

Stop talking and start delivering, say medical aid CEOs about NHI

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Government says it is taking a 'pragmatic approach' to the introduction of the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme.

Government and the private health sector need to stop talking about universal access to healthcare and start working on delivering it.

This is the view of the CEOs of Discovery Health, Netcare and Mediclinic, who addressed the Hospital Association of SA conference in Cape Town yesterday (26 Sept).

Identifying clear objectives

“The private sector is ready and waiting to deliver services [to the poor],” said Discovery Health CEO Dr Jonathan Broomberg. “But there is a trust deficit between public and private sector. It is critical that the government and private sector leadership find trust and identify clear objectives to deliver health services to those who need it most. The skills are there, the systems are there, the resources are there, in the main. Trust is what we need to work on to deliver services.”

Vishal Brijlal, advisor to Minister of Health, agreed that the time for talking was over, stressing that government was taking a “pragmatic approach” to the introduction of the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme. The NHI aims to ensure that all South Africans are able to get access to health services of sufficient quality.

“We know where we want to go to but not how we are going to get there,” said Brijlal. “We would all be better off if we work together. A lot revolves around government and Department of Health in particular, building confidence in a pragmatic process.”

Brijlal acknowledged that the public health sector lacked proper monitoring and follow-up: “Some 3,5-million children have been screened in the (NHI) schools programme since 2014, but we don’t know if they have received follow-up care,” he told the conference.

Role of the private sector

Broomberg responded that the private sector could have followed up with the school children with health problems within weeks.

Netcare CEO Richard Friedland, said his company had been working to deliver services for Britain's National Health Service (NHS) for the past 15 years.

"There was a waiting list of two to three years for cataract operations. It was an overnight procedure then that took 40 minutes. We brought it down to 10-12 minutes and delivered 40 000 cataract operations in mobile vans," said Friedland, who stressed that there were enormous opportunities for public and private sector collaboration.

Meanwhile, Mediclinic CEO Koert Pretorius, said private hospitals could assist to manage nearby primary healthcare clinics, particularly in rural areas, and the private sector could also play a role in training doctors and nurses.

By Kerry Cullinan – Health-e News.