

State of health care proves ANC government is anti-poor

By Haseena Ismail MP – DA Member on the Portfolio Committee of Health

The opening demand of the Freedom Charter states that the people shall govern.

28 years into democracy, I am sure that the writers of the Freedom Charter never dreamed that under their own ANC, that the health services they dreamed about would be so dysfunctional.

The past two years have been harrowing for most South Africans, who have experienced loss on a scale and magnitude that is almost unfathomable. If not for NPOs, NGOs, FBOs and the private sector providing extra resources and expertise, we would not have come out of Covid-19 as we did.

Despite government telling us that they are pro-poor, it would seem that the opposite is in fact the case. The AG has again advised that there is no improvement in governance, procurement and project management, with huge irregular and unauthorized expenditure. As a result, the poorest of the poor bear the brunt of the abysmal management of our health systems.

In the last two years, the SIU has uncovered 45 matters to the value of R2.1 billion, which have been referred to the Special Tribunal. 224 officials face disciplinary action while 386 cases have been referred to the NPA. This was money stolen from a system that should have uplifted health for the poorest and most vulnerable. But the fish rots from the top.

Massive shortages of staff and critical skills, which do not even appear on government's most recent critical skills list, have resulted in shattered and exhausted nursing staff at most facilities.

Outdated staff structures, surgical backlogs, questionable disposal of medical waste, mismanagement at every level and non-payment of suppliers have led to a constant decline in health service delivery – with the poor and vulnerable feeling the effect and paying the highest cost.

South Africa currently has a vacancy rate of 18.6% for specialist medical personnel and 13.7% for nurses. Yet, community service doctors and nurses are waiting to be placed. How can we possibly deliver quality healthcare when there is such a shortage of staff, and those that are lucky enough to have a job are exhausted and overworked. Were it not for the dedication of South Africa's health care workers overcoming tremendous odds, many more thousands would have succumbed during the pandemic. The DA thanks you for your compassion, courage and hard work.

Mental health issues are on the rise due to Covid-19, joblessness, starvation and hopelessness. There are, however, insufficient facilities to assist individuals with mental health problems.

Facilities are crumbling but R18.5 million has been wasted due to mismanagement of projects. New builds are plagued with poor quality building standards and a myriad of deficiencies. These must now be rectified on the taxpayers' bill, and at the cost of the poor and vulnerable.

The office of the OHSC is so understaffed; they cannot even inspect, evaluate or report on the state of hospitals. Alas, the poor and vulnerable pay the brunt.

The health system is in a crisis and on its knees. Act now, or pay the price.