

NHI not a beauty contest between private and public sector – Motsoaledi

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Parliament – South Africa was no longer prepared to tolerate very costly healthcare systems that only took care of 16% of the population, while 80% suffered, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said on Tuesday.

He said the healthcare systems only took care of the elite and ignored the poor as if they had no right to exist.

"How do we continue to justify that you and I here, Honourable Members, who call ourselves the representatives and humble servants of our people, together with the judges of our courts who are defenders of the constitutional rights of our people, benefit from resources in a very expensive medical scheme of our own – for us and us only?" he asked.

He said the same applied to all professionals, including those in the private sector.

Fair and just

The minister again outlined the benefits of National Health Insurance, and said the government wanted a fair and just health system.

"How do we continue to justify a healthcare system where 16% of the population, which in essence is the cream of the nation, have pooled their funds together in their own corner away from the masses in the form of medical aid schemes only for the elite?"

Motsoaledi said the NHI was not a beauty contest between the private and the public sectors. He said many in the 16% viewed it as such, but it represented a desire to share.

Addressing media following his budget vote in Parliament, Motsoaledi said they could not say how far they were with implementing NHI.

Lengthy process

It would not be a singular event, he said, but would be a lengthy process. However, the preparatory work was well underway. The minister said there was money for NHI.

He said NHI meant organising what was already there. "We are spending 8.5% of the GDP on health, but it is only spent on 16% of the population. There is lots of money, spent on a few people. The tax incentive is R16bn. We want that money to come in for NHI.

He said the subsidies paid for him and other MPs, as well as other government employees for medical aid, would go a long way towards providing for NHI.

"That's R20bn. We want that money for NHI," he said. He also mentioned medical aid reserves as another possible source of funds.

Cost of medicine

The minister also bemoaned the cost of medicine, especially for cancer treatments. He said they were in negotiations to bring the costs down, as they had with the costs of ARVs.

"These things are possible. We are going to use all measures in making this happen," he said.

He also announced that, from September, all HIV-positive South Africans would qualify for ARVs, regardless of their CD4 count. He said, with the test and treat programme, they expected to treat around 70 000 more South Africans than the ones already on ARVs.

By Thulani Gqirana, News24