

# South Africa is facing a doctor shortage – here’s why –

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South Africa is currently facing a doctor and nurse shortage due to a lack of funding, says Health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize.

Responding in a recent parliamentary Q&A session, Mkhize said that the primary reason for this shortage is that the public health sector budget has not increased in real terms for the past 10 years.

This has impacted the number of staff that can be appointed, he said.

Mkhize added that the demand for health services in the country is increasing while there is no additional funding to address the change, which results primarily from immigration into the country and the increasing burden of disease.

“The shortage of health professionals is a global phenomenon and is more pronounced in low and middle-income countries as health workers are more likely to migrate to upper-middle-income countries in search of better living and working conditions,” he said.

## **NHI**

The incoming National Health Insurance (NHI) is also likely to have an impact on whether doctors choose to remain in the country.

Critics of the NHI plan have previously highlighted the flight of medical skills as a major risk to the scheme, with some surveys showing that 43% of respondents in the medical field would consider leaving the country when the scheme is implemented.

Some have noted that an exodus is already underway.

Profmed medical aid chief executive officer, Craig Comrie said that health professionals are already emigrating, noting that among Profmed’s health professional members, the typical measure of 17% leaving the country each year rose to 30% in June and July.

In an 8 October interview, Mkhize said that the Department of Health is working on a number of plans to ensure that the required skills are in place for the successful implementation of the NHI.

“You actually just train the people and get the people with the necessary skills. The skills are not only locked in the private sector,” he said.

When asked about how the government plans to incentivise doctors in the private sector to work under the NHI in the public sector, Mkhize said that the answer was to ‘pay them’.

