

Ministry defends decision to collect medical aid data

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Cape Town - The Department of Health has defended its decision in Parliament to demand the data of 8 million people on medical aids in the country.

Health Department director-general Precious Matsoso told MPs on Thursday they needed the data in preparation for the roll-out of the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme.

Matsoso said they sought legal advice on whether they could get the data, and the lawyers gave them the go-ahead.

She admitted to MPs that the matter was controversial, but argued that there was nothing wrong with having the data of people on medical aid.

"There was controversy around data of people on medical aids.

"We have a legal opinion on that.

"There is nothing wrong with that. We'll have that information in one central place.

"This is in preparation for the NHI," said Matsoso.

She said that other than the people on medical aid, there were 12 million people on their system.

Having a centralised database meant they would have 20 million people on their system.

She said the implementation of the NHI would proceed smoothly, and they would soon appoint a person to head it.

However, the department came under fire from MPs over under-expenditure in the revitalisation programme in hospitals and clinics.

The department channels billions of rand into the refurbishment of healthcare facilities across the country.

But some of the provinces are lagging behind in spending their money.

Fish Mahlalela of the ANC said it was unacceptable that provincial departments had spent very little of their budgets for the programme.

Some provinces were sitting on just more than 15% of their budget, and this was a serious worry.

Mahlalela said under-spending by the provincial departments did not make sense as some of the clinics and hospitals were in a state of disrepair.

"Everywhere we have gone, in the Free State and North West, the provinces are in a bad state. Provinces are not spending on infrastructure. The National Council of Provinces was in the Free State, and when they came back they asked: 'Are those our hospitals?'," said Mahlalela.

He said some clinics looked more like simple four-room houses than healthcare facilities.

In the Eastern Cape, the province has spent 17.6% of its budget, the Free State has spent 21%, Gauteng 19.5% and KwaZulu-Natal 26.7%.

In Limpopo, the province spent 18.7%, Mpumalanga is sitting at 19%, Northern Cape has spent 17.6%, North West 20% and the Western Cape 16.6%.

Committee chairperson Lindelwa Dunjwa also raised concerns about under-expenditure on infrastructure projects.

By Siyabonga Mkhwanazi, Political Bureau IOL