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Dear Colleagues,

THE NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE (NHI) BILL TO BE SIGNED INTO AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT - WHAT NOW?

I hope this message finds you well. I want to address recent developments concerning the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill, which is poised to be signed today, May 15, 2024, by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Phased-in approach and Financial constraints.

During the State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Ramaphosa announced that the NHI Bill will be implemented in stages. This phased approach suggests that the full realization of the NHI will take considerable time. Today, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana mentioned plans to discuss the NHI's implementation and financing with Health Minister DR Joe Phaahla. He highlighted that the Finance Department has budgeted for certain aspects of the NHI's initial phase, underscoring the financial constraints and gradual nature of this process.

A senior Treasury official recently informed the Board of Healthcare Funders (BHF) conference that the government's NHI plans would likely take many years due to limited funding options and economic challenges. The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement presented by the ex-Finance Minister Tito Mboweni emphasized the difficulties posed by shrinking economic growth and a widening budget deficit in financing the NHI, noting that the NHI was currently unaffordable for the country.

Medical schemes and private healthcare will continue to operate mainly unchanged.

Given these factors, it is my calculated opinion that the full implementation of the NHI is still far off. For the foreseeable future, medical schemes and private healthcare will continue to operate as usual. Section 33 of the NHI Bill specifies that only once the NHI is fully implemented will medical schemes be limited to providing complementary coverage. Since the timeline for full implementation remains undefined, our view is that medical schemes will remain a vital part of the healthcare system for many years. The passing of the Bill does not immediately alter the landscape for medical schemes. Full implementation is a distant prospect, likely spanning years, if not decades. During this period, the private healthcare sector, including dental practices, will almost continue to function without disruption. Until the NHI is fully implemented, medical schemes will maintain their significant role within the healthcare system.

Extensive restructuring of the public health sector is required for NHI implementation.

Implementing the NHI entails a monumental task, requiring extensive restructuring of the public health sector at both national and provincial levels. We know that the NHI pilots have

failed dismally to improve public sector services and infrastructure. This complex endeavour demands meticulous planning and preparation. Funding remains a formidable obstacle. With no concrete funding strategy in place and considering the nation's economic challenges, achieving a comprehensive NHI in its current form appears unlikely in the foreseeable future. Additionally, inherent flaws in the Bill and procedural shortcomings are likely to provoke legal challenges, potentially prolonging the implementation timeline.

Let's not panic.

While the President's signing of the NHI Bill may raise concerns, it is important to stay informed and focused. SADA is committed to advocating for a viable and effective NHI that benefits all South Africans. We will continue to engage with stakeholders and keep you updated on any developments. We understand the concerns and disappointment expressed by our peers, as highlighted in recent statements. At SADA, we acknowledge the technical and constitutional challenges inherent in the current iteration of the NHI Bill and the legislative processes surrounding its adoption.

Exploring Legal challenge

SADA stands firm in advocating for an NHI that is not only constitutional but also practical and beneficial for all South Africans. While we support the pursuit of universal health coverage through a functional NHI, we must recognize the existing flaws within the bill.

Opinions on this matter vary. Some believe we cannot challenge a law that has not yet been signed and implemented, while others suggest we can interdict the intention to implement it. We will carefully consider and choose the appropriate course of action at the right time. SADA will be guided by the collective efforts of the South African Health Practitioners Collaboration (SAHPC), where we are a founding member, and our CEO serves as an executive and spokesperson. In exploring a potential legal challenge, we believe the collective wisdom and unified voice of this group will be crucial to our success.

Final word

In conclusion, SADA reassures its members that we remain steadfast in our commitment to navigate the complexities surrounding the NHI. By upholding the principles of transparency and collaboration, we endeavour to safeguard the interests of dental healthcare providers and the patients we serve. I will be discussing these points and new developments as I attend branch events, which I have already started.

Warm regards,

KC Makhubele
SADA Chief Executive Officer

16 May	WEBINAR – Oral Cancer in children and what it means to the Dentist (WEB189)
25 May	SADA Western Cape Branch Country Meeting, Ashanti Paarl – 25 May 2024 (WC060)
31 May	SADA KwaZulu-Natal Branch Winter Congress - 31 May 2024 (KZN063)
05 Jun	SADA Algoa Midlands CPD Evening - 5 June 2024 (AM030)

06 Jun	SADA Free State Branch CPD Evening - 6 June 2024 (FS033)
14 Jun	SADA MPUMALANGA BRANCH – Skukuza CPD Weekend - 14 & 15 June 2024 (MP019)
30 Aug	2024 SADA Dental & Oral Health Congress and Exhibition



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