

National Health Insurance Bill almost ready to be tabled in Parly

Minister Joe Phaahla says the Portfolio Committee on Health in the National Assembly has made significant progress to process the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill after their work was paused due to the Covid-19 crisis.



Image source: Illia Uriadnikov – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

“We have virtually completed the main work of the Bill. In the coming year, they will be able to finalise it and table it to a full sitting in the National Assembly.

“We can say, we are in a critical time when the legislative framework for our approach to Universal Health Coverage is almost completed.”

Phaahla was speaking on Monday at a high-level Universal Health Coverage (UHC) seminar under the theme, ‘Build the World We Want: A Healthy Future for All’ at Birchwood Hotel in Kempton Park, Gauteng.

The Minister told the guests that the UHC was not a new aspiration.

“Our Bill of Rights states that the State must take progressive steps for the realisation of the right to health within the limit of its resources.”

On 12 December 2019, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed a resolution urging Member States to accelerate progress toward UHC.



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As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all countries committed to trying to achieve UHC by 2030, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

“Unfortunately, as it's now common knowledge, hardly five months after this declaration, COVID descended and disrupted all our health services worldwide and in our own country,” he said.

“The very same pandemic exposed the weaknesses of our health systems.”

He acknowledged that there are areas in the public health system that need intervention.

“Financing is key, but it's not the only solution. However, the legislation in Parliament, which provide a framework for unified funding and provide a single-payer and single-purchaser system is very fundamental,” he stressed.

“As we are gathered here, we recognise that we also need to do away with the elephant in the room, which is our highly fragmented health system, the two-tier health system.”



Collaboration is key to sustainably transforming South Africa's healthcare system

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He said the current system exacerbates inequality and increases inefficiencies.

“It is common knowledge that your top three private companies are much more profitable than mining companies, food producers and manufacturing companies.”

While government is working around the clock so all people have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them, without facing financial hardship, Phaahla said many challenges lie ahead.

“There are already challenges, just in terms of the implementation of our structure of preparing for the NHI in the department. We are already in court with some of the right-wing organisations,” he said.

“Once the Bill is passed in Parliament, there will be a slew of litigations.”

In addition, Deputy Health Minister, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, said the increasing health costs are pushing millions of people into poverty.

“Achieving UHC will bring about human dignity and social justice. We also know that a healthy population is necessary to

building a thriving economy and a competitive nation,” Dhlomo said.

The Deputy Minister said South Africa is one of the few countries that does not have a universal, tax-funded health system.

“This will ensure that no one is left behind and that all South Africans can live a long and healthy life. We must continue to lay the foundations for truly universally accessible healthcare as we build the country we all want.”

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