

Editor's note

Health care, in all its aspects, is a global issue of intense ongoing debate. This is perhaps even more so in South Africa, in anticipation of change in the health arena brought about by the introduction of the long-debated and anticipated National Health Insurance (NHI). Early last month, the Green Paper entitled *National Health Insurance in South Africa Policy*¹ was released. The Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, said about this event in a media statement:² “[The] first steps towards establishing national health insurance are truly historic: we are building a health system that will offer decent health care for *all* our people.” The overall aim of the NHI is “universal coverage”, to “ensure the provision of essential health care to *all* citizens of South Africa (and legal long-term residents), regardless of their employment status and ability to make a direct monetary contribution to the NHI Fund.” Importantly, the Minister identified two critical success factors for the NHI, namely that improvement of quality of service in public hospitals must be non-negotiable, and that the pricing of health care in the private sector must be tackled equally seriously.

In outlining the way forward, the Minister summarised the activities during the first five years of the NHI implementation, which will focus on:

- Management of health facilities and health districts
- Quality improvement
- Infrastructure development
- Medical devices, including equipment
- Human resources planning, development and management
- Information management and systems support
- Establishment of an NHI Fund.

The Green Paper is open to the public for debate and input, before it is finalised in December 2011. One hopes that South Africans will rise to the challenge and contribute meaningfully and constructively in making health care affordable and accessible to all.

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References

1. National Health Insurance in South Africa Policy Paper. <http://www.health.org.za/documents/2bcce61d2d1b8d972af41ab0e2c8a4ab.pdf>.
2. Media statement by Minister of Health. <http://www.doh.gov.za/show.php?id=2895>.