

Northern Cape ICU limitations exposed – Politicsweb 19 August 2020

The Democratic Alliance (DA) in the Northern Cape is calling on the provincial health department to work hard towards prioritising the operationalisation of additional Intensive Care Units (ICU) across the province.

This comes after MEC of Health, Maruping Lekwene, during a virtual health portfolio committee meeting yesterday, revealed that there are currently only two operational, state-managed Intensive Care Units in the entire province, one being at the Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (RMS) Hospital in Kimberley and the other at the Dr Harry Surtie Hospital in Upington, which is a questionable ICU facility in itself, given lack of staffing capacity.

This is very worrying indeed and leaves an expanse of hundreds of square kilometres of the province without quick access to lifesaving ICU facilities. In effect, people residing in the far end of Namaqualand have to be transported to Upington or even to Kimberley for emergency care, whilst those in De Aar and surrounds, have to be transported to Kimberley. This is in spite of the new, multi-million rand hospital that was not so long ago opened in De Aar. This is ironic, given that the Pixley ka Seme district, in which De Aar falls, is the very district that has been used to pilot the National Health Insurance (NHI) plan, simply proving once again that the NHI is not the answer to the province's many health challenges.

To make matters worse, the Northern Cape also has a very poorly capacitated emergency medical service (EMS), which currently only has about 80 operational ambulances servicing the entire province, and which is increasingly relied upon for referrals from the districts to the better equipped facilities.

This is a growing crisis at any given time, even more so now, as the province finds itself in the eye of the pandemic, with more people likely to require intensive care and ventilation.

The DA is thus calling on Lekwene to prioritise not only the capacitation of De Aar Hospital, but also at least one hospital in the John Taole Gaetsewe district and one in Namaqualand. At the very least, each district should have a well-resourced and professionally staffed hospital, able to provide high level medical care as opposed to mere clinic-type health care services.

It is undeniable that Covid-19 has exposed deep-seated flaws in the provincial health system and that if urgent reform of existing facilities is not prioritised, we will see more and more people dying, not only from Covid-19 complications necessitating ventilation in ICU, but also of cases of maternal and neo-mortality, motor-vehicle accidents, cardiovascular conditions, strokes and the many other health-related conditions that require intensive care.

Issued by Andrew Louw, DA Northern Cape Provincial Leader, 19 August 2020