

## **Busa and health department in ‘cordial and constructive’ first meeting on NHI – Business Day 13 October 2019**

Business Unity SA says it was agreed that no details will be released until a mutual understanding or agreement on National Health Insurance has been reached

Business Unity SA (Busa), which represents private companies and professional bodies, has had a “cordial and constructive” first meeting with the health department to discuss its plans for universal health coverage, it says.

The government is driving the biggest health reforms since the end of apartheid, aimed at achieving universal health coverage, which it calls National Health Insurance (NHI).

The policy promises to provide patients with care that is free at the point of delivery, and its first piece of enabling legislation was tabled in parliament on August 8 in a bill that triggered such negative investor sentiment that it wiped R14bn off the value of top health stocks within three days.

The bill proposes setting up a central NHI fund that will purchase services from accredited public and private sector providers, and creates uncertainty about the future role of medical schemes and administrators.

Busa announced in September that it planned to set up a formal mechanism for engaging with the government on NHI and other issues affecting the sector detailed in the Presidential Health Compact signed in July.

Busa has previously indicated that its concerns about NHI extended beyond investor sentiment as its members are directly and indirectly affected by any changes to the health system. Employers play a large role in their workers’ access to health care, as many of them subsidise their medical scheme contributions, or provide health services directly. And productivity is affected by the health of their workforce, whether it depends on public or private health-care providers.

A “six-a-side” structure has been agreed upon, and met for the first time on Thursday.

Neither Busa nor the health department would comment on what was discussed at the meeting.

“Both parties have agreed that as this process is related to health-care issues in general, in line with the compact, we would only release details to the media at the point where we have worked through issues and have mutual understanding or agreement on these,” said Busa board member Stavros Nicolaou, who is also head of strategic trade at local pharmaceutical manufacturer Aspen Pharmacare.

The Busa delegation includes Discovery Health CEO Jonathan Broomberg, Netcare head of strategy Melanie da Costa, Stephen Smith from the Association for Savings and Investment SA, the SA Private Practitioner’s Forum CEO Chris Archer, and Discovery executive director Ayanda Ntsaluba.

The health department's team includes its deputy director-general for NHI Anban Pillay, NHI adviser Aquina Thulare, NHI consultant Nicholas Crisp, health minister Zweli Mkhize's legal adviser Naheem Raheman, University of Cape Town professor John Ataguba and health economist Di McIntyre.

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