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All systems go for NHI pilot in KwaZulu-Natal

Today, the MEC for Health in KwaZulu-Natal Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo and the Head of the Department Dr Sibongile Zungu reported to the Health Portfolio Committee that ground work has already been done to ensure that the pilot phase of the National Health Insurance runs smoothly.

Dr Zungu reported; "We have already identified a team of managers who will champion the NHI in the Province. They will be tasked with ensuring that the public is brought on board and there is clear communication on how the NHI will work so that people are able to participate having the correct and necessary information."

Dr Zungu added that the department took a decision to add another District because of its peculiarity. "When one enters Newcastle one is assured that it is a town like many others whereas there are vulnerable communities – those in the farms and mines – and the fact that this District has been successful in sustaining a low maternal death rate. This convinced us that we would be able to learn something from the District."

The Department has established an NHI Project Management Office that will report to the MEC and the HoD on a fortnightly basis. The main focus of the pilot phase is the strengthening of healthcare delivery and performance of various institutions. The pilot phase will mainly focus on Primary Healthcare Re-engineering, including the appointment of District Specialists teams, establishment of family health and school health teams.

The NHI Project Management Office will be responsible for the management of the pilot phase, management of the NHI grant, coordinate the functioning of the department as a whole, and establish a Public Relations Office and a research desk as well as performing the monitoring of the pilot phase.

MEC Dhlomo further told the committee that during this phase the department will "work with and learn from the private sector especially in areas around patient information systems, the establishment of the KZN Information Nerve center and the management of the billing system."

MEC Dhlomo said; "Contrary to common belief, we will be engaging the private sector vigorously as we implement the NHI. We would, for an example explore innovative models for service provider billing and payment of general Practitioners, pharmaceutical companies, etc."

An allocation of about R33 million has been given to the Province for the pilot phase. A Provincial Human resource Strategy is being developed in line with the National Department's one.

MEC Dhlomo concluded by saying; "The impact of NHI is dependent on individuals and communities taking responsibility for their own health and we have started with a healthy lifestyle programme that we wish to roll out in all communities."

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