

Namibia considers National Health Fund to redress inequity in health care

The Minister of Health and Social Services, Honorable Dr. Bernhard Haufiku, articulated the inequities in access to health care, perpetrated by the current health financing structure in the country, and called for reforms of the Public Service Employment Medical Scheme (PSEMAS).



Community members learning about UHC at the World Health Day celebration. WHO

“We will continue to advance inequality, if we continue to allocate close to N\$ 3 billion in public funds to less than 300,000 Namibians of which only 124,000 make meagre financial contributions through monthly premiums” Dr. Haufiku said.

The 300,000 constitutes a little over 12% of the total Namibian population while the majority are unable to pay for medical care due to their low socioeconomic status. This imbalance contradicts one of the core pillars of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) which promotes financial protection of the ‘poor, poverty stricken, the vulnerable, and the weak members of our community.’

The Minister proposes a pooling of financial resources and ‘cross subsidization and strengthening solidarity’ to ensure that no one is left out of care. PSEMAS must transform from being a scheme and become a health insurance or a medical fund. He further proposed differential premiums for its members based on income levels. Honorable Dr. Haufiku acknowledged the importance of strengthening the health care system for these proposals to become a realization.

In addition to transforming the Medical Scheme, the Minister proposed the establishment of a National Health Fund (NHF), referring to the Social Security Commission as having laid the foundation. “An independent, well managed by professionals, transparent and accountable Namibia Health Fund will go a long way in our quest for UHC in Namibia”, the Minister said.

The Health Fund will then manage PSEMAS as well as taxes collected from tobacco, alcohol, sugar, sweetened foods and beverages. “NHF will thus be the central funding agency in Namibia. One strong, robust, well-resourced National Medical Fund catering for everyone in Namibia, working or not working, insured or not insured, rich or poor, old or young.”

The Minister concluded his remarks by saying that, “without proper physical and other health infrastructures, proper medical equipment, adequate human resources for health and

sufficient funding of healthcare services, universal health coverage will remain a pipe dream. Universal health coverage will strengthen access to quality healthcare in Namibia and broaden its basis for the good of the population rather than only a few members of the society.”

The Minister was speaking at the commemoration of World Health Day in Havana Informal Settlements in Windhoek. The theme for the day was UHC: Everyone, Everywhere; with the slogan “Health for All”. To bring services closer to the community, the University of Namibia School of Nursing and the Society for Family Health set up mobile healthcare points for blood glucose and blood pressure screening as well as the provision of sexual reproductive health and HIV prevention services.