

Government prepares for move to new NHI – but ... - Business Tech 3 Sept

2020

Parliament's portfolio committee on Health met on Wednesday (2 September) to discuss the next steps needed to allow for the introduction of the new National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill.

The committee is currently grappling with the sheer number of responses it has received around the bill, with 32,227 written and 32,634 emailed submissions received.

While the deadline for submissions closed at the end of November 2019, the committee has battled to grapple with the sheer number of submission received, with just 1,031 out of 32,217 hand-delivered submissions scanned, validated and captured.

Parliament is now looking at using an external service provider to help go through the submissions and complete the process by the end of the year.

Commenting on the actual submissions, the committee said that it received varying responses around the introduction of the new NHI.

The majority of the submissions made during the provincial public hearings **support the bill** in its current form. The committee said that a similar picture emerges with the hand-delivered submissions.

By comparison, the email submissions give a contrasting picture and show that a number of people **do not support the NHI** in its current form.

South Africa better prepared for NHI

Dr Nicholas Crisp, NHI fund developer and consultant at the Department of Health, says that the coronavirus has helped the government learn new lessons around staffing, health and safety, and health products – all of which will help boost the implementation of the NHI.

“On top of that, our data was a big shambles before Covid and that was one of our big projects in the NHI office. We had to convert our entire NHI's digital capabilities to look after Covid.

“Now what we are left with is an unbelievably competent digital system that has data in which we would never have dreamt of having before.” He said that this includes data from the private sector which will help boost the NHI's capabilities.

Crisp said that the ultimate goal of the NHI was to achieve ‘equity’ and ‘good quality healthcare’.

“What we are trying to do in universal health coverage is have a greater number of people, with a greater number of services, with less financial vulnerability at point of care.”

Roll-out by 2025

It is not yet clear how the coronavirus and influx of submissions will impact the roll-out of the NHI.

In February, President Cyril Ramaphosa said that government will not be ‘reckless’ in implementing the NHI and that the Department of Health should prepare adequately for the implementation of the system.

“We will implement it in an incremental fashion and aim to cover the whole country by 2025. We will use an affordable approach to progressively move towards a comprehensive NHI environment,” he said.

Ramaphosa further called on the private sector and citizens to mobilise behind the NHI, to see it implemented.

“I call on the private sector to join government in seeing the NHI realised. To transform the health care landscape to make it more efficient, cost-effective and value for money requires that we forge strong public-private partnerships for the delivery of services,” he said.

“We remain committed to ensuring there is effective consultation and engagement with all sector partners at all stages of the process.”