

National health insurance will finally see light of day, Cyril Ramaphosa promises

The long-awaited National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill will be submitted to Parliament within the next few weeks

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The long-awaited National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill will be submitted to Parliament within the next few weeks, President Cyril Ramaphosa said during his state of the nation address (Sona) on Friday evening, reaffirming the government's commitment to universal healthcare.

NHI is a set of health financing reforms that aim to provide everyone with healthcare services that are free at the point of delivery. It is enshrined in the social solidarity principle that everyone should contribute according to their means and will receive benefits according to their needs, in effect ensuring the rich and healthy subsidise the poor and sick.

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The government began piloting NHI in 2011, but has yet to drive through any significant reforms to breathe the policy into life.

“The time has now arrived to finally implement universal health coverage through NHI,” Rampaphosa said. “The NHI Bill is now ready to be processed through government and will be submitted to parliament in the next few weeks,” he said.

Key NHI projects targeting society's most vulnerable people would begin in April, he said.

He also announced that the government would launch a major cancer campaign within the next three months, similar to the government's massive HIV/AIDS counselling and testing campaign. It would draw on the private sector, he said. “We need to mobilise all resources to fight this disease,” he said.

He also emphasised the government's commitment to combating SA's HIV/AIDS epidemic, promising to provide treatment to another two-million people by 2020.

SA has the world's biggest HIV/AIDS burden, with an estimated seven-million people living with the disease. A little over half of them are currently on treatment, according to the most recent estimates from UNAIDS.

The rand strengthened by a few cents to the dollar during President Cyril Ramaphosa's maiden state of the nation address on Friday. At the start of the presentation, the rand was at R11.62 to the dollar, firming to R11.58 by the time Ramaphosa had finished speaking. The local currency reached a three-year best level of R11.56 to the dollar earlier on Friday.

Business Day