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National Department of Health Presents its Annual Report 2017/18

Cape Town, 17 October 2018. Today, the National Department of Health presented its Annual Report to the Health Portfolio Committee. The Report highlights key achievements made in the 2017/18 financial year towards attainment of the National Development Plan 2030 target, namely to deliver cost effective services to all South Africans.

The Report is the 11th unqualified audit outcome – the annual financial statements consecutively since 2011/12 to 2017/18 financial years. The Department also improved on reporting related to predetermined objectives which refer targets undertaken in the Annual Performance Plans linked to its allocated annual budgets.

Independent estimates from Statistics South Africa, Medical Research Council and others show the average life expectancy at birth having been improving over the years. The NDP set out 2030 targets which include a life expectancy rate of at least 70 years for men and women. The overall life expectancy rate has improved from 55.8 years in 2002 to 64 years in mid 2018 population estimates of Statistics South Africa. Life expectancy rates for women increased from 57.7 to 67.3 years between 2002 and 2018. In the same period, life expectancy rate for men also improved from 53.8 year to 61.1 years.

Government has developed and adopted pro-poor health policies which ensure free health care at the Primary Health Care facilities and hospitals for the poor. This meant that all financial barriers to utilise health care services were removed. This started with pregnant women, mothers and children and later expanded to cover all indigent patients.

We embarked on the Comprehensive HIV and AIDS Operational plan implementation in 2010 government expenditure on antiretroviral drugs tripled as we rapidly scaled up the ART programme in line with WHO Guidelines. Today, South Africa has the largest ART programme in the world with more people living longer on ART with about 4,7 million people living with HIV being on antiretrovirals. The prevention of Mother-Child-Transmission of HIV has improved significantly, with close to 95% of pregnant women enrolled on ART who visit public health facilities. A Medical Research Council study stated that PMTCTY programme has saved approximately 80 000 to 85 000 babies per year since 2010 from early infections.

There are numerous examples in the Annual Report of the successful implementation of health systems strengthening innovations. Most of which were tested and implemented in the 11 NHI pilot districts. These innovations include momConnect programme which has registered closed to 2 million pregnant women and mothers since it started in 2014, the Central Chronic Medicines Dispensing and Distribution which has more than 2 million clients/patients who collect their chronic medications from medicines pick-up points close to their placed of residence or convenience, the Health Patient Registration System has registered more than 6.3 million patients at the end of 2017/18 financial years. Challenges in the service platforms have turned out to be hard to crack. The challenges of quality of health services are being approached from various angles. The ideal clinic realisation and maintenance is one of those approaches in use. The quality of health facilities infrastructure and equipment are also being address.

The Department of Health is working with the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development to address litigation and medical negligence. Key strategies include law reform, and development of legislation to address medico-legal claims as it previously did not exist. The State Liability amendment Bill is being proposed to amend State Liability Act of 1957 to provide for structured settlements of claims versus the lump sum payment that are currently draining service delivery budget. NDoH is in a process of appointing service providers to provide expert and strategic support to the provinces in handling the medico-legal cases. The initial Terms of Reference advertised in early 2018 were revised to be inclusive of multi-skills (legal, clinical, investigative and analytical). The Tender closed on 15 October 2018 and is expected to be concluded and awarded in November 2018. This medico-legal team is expected to assist the department and provinces to (a) develop a secure case management system; (b) support the reporting of criminal matters to the respective law enforcement agencies; (c) maintain an up-to-date case management system, and using this for trend analysis; (d) support the respective Legal units with investigation of cases and negotiation of reasonable settlement agreements (where necessary); (e) provide expert opinions including attending court cases and testify as expert witnesses in cases referred through the courts; (f) assisting with compiling and putting together acceptable and reliable evidence; (g) comprehensive Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy (incorporating Fraud Risk Prevention Plan) relating to Medico-Legal Litigation; and (h) eradicating the current backlog of cases.

The ultimate improvement in the health status of South Africa is expected to improve exponentially with the gradual phasing in of the National Health Insurance. We ended 2017/18 financial year with the completion and Cabinet submission of the draft National Health Insurance Bill and Medical Schemes Amendment Bill.

The full report is available on the Department's website: www.health.gov.za.

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