

Covid-19 changed life as we know it at social, economic and political level – IOL

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By Dr Bandile Masuku Jun 18, 2020

On Friday June 19, I will be delivering my second budget vote speech as the MEC for Health in Gauteng since assuming office in May 2019.

The context that this speech takes place in is one that is engulfed by the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Covid-19 has changed life as we know it at a social, economic and political level. This pandemic has also put a strain on the global healthcare system and an even greater strain on countries where access to quality healthcare is already compromised.

In the past few months, the South African government and citizens have committed resources and human capacity towards managing the impact of the pandemic on citizens.

While the reality of this pandemic directly confronts the Department of Health and lays bare the areas where our healthcare system needs strengthening, I believe that it's important that in focusing our energies on managing the spread of the virus and providing quality health care, we do not lose sight of the opportunity to reflect on the year that has been. This specifically as it concerns highlighting the areas that we have been successful and acknowledging the areas that still require some work.

In August 2019, the departmental strategic plan resolved on five key priority areas that would drive the agenda of the 2020/21-2024/5 administration. Anchored on building an activist and responsive government that seeks to grow Gauteng, the priorities resolved upon include the National Health Insurance (NHI), improving patient experience of care, clinical services, leadership; governance and health promotion as well as health education.

One of the main achievements of this administration has been changing the public image of the Department of Health in Gauteng. Key to this has been the improvement of staff morale in the Department, this as a part of improving the experience of users of our public health facilities. The logic behind this simply being that acknowledging health-workers for the work that they do, contributes to their interaction with those that come to our health facilities for care. The introduction of the Employee Value Proposition Programme is one of the main contributors to the Departments attainment of some of its targets in this regard.

The Department has also shown some positive outcomes as it relates to Clinical Services and improved service delivery at our facilities. This includes some in-roads in the area of District Health Services, specifically in operationalising 30 out of 32 24- hour Community Health Centres in the province, improving waiting times at all

Primary Health Care (PHC) facilities, as well as integrating mental health services in these facilities.

The rendering of health services in Gauteng facilities has improved since the last Budget presented, this signifying that there is some consistency in moving forward regarding improving access to quality health services in the Province.

The Department's Mpilo App is one of the key legacy projects that is among the highlights of the Department in the past year. The launch of this application has made the Department more accessible to the public as it offers some of the key information about the Department's facilities and makes facility managers more accessible while providing accountability to the users of the public health system.

In the past year, the capacity of the Department to resolve client complaints has seen an improvement, exceeding the targets that had been set for this financial year. We partly attribute this improvement to the inclusion of Mpilo as one of the channels that the Department can be accessed through.

While there has been progress in the Department's HIV/AIDS, STI and TB programmes, we also realise that additional work is required in this area, specifically as it relates to reaching the 90-90-90 targets.

One of the key challenges in this area includes the retainment of health users on the Anti-Retroviral Treatment, this notwithstanding the fact that the implementation of the Department's Centralised Chronic Medication Dispensing and Distribution Programme has been successful.

The context of the pandemic offers us an opportunity to recover some of the gains in this regard.

It is however important, that members of society work with the Department in strengthening the work that has been done in the past year. The upcoming budget processes, which will later factor in the Covid-19 pandemic and how it will affect health service delivery is premised on building from where we currently are, managing the pandemic, but also strengthening capacity of the healthcare system in preparation for the NHI.

Dr Bandile Masulu is the MEC for Health in Gauteng.

