

MEC says NHI will be excellent *Sunday Independent, 18 August 2019*

GAUTENG MEC for Health Dr Bandile Masuku attempted to allay fears and clear up “confusion” arising from the roll-out of the National Health Insurance (NHI) set for 2026. Masuku said the government-initiated insurance stood to benefit citizens and “struggling” private doctors whose practices weren’t drawing enough patients as well as traditional healers. He said there is seemingly a confusion with people thinking that when you talk about the NHI you are talking about the national health system. The NHI is how we are going to be able to fund the system. Masuku said the pooling in of resources for this fund will improve and increase the budget of health and give us enough funds to employ more doctors and make sure that we get equipment that we need and also for the upkeep of our facilities. The MEC said the NHI was going to improve health services in Gauteng and also ensure that people were able to access healthcare of their choice, including traditional healers without having to pay. Masuku said it is not a secret that there are people who consult traditional healers. So, the system is supposed to make sure that everybody is able to access healthcare of their choice. He said there is going to be an aspect that will also talk about traditional healers and how we are going to compensate them because it’s a system in Africa and it cannot just look at one type of medicine. He said only NHI-accredited health service providers stood to benefit. He advised traditional healers to organise themselves and be accredited in order to benefit from the insurance. With the NHI still some years away from implementation, Masuku said his department was not going to wait for it before fixing drawbacks within the provincial healthcare system. Speaking about litigation cases brought by patients who have suffered at public healthcare facilities, Masuku said his department was not going to settle the claims - which are about R22 billion - and would instead re-cost them since they were calculated using private healthcare pricing. He said the claims will be paid in tranches so that lawyers must not be the final benefactors of this. Discussing the struggles faced by women who seek abortions in public facilities across the province, Masuku said they were in the process of ensuring that facilities were spread out throughout the province and that they had enough trained health workers who are able to deliver abortions.