

## *NHI rollout could be delayed - Motsoaledi Lameez Omarjee Fin24, 1 November 2018*

National Health Insurance (NHI) projects will be put on the back-burner as the Health Department has to reprioritise its budget

HEALTH Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has said that National Health Insurance (NHI) projects will be put on the back-burner as the Health Department has to reprioritise its budget. During an address earlier today, he said that Treasury had essentially cut back allocations to the Health Department by R9-billion since 2015, while State subsidies and medical tax credits for private healthcare users grew by R11-billion. Given the reduced budget allocations, the Health Department had to “go back to the drawing board” to decide which treatments to prioritise, he explained. Having spoken to former Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene and Treasury director-general Dondo Mogajane about the need to improve staff recruitment, it was decided the Health Department would reprioritise monies intended for NHI to recruit over 2 000 healthcare professionals and purchase beds and linen for hospitals in dire need. During follow-up questions by journalists about whether Treasury had been protecting the Health Department, Motsoaledi said this had not been the case. He said budget cuts have affected healthcare infrastructure and human resources. When asked if he was happy about the changes which have come about because of the economic stimulus package, Motsoaledi said he is not and that he has no option. Part of the money given for NHI is now going towards the objectives of the stimulus package. Motsoaledi described it as government taking away from the same hand they had given to. He said he would have been happy if new money had been given for the stimulus package.

### **Averting a crisis**

Motsoaledi said that the country is better off if the Health Department keeps existing services going, as opposed to taking them away in favour of introducing new services in line with NHI. He said that he held back on spending the R4.1-billion of NHI money, because he was warned as early as May that reprioritisation would be on the cards. Motsoaledi said if the money had been used for new things and then suddenly we have lost all the old service delivery - it would have been a crisis for the country.