



SOUTH AFRICA'S COUNTRY STATEMENT

THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC)

DATE: 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

Your Excellencies,

Mr. President, South Africa appreciates the opportunity that this high level meeting has provided to allow us to take stock of the progress that we made at this mid-point towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

We note that even before the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, many of our countries were already experiencing challenges in achieving our UHC targets.

South Africa was not spared the negative effects of the pandemic on our health system that included general access to PHC-level services including access to contraceptives, immunisation, and testing for TB and HIV.

A major challenge to South Africa has been the perpetuation of a fragmented, inequitable two tiered health system, one being an expensive private health system for those with income, and a public health system for the low-income and unemployed people.

South Africa has made good progress in transforming the public health sector into an integrated, national health system with the primary health care (PHC) approach being the underlying philosophy and the foundation for the implementation of the District Health System and preparing for UHC.

Mr President, South Africa has prioritized primary healthcare and a shift from curative care to preventive care. Through reengineering of primary health care, the deployment of community health workers, school health services and the district clinical specialist model, we have re-ignited the principle of the Alma Ata and Astana Declarations of health promotion, disease prevention and addressing key drivers of maternal and infant mortality.

South Africa has also made steady progress in improving health indicators such as increasing life expectancy and reducing maternal and infant mortality. Life expectancy increased by 9.5 years from 55.8 years in 2000 to 65.3 years in 2019. Progress has been made with regards to the maternal mortality ratio from 232 deaths per 100 000 live births in 2004 to 109 in 2020. The infant mortality rate has improved from 79.2 in 2005 to 32.9 in 2021.

South Africa has invested in increasing the training of the health work force through various platforms including the building of two

medical schools, and deploying innovative retention strategies for healthcare professionals, and by ensuring that our health facilities maintain the availability of essential medicines. We have also made investments to improve our health infrastructure by built more than 1900 clinics and 56 hospitals having since the dawn of democracy.

Quality improvement efforts have focussed on promulgation of the Norms and Standards to address Patients Experience of care and Waiting Times. The establishment of the Office of Health Standards Compliance in 2013, the Health Ombuds in 2016 and quality learning centres provided a platform for regulation, oversight and operationalisation of quality improvement in the health system.

Your Excellencies, we are also improving health information systems and data collection for evidence-based decision-making and monitoring progress towards UHC.

Our major health reform is the introduction of the National Health Insurance System. The NHI Bill has already been approved by the National Assembly of Parliament and is awaiting approval by the second house of Parliament. This NHI will provide an enabling framework for the introduction of an integrated national health system.

As I conclude Mr President, the achievement of UHC is an imperative for the realisation of SDGs

Together, let us strive towards a future where no one is left behind in accessing the healthcare they need and deserve.

I thank you.

***DR JM PHAAHLA, MP
MINISTER OF HEALTH
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA***