

Signs of potential health sector improvement after inaugural summit-

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The health summit fulfilled expectations, leaving the private healthcare sector optimistic, while Sama remains cautious.

While the South African Medical Association (Sama) was yesterday guarded on whether the two-day Presidential Health Summit would succeed in addressing the country's public health crisis, the private health industry has emerged optimistic.

The weekend's summit, aimed at coming up with a solution to the crippling health crisis, was held in Boksburg and attended by delegates representing an array of health constituencies, including government, labour, non-governmental organisations and the World Health Organisation.

Stavros Nicolaou, senior executive for strategic development at Aspen Pharmacare, said he was encouraged by the process, which he described as "inclusive".

"Although things may not be clear at the moment and timelines seemingly ambitious, it was encouraging for us to emerge with some form of a roadmap.

"What came out was not just a discussion on the NHI (National Health Insurance) but a focus on how to deal with the many issues that health is confronted with.

"As an industry, we hope that the process will allow for a balance to be structured to offer affordable and accessible services to our people, while ensuring business sustainability in achieving the country's economic growth objectives.

"The fact that it is the first-ever presidential health summit displays the importance President Cyril Ramaphosa places on health by elevating it as a priority."

Sama president Dr Mzukisi Grootboom said the association was "optimistic but guarded, given the constraints that government has and the political interference we have seen in the past".

"It is important that we should be vigilant by setting our own monitoring structures," warned Grootboom.

In his closing remarks, Deputy President David Mabuza said the summit "fulfilled and even surpassed many expectations we had when preparing for it".

"We had to confront difficult realities and acknowledge shortcomings, because it is only through honest reflection that we are able to produce effective remedies," he said.