

# Nationalizing Healthcare will destroy the lives of our people

By **Siviwe Gwarube** – DA Shadow Minister of Health

House Chairperson,

South Africa is one of the countries that spends the most on healthcare, with an accumulative budget of over R222 billion across all departments and its entities.

The cost of healthcare in our country continues to climb while the economy is rapidly declining under the pressure of poor economic growth.

One would think, a department with a budget this large would be delivering the very least- an adequate level of care.

But all of us in this House know this not to be true.

This is confirmed by the poor health outcomes of the majority of provinces and lived experiences of the people that we are meant to serve.

25 years later, kusekho abantu abajikiswayo bengancedwanga kwi- clinic zethu apho kumele bafumane uncedo khona. Eyona nto kumela ukuba 80% of health issues are dealt with at primary health care level.

Kusekho oomama abaphela bebelekelwa ezibhedlele kukhanyiswa nge- torch zee- cellphone kuba kungekho mbane.

There are still hundreds who died in unlicensed NGOs during the Esidimeni tragedy and thousands who were sentenced to death by a completely preventable oncology crisis as was the case in KwaZulu Natal, under Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo's leadership.

This is the direct result of poor policy and no consequence management for provincial departments that underspend and embezzle public money and the sheer lack of excellence driven leadership at the political level.

Yesterday, the cabinet announced that the NHI Bill has been approved and will be later presented to Parliament.

It is unclear whether costing has finally been done and whether in its finalisation, the lessons from the failed pilot projects have been taken on board.

This Bill comes with a price tag that was estimated at over R259 billion in its initial phase.

This was later proven to have been a complete thumb-suck by the previous minister's own admission.

The legislation will see the nationalization of healthcare, the creation of a state-owned-enterprise which will be the perfect breeding ground for mass corruption and sluggish delivery of care.

The NHI pilot projects across the country have failed in a spectacular fashion.

As such, the current Minister and his predecessor, have sat on the report that will give a fair assessment of the pilot projects.

When I asked the Minister about this report, he said he simply does not care what it says and it does not matter how much the Bill will cost to implement, this government will simply push ahead.

Minister, this is quite frankly this a dereliction of your constitutional obligation and your responsibility to the people of this country.

More concerningly, we are aware that the provinces are yet to be fully engaged in what will be expected of them in the full rollout of the NHI.

There has never been a constructive discussion about this legislation at the National Health Council with the 9 provincial MECs and their Heads of Department.

To add insult to injury, over the medium term budget there has been a R9 billion reduction in the investment of our clinics and day hospitals which are the real interface of healthcare with our communities.

Any legislation that will see the improvement of a health system needs to do so from the bottom up.

It needs to start at the primary healthcare level and not in the corridors of Luthuli House.

Minister, what is clear to me is that you and your government are here to fight for the ANC and you are after an ideological wins.

On the other hand, DA is here fighting for the people of this country.

Nationalisation of healthcare is not the way to bring about dignity to the millions who depend on public healthcare.

It will only bring about financial benefit to the politically connected.

Should this piece of legislation be passed in the form presented during the 5<sup>th</sup> Parliament, it will be a gamble with the lives of millions.

The road to Universal Health Care does not have to be paved with fundamentally bad policy proposals, failed and expensive interventions.

South Africa can have universal healthcare that will see the entire system transformed so that it can serve the people who have been left behind for 25 years.

Under the DA health plan, our people would not need to wait up to 15 years for their lives to improve.

They need not wait for billions of rands that we do not have for them to have access to a good health system as envisioned in the Constitution.

The DA would rollout Universal Health Care in 5 to 8 years.

Most crucially, it can be delivered through restructuring and reprioritisation of the current health budget.

It can be financed through two interventions.

We would remove the medical aid tax benefit afforded to medical aid clients, availing R17 billion to invest in the following:

- Improving Primary Healthcare- the bedrock of a health system;
- Investing in maternal and child health;
- Improving the provision of emergency services;

With those interventions alone, the health system would drastically improve.

We would not end there.

We would assign every single South African with a subsidy which will allow them to access to quality healthcare.

It would not matter if you are a private health patient or a public health patient, you would be afforded quality of care through a standard health package.

This means, under the DA Health system our people are not relegated to second class health system.

They will be able to access whatever health facility they want and instantly the system of insiders and outsiders is done away with.

Chairperson, in order to bridge the gap of those who have and those who have not have access to quality healthcare, the DA would impose a health justice fund.

This would be a cross-subsidisation funding model to provide a standard package of healthcare that is of quality.

In this way, we would give agency to our people to choose the healthcare that they want; regulate the private healthcare schemes so that people are not exploited and ultimately rollout comprehensive universal healthcare that will not destroy the economy but will be affordable.

Our fight is for the excluded and those who have been victims of a system that has cost millions their lives.

It is not against the ANC and the minister.

We are bringing solutions to the table that would afford people dignity.

When this Bill is brought before Parliament, we want to ensure that the patient is at the centre of any reforms.

Anything less than that will be rejected in its entirety.