

Will HMI insights get lost in the rush to finalise healthcare laws? – Bizommunity 23 July

Has the almost simultaneous release of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill, the Medical Schemes Amendment Bill and the provisional findings of the Health Market Inquiry (HMI) created an information overload, where some of the insights from the "There is significant risk that the regulatory environment being created through the legislative amendment process currently underway could conflict with the lessons learned in the course of the HMI's work, which will only be fully apparent on the release of its final report," says Mark Arnold, principal officer of Resolution Health Medical Scheme.

A considerable amount of time, resources and expertise have been invested in the HMI, but with the final report due for release in November, however, there is a risk that the full benefit of these insights could be lost due to the timing of these inter-related developments, as the period for submissions on Medical Schemes Amendment Bill and the National Health Insurance Bill close in September, he says.

"As it stands, the HMI findings might be considered when fine tuning the proposed amendments to medical schemes law. However, far greater value could be added if the final HMI findings and recommendations are embraced and incorporated as the foundation for the amendments in the creation of a fresh approach to healthcare for the country.

"Closing the submission period on the Medical Schemes Amendment Bill, which specifically deals with the private healthcare sector, before the HMI's final report is available is analogous to putting the horse before the cart.

"Such an approach squanders the opportunity to strengthen legislation with the full benefit of wisdom garnered during the lengthy and expensive inquiry and the best chance we have of making informed decisions that will shape the future of healthcare in South Africa for all."

Significant political pressure

Acknowledging that there is significant political pressure for legislative certainty that will pave the way for the full implementation of the NHI Arnold notes that a better integrated process would be more likely to achieve a successful and sustainable new healthcare paradigm in the long run.

"If we are to overcome the challenges facing private healthcare – some of which also threaten to derail the goals of universal health coverage – we need to develop a balanced and well-informed piece of legislation, and this is a process that should not be rushed," he adds.