

70 000 objections to NHI indicate need to extend public participation – Politicsweb 17 September 2019

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The 70 000 objections to NHI Bill indicate the need to extend public participation process

The Democratic Alliance (DA) has, following extensive engagements with members of various communities, civil society groups and other interested parties, come to the conclusion that the month that Parliament initially gave for public comments is simply inadequate.

The party has received over 70 000 objections to NHI from ordinary South Africans. This shows how strongly citizens object to the plan that will ultimately cripple the health system and further burden us with even more taxes.

Not only is the the time period not sufficient for South Africans to make their voices heard about this Bill, but they are expected to make submissions and comments with gaping pieces of information still missing.

The people of South Africa are expected to support or reject the Bill yet they haven't been given the requisite explanation of what healthcare will look like should there be an NHI legislation implemented. These pertinent questions include:

1. What will be covered or not covered by private medical schemes;
2. Will private medical schemes be merely supplementary or complimentary? What will the package of care that will be provided by the state include?
3. What is the funding model that will be used? Will South Africans be expected to pay additional personal tax? What would the value of that be?
4. What are the other funding sources for this legislation? Has National Treasury costed it and certified that the country can roll this out?

These are crucial questions that ordinary people would want to know before making their voices heard about the Bill. Quite frankly, these are critical questions which should be answered - and have not been - by Minister Zweli Mkhize to the members of Parliament in the portfolio committee before we can expect people to make meaningful contributions to a piece of legislation that has far reaching consequences for each and every citizen.

With only 3 weeks left of this process, Parliament should extend the period by six more weeks from October 1st. In that time, clarity must be given. We need the relevant questions clarified so that people are making meaningful contributions to this Bill.

Gone are the days where Parliament is only used as a rubber stamp station for problematic pieces of legislation and South Africans are simply bullied or misled into a fraught process that doesn't give credence to their voices.

While the DA supports the rollout of universal healthcare, we do not support the bulldozing of the national Health Insurance Bill.

Currently, it makes provision for the abuse of power by the Minister of Health who will be solely appointing the board that will manage the NHI fund; it imposes additional tax for ordinary and already stretched South Africans, it seeks to erode the provincial powers which allow for greater accountability and efficient service delivery and there's no indication that it has been costed.

The chairperson of the portfolio committee, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, should place politics aside and support the extension of the public participation process while greater detail is sought around questions that remain unanswered from Minister Mkhize and his department.

Issued by Siviwe Gwarube, DA Shadow Minister of Health, 17 September 2019