

Poll favours state health insurance, if quality guaranteed

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Published: 2009/10/22

CAPE TOWN — South Africans are willing to pay for national health insurance (NHI), but only if they are guaranteed quality services, a new survey shows.

The study, commissioned by the Department of Health and published this month in the South African Medical Journal, offers important insights into public perceptions of NHI. A committee appointed by the African National Congress (ANC) after its Polokwane conference is drafting a policy for NHI, and Deputy Health Minister Molefi Sefularo has indicated the government intends to make laws to bring it into effect by April.

Funding details are sketchy, but a leaked document that has been widely circulated shows the ANC envisages a single health system to which all who can afford it contribute through payroll deductions and general taxes.

One of the study's most significant findings was that support for the principle of cross-subsidisation, in which the rich help pay for the poor, varied depending on financial circumstances, said study co-author Jane Goude, director of the Centre for Health Policy at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Although the majority of respondents (62%) supported a progressive financing system where the proportion of income paid for healthcare increases with wealth, there were significant variations across the socioeconomic spectrum: the richest preferred proportional contributions, while the poorest preferred progressive contributions.

The survey was based on interviews with 4800 households across SA. It found the public health service was often not as bad as people feared, suggesting the government had some work to do to improve impressions about its facilities.

"For an NHI to be feasible, the public has to feel confident about using public sector services," wrote the authors.

Less than half (45%) of respondents said patients at public hospitals were treated with respect and dignity, basing their opinions on media reports and the experience of friends and family. But of those respondents who had been admitted to a public hospital in the past year, more than half (57%) said they had been treated with respect and dignity.

<http://www.businessday.co.za/Articles/Content.aspx?id=84656#>

Based on: **MCINTYRE, D.**, GOUDGE, J., HARRIS, B., NXUMALO, N. & NKOSI, M. (2009) Prerequisites for National Health Insurance in South Africa: Results of a national household survey. *South African Medical Journal*, 99, 725-729.