

NHI criticised for implementation delays

26 August 2016

The National Health Insurance (NHI) has come under criticism for its slow pace of implementation. This has emerged during a panel discussion looking at achieving universal access to quality healthcare in South Africa.

Government is working on implementing the National Health Insurance which is aimed at providing universal and quality health care to all South Africans, regardless of their social standing in society.

In 2012, Health Minister, Aaron Motsoaledi, named 10 districts in the country for the pilot of the NHI.

The funding of this health system continues to be questioned.

Government has invested R4.5 billion for the renovation of healthcare facilities in the eleven NHI pilot districts.

The current financial year is the final year of the NHI pilot phase which focused on, among others, district health services, service delivery, strengthening of health systems and health financing.

Deputy CEO of Discovery Health, Dr Ryan Noach has criticised the slow pace of implementing the NHI. "The reality check is we are nine years post the 2007 announcement at the Polokwane Conference of the launch of NHI. In the nine years, we've really had two papers a green paper and a white paper, some small pilots which haven't been as successful as we would have hoped. We would like to see the pace pick up. We think there has to be an opportunity to improve universal access."

Professor Lizo Mazwai from the Office of Health Standards Compliance, however, disagrees, saying communication about this new health system hasn't been sufficient.

Members of the public had until the end of May, 2016, to make their submissions on the NHI White Paper. Prof Mazwai says people want more than just making submissions on the matter.

The Health Department has defended the NHI as a revolution and the total re-engineering of the health care system in South Africa which should not be hastily implemented. Government had initially said it would take 14 years to implement the system.

Department Spokesperson, Joe Maila, says many lessons have been learnt from the pilot sites of the NHI. Maila says the lessons learnt from the pilot sites will be implemented and challenges addressed.

Prof Mazwai says the success of the NHI lie in good leadership at government health institutions.

By Thabile Mbhele, SABC News