

## Ramaphosa announces Zweli Mkhize as the next health minister – Health E-News 29 May 2019

### **Aaron Motsoaledi leaves the department after ten years, with the last few years marred by some of the biggest failures in public health.**

Dr Zweli Mkhize will take over as the new Minister of Health, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on Wednesday.

Mkhize is the former Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and served as the Treasurer-General of the African National Congress (ANC) between 2012 and 2017.

Ramaphosa has reduced the number of ministers from 36 to 28, by merging several departments such as Water and Sanitation and Human Settlements. According to Political Analyst Tasneem Essop, Mkhize's appointment doesn't come as a surprise.

She explained: "He has been a key figure within the ANC for a while and especially coming from KwaZulu-Natal. He's been circulating in the top echelons of ANC politics for some time now and a deployment of this kind for him was expected much earlier."

Mkhize was the [leader of the KwaZulu-Natal health department](#) for 10 years — from 1994 to 2004 — making him the longest-serving provincial Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) in the country. He was also the MEC for Finance and Economic Development from 2005 to 2009, also in KwaZulu-Natal, and subsequently became the premier of the province between 2009 and 2013.

Additionally, Essop told *Health-e News* that the factional politics within the ANC played a role in his appointment, as well as the fall of some of Former President Jacob Zuma's loyalists after the party's 2017 elective national conference held in Nasrec.

But some fear that Mkhize's appointment could curtail women's access to comprehensive healthcare even more.

"We desperately need a minister who doesn't need to be convinced of the importance of sexual reproductive justice. We need someone who will prioritise the health of young, black women," founder of Nalane for Reproductive Justice Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng said.

Dr Joe Phaahla retains his position as the Deputy Minister of health.

## **Motsoaledi's tenure**

Meanwhile, Former Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has been moved to the Department of Home Affairs. He headed the health department for a decade and has been lauded for [achieving victories in HIV](#) and tackling of non-communicable diseases through supporting the [Health Promotion Levy](#), also known as the [sugary drinks tax](#).

He also championed the [National Health Insurance](#) (NHI) scheme — South Africa's iteration of universal healthcare — which was moved out of the health department and into to a "war room" within the Presidency under Ramaphosa's special advisor Professor Olive Shisana. Civil society and public health experts have criticised the current version of the NHI, labelling it as a "[pipe dream](#)" if problems such as the shortages of health professionals and the equal distribution of labour aren't resolved.

Motsoaledi's term was plagued with crises, such as the [Life Esidemeni](#) tragedy and the [collapse of health services](#) in the North West province which was put under administration last year.

It's not clear why Ramaphosa would feel pressured to retain Motsoaledi in Cabinet, Essop said. "Ramaphosa could be looking for people who appear to be competent to the public and have years of experience in Cabinet. But Motsoaledi is not a key figure that has the influence to lobby within the ANC," she explained.

In 2019, Mkhize [said](#) the NHI would level the playing field and create an equitable distribution of resources which would result in quality health services for all the people.

“The idea of the NHI has been proposed to cure the ills of the health care system in the country. The public health system has suffered a degree of underfunding which has resulted in a deterioration in the conditions of the state facilities, the decline in the quality of care and exodus of skilled personnel.”

Some have welcomed the announcement, sighting his years of experience in South Africa’s public health system will be critical to addressing the country’s

“The appointment of Dr Mkhize is a good one and the best one to manage the concurrent functions between the national and provincial health departments, to ensure cooperation and that provinces spent their health budgets adequately,” Director of the Rural Health Advocacy Project Russel Rensburg said.

On the other hand, Mofokeng said it would have been great for a woman to be appointed as health minister.

She said: “I was expecting a woman who has feminist politics and understands the urgency and the level of crisis that affects women’s health. Whether we’re talking about the continuous contraceptives stockouts, or the issue of unsafe abortion that continues without any plan of action, or any sense of urgency whatsoever.” – Health-e News