

Government has already registered over 45 million South Africans to its NHI database – Business Tech 19 November 2020

Despite delays caused by the coronavirus lockdown, government is making steady progress in its planned implementation of a new National Health Insurance (NHI).

In its annual report presented to parliament on Wednesday, the National Department of Health said that the NHI Bill is currently being considered by parliament and that an official NHI Office can only be established after the bill is passed into law.

Despite this delay, the department said that a total of 3,059 public healthcare facilities had implemented the **Health Patient Registration System (HPRS)** and that registered NHI beneficiaries have reached a total of **45,286,288** against a target of 40 million in 2019/20.

In an explanation of the HPRS in 2019, Health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize said that the system was developed to assist with the implementation of the NHI and will act as a ‘backbone of an electronic health patient record’.

“We support the Department of Home Affairs in the registration of babies in our hospitals, as they will then be registered automatically on the NHI patient register,” he said at the time.

“(The) NHI will require a digital health platform that will support the operations of the NHI Fund and work has already commenced in this regard.”

Parliament’s portfolio committee on Health is currently grappling with the sheer number of public submissions it received around the NHI which has proved to be a controversial issue for many South Africans.

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.

While additional healthcare support has largely been welcomed by opposition parties analysts and business, concerns remain around how the NHI will be funded and how it will impact existing private healthcare in the country.

Lee Callakoppen, principal officer for South Africa’s second-largest open medical aid scheme Bonitas Medical Fund, has said that the need for universal healthcare is ‘not debatable’.

However, Callakoppen said it is the mechanisms around its implementation that stimulate continual debate, challenges, disagreements and proposals.

It is envisaged that NHI will offer all South Africans and legal residents access to a defined package of health services. It is not clear how comprehensive or wide this range of services will be.