

SAMA MEDIA STATEMENT



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Pretoria, 14 May 2024

The South African Medical Association (SAMA) stands firmly in its commitment to championing the health and wellbeing of South Africa. We remain resolute in our endeavours to advocate for and actively participate in the realisation of Universal Health Coverage in the republic. We, however, wish to express our profound concern and opposition to President Cyril Ramaphosa's decision to sign into law the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill on Wednesday, 15 May 2024, as reported in various social media platforms. As an organisation, it is our duty to advocate for equitable access to affordable essential healthcare services, as a basic human right and as a means to ensure the highest achievable quality health outcomes for a nation. We are and will always be devoted to this duty. In our various engagements we have stated our position that we cannot support the NHI Bill in its current form as a viable solution to address the complex health challenges facing our nation.

The NHI Bill, as it stands, fails to adequately address the critical socio-economic imbalances and inequities of the past that continue to plague our health system and limit access for the majority of the population. While the intention behind the bill is to transform South Africa's healthcare system and ensure universal coverage for health services is commendable, the implementation strategy outlined lacks the necessary depth and practicality required to achieve meaningful and sustainable change. South Africa's healthcare system is not ready for the NHI as it is currently articulated in the bill. The funding mechanism is flawed in its heavy reliance on general tax revenue, payroll tax, and surcharges on personal income, and in particular, the potential financial hardships for poor and middle-class citizens due to the country's economic challenges. The immediate solution of the diversion of provincial health budgets and the reallocation of funds from occupational injuries and diseases and road accident funds to the NHI are difficult to implement and likely to result in benefit reductions to those who require it. There are further systems and structural challenges such as ethical governance and leadership, poor human resource allocation resulting in understaffing, limited funding for vacancies and other resources, and poor infrastructure in public healthcare facilities in general.

We hoped and remained optimistic that the President was going to refer the bill back to Parliament for further stakeholder engagement, to assist with insights and expertise with the aim to resolve the challenges the bill will pose and to bring all parties and the country closer to realising universal healthcare in our lifetime. These calls for a better healthcare system have been ignored. SAMA, therefore, in our effort to ensure the realisation of access to health for the underprivileged and better affordability of healthcare services for those that are already paying for their own healthcare, will fight for the protection of our healthcare services in relevant courts. Our legal team is preparing to launch this challenge. We view this as an act of service by SAMA members to improve access to healthcare services and to preserve the wellbeing and lives of every person in South Africa.

As representatives of the medical profession in South Africa, SAMA remains committed to engaging constructively with government stakeholders to develop a comprehensive and effective healthcare

policy that prioritises the needs of patients and healthcare providers alike. We call upon President Ramaphosa and the relevant authorities to reconsider the NHI Bill in consultation with healthcare professionals and experts to ensure that it aligns with the principles of universality, equity, and sustainability. SAMA stands ready to collaborate with all stakeholders to achieve our shared goal of a healthier and more equitable South Africa.

(ENDS)

Notes to Editors

About SAMA: The South African Medical Association (“SAMA”) was established in 1927 and became known as it is today through the unification of a variety of doctors’ groups on 21 May 1998 that had represented a diversity of interests. SAMA is a non-statutory, professional association for public and private sector medical practitioners. SAMA is registered a non-profit company in terms of the Companies Act. SAMA is a voluntary membership association, existing to serve the best interests and needs of its members in all healthcare-related matters.

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