

How many blows will be needed to stop the NHI- Fin 24 2

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Trade union Solidarity intensified its war against the government's proposed National Health Insurance (NHI) and is now threatening to take the fight all the way to the Constitutional Court.

The NHI, which is before parliament for consideration, is the government's plan to provide universal healthcare access to all South Africans. It is expected to be rolled out by 2026 and is estimated to cost R256bn.

"The NHI, should it come into effect, would bring an unprecedented disaster for South Africans," said Morné Malan, a strategic specialist at Solidarity.

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"We don't know just how far government's irrationality and insanity will go. We don't know how many blows will be needed to stop the NHI, but we are ready to come up with as many blows as will be needed, and, ultimately, with even more as long as we can stop this disastrous policy," said Malan.

"We are also ready to participate in all further processes, to lobby against the bill and to resort to court action right to the Constitutional Court should this bill ever be enacted."

The trade union, which this week submitted its comments on the NHI representing a mandate of 30 000 people, reiterated its survey findings among health practitioners in the private and public sector.

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"They are not being treated as individuals with rights but rather as resources and state assets that can be allocated as government deems fit. It is no wonder that our national survey among health practitioners shows that they are almost unanimous in agreeing that government will not be able to manage it and that health practitioners are not interested in working within such a system," said Hennie Bierman, head of Solidarity's Guilds.

The survey found that only 15% of respondents were of the view that the NHI could possibly be successfully implemented, while 84.5% indicated the implementation could destabilise the entire healthcare system.

"The NHI deprives health care practitioners of almost every freedom related to how and where they practice their profession; it turns doctors, nurses, pharmacists and all other health professionals into mere commodities, denying them their humanity, as it were," said Bierman.

The deadline for written submissions on the NHI Bill closed on Friday, but oral submissions remain open.

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The parliamentary portfolio on health, chaired by Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, conducted the final round of public hearings for the year in the Eastern Cape on Friday.

It is set to resume mid-January and end the first week of February next year.

The committee said in a statement that it is of the view that, both oral and written submissions received so far will contribute immensely in making the legislative framework which will lead to the achievement of the objective of the Bill.

“At the centre of this Bill is the preoccupation to ensure that there is quality healthcare system that caters for everyone. The quality and amount of written and oral submissions received from the people in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal provinces have greatly enhanced the Bill,” Dr Dhlomo said.

- **READ: We don't need to wait for NHI to improve healthcare - Mboweni**

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Tito Mboweni told the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) on Wednesday that the NHI system was the only opportunity for the SA public healthcare system to shape up, reported Fin24.

Replying orally to questions from members of the NCOP, Mboweni said he did not believe NHI should be considered the only panacea to the challenges dogging the public healthcare system.

"We don't have to wait for NHI to be implemented to fix our public healthcare system. There are things that are within our power that can be fixed now," Mboweni said.

Mboweni also urged MPs not to allow ideological persuasions to dictate their views around the NHI without considering the benefits it could yield for South Africans.

- Compiled by Adiel Ismail