

Fraud, corruption and maladministration symptoms of inept Health Department

By **Michele Clarke MP** – DA Shadow Minister of Health

Many South African's are asking themselves if their government is a lost cause. When we analyze the Health Department budget, and the state of health care in South Africa under the ANC, we can see why South Africans feel that way.

Fraud, corruption and maladministration has become the order of the day under ANC governance, and the Health Department is a clear demonstration of how fraud, corruption and maladministration has destroyed public services for the poor.

The health needs of the South African people exceed the capacity of the health department and after 28 years, it is clear that this government doesn't have the ability to fix it, despite massive spending. What they have delivered is one of the highest inequality rates in the world – this too has a massive strain on the health system.

The lack of adherence to procurement processes has been the biggest contributing factor to Covid-corruption. South Africans saw repeated instances of grand theft of public funds by those entrusted to serve the citizens of South Africa. These looters knew no boundaries and continued to loot Covid-19 pandemic emergency funding, without any remorse for those dying of this deadly virus, or the millions who had lost their livelihoods due to the lockdown. After what we saw with Covid-corruption, can we honestly say that we have a caring government, or a government that cares about the poorest of the poor?

The SIU had investigated 5 467 contracts awarded to 3 066 service providers with a total value of R14.3 billion. Investigations into 4 549 contracts that had been finalized of which 2 803 were found to be irregular. This means that 61.2% of all procurement was irregular.

Within program 2, an amount of R8.8 billion has been allocated to the NHI. Considering the massive irregularities in procurement and high risk of mismanagement of funds, the R8.8 billion rand of taxpayers' money being allocated to this programme will be at the risk to fraud and corruption, as this programme has historically underspent and is prime for looting.

The NHI should be scrapped in its entirety. The funding should be used towards solving the chronic problems in the sector such as infrastructure and skills development, as well as ensuring that hospitals are capacitated to supply quality universal health care to all citizens within South Africa that depend on State health care.

Considering the shortage of funds, we are already experiencing severe impacts on health infrastructure, filling of vacancies, offering of high-end care, waiting times at clinics and surgeries, availability of medication and the affordability of the NHI.

Since the initial costing of the NHI Bill, we have experienced a pandemic, economic decline and millions of job losses. South Africa's tax base has shrunk. A shrinking tax base highlights the increasing concern regarding the NHI's unaffordability now more than ever.

Government needs to strengthen its health workforce. This has become critical. The budget for nursing services program has only increased by 1.3% in real terms.

Considering that the vacancy rate for nurses is 21 453 and the vacancy rate for specialist medical personnel is sitting at 602, it is clear that the budget for the development of required nursing and specialized skills is not enough.

The current ratio for doctor to patient is 0.31 per 1 000 per inhabitants – down from 0.79 per 1 000 in 2019. It is clear that South Africa has a dangerously low number of medical health practitioners and with the implementation of the NHI as well as the mass emigration we are experiencing it will only get much worse.

Despite these shortages, nurses have been left out of the critical skills list.

All these horrific shortages of medical staff have a huge impact on the kind of health care the Department provides. On a daily basis, I get calls from desperate poor South Africans seeking help because family members in State health care facilities are not being taken care of.

On Saturday I had a call from a community member asking me to assist her – her mother was admitted to Tembisa hospital in early March with liver failure. Her condition was regressing, yet the family had no feedback from the doctors taking care of her. As I was getting in touch with the CEO of the hospital, I received a call from Entle to inform me her mother had passed away.

It is heart wrenching that families are not informed of their loved ones, because State hospitals simply do not have the nursing staff, doctors and infrastructure to provide decent health care due to budget cuts.

Government must significantly ramp up the development of nursing and medical health professional skills in South Africa.

NHI will ultimately fail to provide equal access to quality health services under these conditions. It will become another failed SOE.

The Health Department's attempt to repurpose Universal Health Care into the NHI will become yet another cadre enrichment machine as we have seen within Eskom, Denel and SAA. Be warned ANC, the trust within government is declining. We have seen this with the mass objections against the proposed health regulations from South African citizens.

The country is at the beck and call of crooks and denouncing corruption, Mr. President, will not work if these crooks do not find themselves in orange overalls. South Africans are not fools and there is a growing impatience in our country. Be warned ANC, your days are numbered within government.

I thank you.