

Covid-19 accelerates South Africa's NHI plans — Business Tech 28 July 2020

The advent of the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on the country's healthcare system shows the importance of a new National Health Insurance (NHI), says Dr Nicholas Crisp, NHI fund developer and consultant at the Department of Health.

Speaking in an SAfm interview on Tuesday (28 July), Crisp said that the virus has exposed the shortcomings in the current system, but also highlighted the strength of public and private healthcare partnerships.

“What we've learned during Covid-19 is that if we'd had one system, it would have been much easier,” he said. “We've learned a great deal about working together with private hospitals and practitioners during this time. It has taught us we can do it. The willingness to cooperate has been great.

“Healthcare is not just about treatment. It is also about preventing people from reaching the point where they need treatment. Once people need treatment they should have quality healthcare and shouldn't have to worry about whether they can afford it.”

Crisp said that a number of staffing issues have been addressed which has helped give the NHI ‘a significant kickstart’. However, he acknowledged that more needed to be done, and that government was aware of continued inefficiencies in the system.

“I don't think that any of us are under illusions that there is a long way to go and we have seen from press reports and things we already knew about deficiencies in the public system – the collapse of certain hospitals in the Eastern Cape and so on.

“We are not going to deny that is what has happened. The question is not to see how clever we are in documenting how bad things are, but to see how clever we can be in fixing them in the shortest possible time.”

Nicholas Crisp: What we've learned during [#COVID19](#) is that if we've had one system, it would have been much easier. [#NHI @SAfmRadio](#)

Pushing forward

Health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize confirmed last week that the government is pushing forward with plans to move towards a new National Health Insurance.

Presenting his updated department budget vote in a virtual parliamentary meeting on Thursday (23 July), Mkhize said that a fundamental condition for growth and development is a healthy and productive population, with access to quality and affordable health care.

He added that his department has put great effort into improving health service delivery to prepare for NHI and achieve universal health coverage.

“Covid-19 has illustrated just how important data and information are in managing health decisions,” Mkhize said.

“We are pleased that during the past few months the NHI information systems capacity has been augmented, strengthened, and dramatically improved.

“The investments made in these improvements will all remain and enhance the capability of the department to manage the health system into the future.

“We have established a patient registry through the deployment of the Health Patient Registration System in our PHC facilities and Hospitals. To date, a total of 51 909 554 patients have been registered.”

Mkhize said that his department has also developed a health systems dashboard which will soon go live.

“This system will support the government with early warning signs in surveying hospital infrastructure, alerting us to impending critical mass reach in various areas of our operations, and giving us an opportunity to respond before there is a crisis on the ground,” he said.