



**ANC Parliamentary Caucus**

**Debate on Vote 18: Health**

**11 July 2024**

**Comrade B.M Kegakilwe**

The signing of the NHI Bill into law on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2024 marked a transformative shift in our country's health system. As noted during the signing, the fundamental principles of the NHI are an expression of a long-standing promise which dates back as far as the 1940s as noted in the African Claims document. These ideals have stood the test of time and carried through the 1994 democratic dispensation under the African National Congress's National Health Plan for South Africa to establish an equitable, quality and accessible healthcare system for all.

The NHI is a direct threat to an unjustly inherited system which has the public sector cater to about 84% of the population while the private sector merely caters to about 14% of the population. This unjust and unsustainable system has negatively affected the majority in this country who are broadly categorized as black and poor, impacting their health outcomes, quality of life and overall wellbeing.

The budget vote permits for the implementation of critical functions to enable the implementation of the NHI. The successful implementation of the NHI is a pivot as it enables South Africa to realise its commitments to local and global commitments. Locally, South Africa is governed by the Constitution which declares that everyone has the right to equality, including access to health care services. Furthermore, we are in the last decade of the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 which calls for a "phase in national health insurance, with a focus on upgrading public health facilities, producing more health professionals and reducing the relative cost of private health care".

Therefore, the realisation of the NHI is not merely a health reform plan but a pathway for South Africa to realise its strategic developmental goals towards creating a united, democratic and prosperous country. This has profound implications for decreasing not only health disparities but



also inequality. When people have access to accessible and quality health care, diseases can be detected and managed timeously, people can be treated early, and the impact of outbreaks such as COVID-19 can be contained or minimized. Furthermore, the unified NHI Fund will reduce the need for individuals to pay out of pocket for healthcare services, thus increasing people's household disposable income.

Simply put, health cuts across all spheres of society. In addition, sick people cannot work, and improving access to health ensures that we have a healthier and responsive workforce which can actively contribute to the economy. By improving health care, we stand a better chance of alleviating poverty, addressing gender inequality, enhancing the quality of education and improving the opportunities for people to meaningfully engage in social and economic activities. Therefore, the NHI can be a mechanism to drive greater socioeconomic development and achieve prosperity for different sectors of society.

Chairperson,

In addition to being a critical instrument to foster social cohesion, the NHI acts as a tool towards South Africa aligning to global commitments of achieving sustainable development and a healthier world. South Africa is one of the countries committed to the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, particularly to realise goal 3: good health and wellness. The objective is to promote citizens to lead healthy lives and create a health system which improves health outcomes. The NHI is committed to this goal by ensuring that it removes the financial burden attached to health which has had an impact on the accessibility and quality of care citizens receive. The NHI is thus an opportunity for South Africa through a phased approach, to pave a way towards Universal Health Coverage.

As a global community which lives with the potential of health threats and other crises which affects people's health and livelihoods such as the devastating climate change effects in the form of natural disasters which have been witnessed in areas such as the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal, the NHI has the potential to provide greater health security by strengthening the country's emergency response to crises. By establishing a more responsive and coordinated health emergency response, building resilient infrastructure, and equitably distributing health services in



all regions of our society, we can ensure that affected communities receive the necessary assistance in the form of equipment, medical personnel and other essential resources.

Honourable Members,

For far too long, we have endured a fragmented, divisive, unjust and unsustainable healthcare system which contradicts our country's developmental aspirations. The budget vote reflects a commitment towards building a responsive, agile and robust system to address the needs of our people.

As a country that still grapples with numerous systematic and structural challenges which burden the development of our country and the improvement of people's lives, we must continue to jealously guard and defend the democratic gains established over the past 30 years of our democracy. We must continue to develop legislation and implement pro-poor programs which address poverty, and inequality and are stewed towards stimulating the economy and improving the lives of all South Africans.

Thank you.