

Covid-19 highlights need to invest in health system resilience

The learnings from the Covid-19 global pandemic have highlighted the need to ensure that the long-term resilience of the health system to respond to future outbreaks.



Health minister, Zweli Mkhize

"Globally, the lesson from the impact of Covid-19 has emphasised the necessity of investing in long term resilience and sustainability of health systems to enable us to better respond to future health emergencies and crises," health minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize, said when he tabled the Department of Health's Budget Vote during a mini-plenary of the National Assembly.

"The Covid19 pandemic caused significant health seeking deterrence and various results have pointed to this challenge. The mandates set out in the performance agreement that I signed with the president for the period of June 2019 to April 2024, indicate the need for innovation to close these service delivery gaps."

Mkhize said key amongst these include the establishment of the National Health Insurance (NHI) Fund, implementing the recommendations of the Health Market Inquiry Report, building human resource capacity, quality improvement, expansion of health infrastructure, risk management, uprooting corruption and ensuring clean governance as well as building partnerships through social compact.

Phase 2 of Covid-19 roll out

Mkhize said, meanwhile, that South Africa will begin phase 2 of its vaccination programme on Monday.

This as the country emerges from a tumultuous year of 2020, which resulted in 1.6-million positive Covid-19 cases and 54,968 people losing their lives.

“Our country is set to begin phase 2 of the vaccination programme on 17May 2021, targeting 130 sites in the public sector to be active next week, focusing on the population aged 60 and above and vulnerable groups, using Johnson and Johnson and Pfizer vaccine; as vaccination of the remainder of healthcare workers is being concluded.

“Private sector sites will open later next week,” he said.

Mkhize said over the medium term, the department’s most urgent focus is combatting the coronavirus through government’s comprehensive local intervention programmes, for which R9bn has been allocated.

“We continue to play our strategic roles as co-chair of the ACT-Accelerator and Covid-19 champion of the African Union, following President Cyril Ramaphosa’s outstanding leadership in his capacity as chair of the AU in 2020.”

Pilot programme

Mkhize said, meanwhile, that the department will, come June, be piloting 16 quality learning centres, defined as a cluster of health facilities at different levels of care servicing the same population.

He said the pilot cluster will comprise 80 hospitals and 64 primary healthcare facilities.

“After incorporating the learnings from the pilot phase, the programme will gradually expand until all facilities belong to a quality learning centre.

“R13.7bn has been allocated for supporting tertiary healthcare services which are offered at tertiary and central hospitals to service patients from different provinces.

“The grant compensates the provinces that suffer inequality that results from this arrangement.”

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