

## **Nurses' association defends public sector wage bill in MTBPS wish list** – IOL 29 October 2019

CAPE TOWN – As the Minister of Finance will be tabling the country's Mid-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) in Parliament on Wednesday, the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (Denosa), once again, would like to highlight key areas of national importance that it hopes the Minister will take to his heart and mind when delivering his speech, as these centre around the delivery of essential services.

For years now, and owing to the country's prolonged sluggish economic growth, there has been a raging debate about what many sections of society have termed the "bloated public sector wage bill", where concerted calls have been made to "cut" or "slash" it, despite a considerable increase in the country's population numbers as well as the ever-increasing and unaccounted influx of immigrants into the country.

Denosa reiterates Cosatu's point that the public sector wage bill has not been increasing, and neither is it out of control. It has remained around 32 percent to 35 percent. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that in 1994, South Africa had 1 million public servants at the time when the country's population was still at 34 million. Today the country's population is at 57 million, which is 23 million people more than we had in 1994, and 1.1 million public servants with more than 120 000 vacancies.

From this, it is clear that public servants have been stretched to the breaking point and there has not been any great revolutionary innovation to cheaply argue away the current low staffing levels for this ever-increasing population. So, please!

With regards to tomorrow's MTBPS, we expect the Minister to realize that the key frontline staff like nurses, teachers, doctors and police are taking a great strain at the time when even senior government representatives keep on demotivating them further by threatening to worsen their workload through job-cuts and moratoria on employment of workers to fill vacant posts and through enticing staff to retire early (already, 4000 public servants have been lost through this enticement). We hope the minister is well aware of this reality.

### **In heath, our expectations are the following:**

- As the country prepares for full implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) by 2026, We hope that a considerable funding will be allocated for hiring of healthcare personnel in many healthcare facilities, as the shortage of staff is still a disturbing norm in many health facilities and more staff will be required to deal with the workload;
- That sufficient budget is allocated for the extension of many clinics' operating hours to become 24-hour service centres whereby access to healthcare service would become available to many community members;
- That more investment is made into the safety of healthcare workers in the workplace as many health workers have become victims in facilities due to poor security;
- That a sufficient budget is allocated for the commitment to the refurbishment and reopening of the previously closed nursing colleges, which was made in 2011 by

former President Jacob Zuma which has not yet been fulfilled. It is more critical that this gets done especially as we usher in the National Health Insurance (NHI) which will need quite fair production of nurses by both colleges and universities.

If planning to roll out NHI fully is not reflected in this MTBPS, whose outlook is the next three years, then government risks missing out on realizing this concept of Universal Health Coverage for millions of South Africans within its set date.