

# The NHI will destroy health care in South Africa

*Speech by Michele Clarke MP, DA Shadow Minister of Health*

The ANC keeps touting the NHI as being in the best interest of South African citizens. That it is a Bill born out of care that will save the public health system.

So let's take an honest look at what the implementation of the NHI Bill will mean for the ordinary South Africans.

At the moment about 9 million people have medical aids. Once the NHI is implemented, these 9 million people will have to be accommodated at an already overburdened public health system.

Instead of going directly to their privately paid doctors or hospitals, they will now be competing for treatment in the public health system with its severe staff and resource constraints. The last indicators of the national surgery backlog were more than 168 000.

The ANC might argue that through the NHI Fund, private health facilities will be servicing a larger portion of the public previously unable to access their services. However, this is based on the ludicrous assumption that those 9 million South Africans would continue to pay their medical aids when it no longer benefits them. Without private patients funding them, private health facilities would be dependent on government for its funds, effectively making them public health facilities, without the benefit of dedicated budget. As government has done no feasibility studies, we don't know how many facilities would survive government-imposed fee-structures. These potential closures would further decimate the health sector.

And talking of a decimated sector – staff shortages are a massive problem and have been for years. Not only are public health personnel expected to work in horrendous and unsafe conditions and facilities where the provision of quality health care is nearly impossible, they are victimized when they speak out to address their concerns. There will surely be a mass exodus of medical professionals if the NHI is enforced.

How has government addressed these shortages? Not by accrediting the private health sector to train their full capacity of nurses.

Has government upgraded health facilities and ensured that hospitals and clinics are safe, have working equipment, enough beds, medicine and food? The DA and committee's oversights, AG reports, patient feedback or whistleblowers attest that many of the country's hospitals and clinics border on the inhumane.

To this day, we don't know which services will be covered by the NHI. Will the Department pay for hip replacements, dental care, appendix removals, dialysis, chemotherapy, TB and HIV treatments, or mental health care? We don't know because you have refused to inform us. Possibly because you do not know.

But possibly the biggest reason why the NHI will inevitably destroy all health care in South Africa: the ANC cannot be trusted. Corruption has become more natural than breathing to you. During a world-wide pandemic that saw more than 102 000 South Africans die and had millions confined to their houses in fear, the ANC government facilitated the looting of R2.1 billion that was meant to treat Coronavirus and intervene in a variety of ways. Not something a government that cares for the poor and vulnerable would have done.

The DA has always believed in partnering with the private sector for a whole-of-society approach in addressing the issues plaguing society, instead of scapegoating them for governance failures. Despite the ANC's best attempts to create the impression that the private health sector is to blame for the public sector's deficiencies, it is government's mismanagement, cadre deployment and corruption that has caused and now perpetuates the destruction.

The key is to ensure that patrons of the public and private health sectors both receive quality health care. After all, the expansion of private health sector is a consequence of the failing public health sector, not the cause. As such, conditions must be created that will encourage private investment in the public health sector. Your determination to alienate or absorb the private health system will end in tears.

Corruption must be rooted out and provinces need to have greater accountability where health outcomes are poor.

Don't sell a dream to people. When you misdiagnose the problem, you will not find the correct cure. The cure is proper financial management and zero tolerance to corruption.

But that cannot be done until people like the former Health Minister are held accountable.

The NHI is not the miracle the ANC purports is to be. It is smoke and mirrors meant to make voters believe that the grotesque looters standing in front of them have returned to their revolutionary roots that once liberated a nation. They have not. They never will.