

NHI White Paper: Day 1

Universal Health Coverage

This is the first in a series of daily analysis pieces of the NHI White Paper that will be sent to SAPPF- and HealthMan Members. Different aspects of the NHI will be analysed on a daily basis, which will help to assist providers in understanding how the NHI initiative will impact the private provider and their practice, as well as the impact on their own access to healthcare. Some broader economic impacts will also be included on occasion.

Extract from the White Paper:

Universal Health Coverage (UHC):

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines UHC as ensuring that all people can use promotive, preventative, curative, rehabilitative and palliative services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.

This definition of UHC embodies three related objectives:

1. equity in access to health services – those who need the services should get them, not only those who can pay for them;
2. that the quality of health services is good enough to improve the health of those receiving health services; and
3. financial risk protection.

This White Paper lays the foundation for moving South Africa towards universal health coverage (UHC) through the implementation of National Health Insurance (NHI) and establishment of a unified health system.

Critical Analysis:

The WHO states that “UHC does not mean free coverage for all possible health interventions, regardless of the cost, as no country can provide all services free of charge on a sustainable basis.”

South Africa has chosen to provide free health services to all individuals under the NHI, which is clearly an indication that it has not taken heed of the full sentiments of the WHO regarding UHC. This will either mean that the system will be unaffordable, or the basket of services will have to be reduced to an affordable level, which might then be less than what is currently available in the State and public sector.

The NHI is the South African attempt at achieving UHC, it is not the only possible way to achieve this. The decision making on arriving at the NHI model does not speak to the problems identified in the process. There is no motivation provided for deciding on single funder model and with only Estonia, Taiwan and Canada having single funder models internationally, there is little evidence to support his decision.