

State medical scheme GEMS urges caution on merger plans

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Changes should be discussed in Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council, principal officer says

The principal officer of the Government Employees Medical Scheme (Gems) has warned about the state's plans to merge it with other schemes for public servants, saying consolidation will require careful planning and consultation with unions.

The Council for Medical Schemes released a discussion document in September proposing the consolidation of all medical schemes for public servants into Gems in line with government policy on National Health Insurance (NHI).

The council identified 10 schemes that could be amalgamated with Gems, including Polmed for the police and Parmed for MPs and judges, as well as state-affiliated entities such as the SABC and Rand Water. It said that consolidating public-sector medical schemes with Gems offered potential savings as a larger scheme would have more negotiating power with health-care providers.

"I don't see it as a rushed process. It needs to be done in a carefully considered way," said Gems principal officer Guni Goolab in an interview with Business Day on Tuesday.