

## ***Minister gives NHI a budget pick-me-up Business Times, 14 July 2019***

HEALTH Minister Zweli Mkhize has announced a list of priorities that shed some light on how National Health Insurance (NHI) will work. He also revealed how NHI would be driven by an implementation unit. Mkhize, delivering his budget vote speech in Parliament on Friday, said that a number of interventions to improve health services would be implemented at the same time. The first would be equitable funding for the public sector. The Health Department and the National Treasury were exploring models, he said, adding that, in the long term, the investment in NHI will create a funding mechanism that will permanently resolve underfunding. The NHI Bill will be reviewed by the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces, after which it will go through a public consultation process. The Minister said 2 680 of the 4 143 vacant positions in public health would be filled in this financial year. These included nurses, health professionals such as radiographers, physical therapists, pathologists and community health workers. The department will also absorb 2 625 interns. Another intervention is focused on quality improvement to ensure that facilities meet compliance standards. The department will work on improving management and governance by eliminating “bloated and inappropriate structures” and corruption and ensuring efficiency.

Mkhize said the department would spend R39.1-billion on building new hospitals and maintaining and refurbishing others. He said a team of experts from the department and Treasury had five to seven years to do this. The NHI will be based on primary healthcare and the department will create a network of community health workers and community caregivers to support the delivery of services. The department will also expand contracting general practitioners at primary healthcare centres. The Minister introduced an implementation unit to “form the embryo of the NHI fund and a platform for capacity building for staff”. The department will send about 30 managers to foreign countries to learn about national health systems, “so that they can actually learn on the spot”. Henru Krüger, COO of the Alliance of the South African Independent Practitioners’ Associations, said Mkhize’s statement was positive. He said that the statement gave the first glimpse of a basket of services that would be offered under the NHI. Krüger said that the most positive was the contracting of GPs because it was something for which doctors had been waiting. He said that all that was missing was information on what services GPs were meant to offer, to start costing and getting themselves ready for the NHI.