked and what did not. He said the Western Cape government was totally opposed to the centralisation of tertiary healthcare facilities, as had been proposed in some circles. Professor Craig Househam, head of health in the Western Cape, told the meeting that health facilities in Eden district were already "exceptional" and for this reason the district was very privileged. He said that the pilot project afforded the opportunity to "experiment" and that the NHI was by no means "a finished product". Househam said there was no such thing as free healthcare and that for the time being, the total amount allocated to the pilot project was only R11.5m. He said that that sounds like a lot but the provincial health department's budget was R15bn, adding that as time went by perhaps see more money would be allocated to the NHI pilot project.

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