

NHI dream is actually a sick and unaffordable nightmare

TimesLIVE, 13 July 2019

THE National Health Insurance Bill (NHI) is built on a foundation of failure and ignorance, according to the Democratic Alliance. Its health spokesperson, Siviwe Gwarube, told Parliament on Friday that the costs of proposals in the bill, which was approved by the Cabinet last week, were nothing more than a thumb-suck. And, she said, the NHI pilot projects across the country have failed in a spectacular fashion. Gwarube said the bill would create a “perfect breeding ground for mass corruption and slow delivery of care”. While the ANC would spend 25 years transforming the healthcare system, she said, the DA’s alternative plan would roll out a universal healthcare system within eight years, financed through tax reforms. Gwarube said patients need not wait for billions of rands that we do not have in order to have access to a good health system. She said the road to universal healthcare does not have to be paved with fundamentally bad policy proposals, failed and expensive interventions.

Health minister Zweli Mkhize said other nations that had systems similar to NHI were not rich when they implemented it. He said the government was ready to implement NHI and would fix the inefficient public healthcare system along the way. Health Department director-general Precious Matsotso said it would not be clear how much the implementation of NHI would cost until the Treasury had completed a costing exercise. To kickstart the programme, the health budget of about R202-billion is expected to be increased by R30-billion. Addressing journalists after his budget speech, Mkhize admitted that while there was still gross underfunding of public healthcare, the private sector was experiencing “over-servicing and unnecessary wastage”, and the two systems needed to be corrected. He further posited that SA must be prepared to pay whatever it cost to provide the best service for its citizens, as universal healthcare was a social solidarity issue. Mkhize added that the mentality of privileged South Africans, which leaned towards saving money, should change and the focus should be about saving lives. Mkhize said investing in health and giving good quality healthcare to our people is ensuring that we can have a healthier population, we can have development of human capital and we are investing in economic growth.