

### *Motsoaledi pledges NHI white paper is 'imminent'*

HEALTH Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has once again promised that the publication of the government's long-awaited white paper on National Health Insurance (NHI) is imminent. This policy document is expected to go hand in hand with a financing proposal from the Treasury, which has also yet to be published. Choosing his words carefully, the Minister said talks with the Treasury on the financing of the NHI were close to conclusion. When pressed to put a date to the publication of the white paper, he said "we are not planning to do it after the election", but would not be drawn further. The government hopes to overcome the inequities in people's access to health by introducing NHI, but exactly what form it will take in order to achieve this goal and how it will be paid for are questions it has yet to answer. Consumers and health economists are particularly keen to see the financing proposals, as better-off individuals will probably pay higher taxes to supplement what the state allocates directly from the national budget. The Health Department published its green paper on NHI in August 2011, and has consistently said since then that a white paper, which is the next step in policy development before legislation is drafted, will soon follow. Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan initially said the Treasury's discussion document on financing mechanisms for the NHI would be published by April 2012, but that deadline too has been repeatedly extended. The Health Minister made his remarks on the sidelines of a two-day summit on healthcare innovation hosted by the Bertha Centre at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business, where he told delegates that the two biggest obstacles to overcome in providing universal healthcare were the poor quality of care in the public sector and soaring costs in the private sector. He said that every time he said this people said he wished to close down private healthcare, but nothing like that was going to happen. Motsoaledi said the world had seen innovations in drugs and diagnostics, but new ideas were badly needed on the financing front.

*Tamar Kahn: Business Day, 31 January 2014*