

The road to universal health coverage – Pretoria News – 2 August 2019

Pretoria - Seven years ago the UN endorsed universal health coverage as key to sustainable development and global security.

The South African government has taken up the challenge. President Cyril Ramaphosa has underscored the government's commitment to introducing South Africa's version of universal health coverage. He said the revision of a new law to implement National Health Insurance (NHI) was at an "advanced" stage. The aim is to ensure that all in the country have access to quality healthcare, without prejudice or financial detriment.

The country still has a long way to go. A recent report on the 11 districts where the NHI was piloted found that the projects were plagued by problems. Medicine stock levels in clinics and hospitals couldn't be monitored because there was no internet connectivity and vacant posts couldn't be filled because they had been frozen. Teams of medical specialists were expensive, overworked and failed to achieve targets of improving infant health.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) three features must be present for universal health coverage to be achieved.

The first is that the services provided must be extensive and include health promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation as well as palliative care. The second is coverage, which includes some form of financial risk protection.