

SAMA MEDIA STATEMENT



SAMA WILL NOT BE SIGNING THE PRESIDENTIAL HEALTH SUMMIT PLEDGE

14 AUGUST 2024

The South African Medical Association (SAMA) reaffirms its unwavering commitment to advancing Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and strengthening the South African health system. As participants in the recent Presidential Health Summit and the formulation of the 2024-2029 Presidential Health Compact, we recognise the critical need to ensure equitable access to quality healthcare for all South Africans.

SAMA fully supports the overarching goals set forth in the Presidential Health Compact, which emphasises health system strengthening, the enhancement of health infrastructure, and the equitable distribution of healthcare resources. However, SAMA has serious concerns about the current National Health Insurance (NHI) model as the primary vehicle for achieving these goals. While we share the government's commitment to UHC, we believe that the NHI, in its current form, may not adequately address the complexities of our health system and could inadvertently lead to unintended consequences that compromise both the public and private healthcare sectors.

SAMA urges for a re-evaluation of the NHI framework, advocating for a more flexible, inclusive, and sustainable approach that considers the diverse needs of South Africa's population and healthcare providers. We recommend that references to NHI in the Presidential Health Compact be reconsidered to allow for alternative models of achieving UHC, which may include hybrid approaches or reforms that build on the strengths of both the public and private sectors.

We are particularly concerned that the current NHI model could strain healthcare resources, exacerbate existing inefficiencies, and limit patient choice. Instead, SAMA advocates for a health reform model that ensures access to quality care for all citizens without compromising the standards of care, financial sustainability, or the autonomy of healthcare providers. SAMA is advocating for UHC which is rooted in Primary Health Care (PHC). UHC means that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need when and where they need them, without financial hardship. This aligns with the World Health Organization's PHC which is the most inclusive, equitable, cost-effective and efficient approach to enhance people's physical and mental health, as well as social well-being.

SAMA is fully committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders—government, civil society, business, labour, health service users, academic and research institutions, public health entities, statutory health councils, traditional health practitioners, and allied health professionals—to develop a health system that truly meets the needs of all South Africans. We support the Compact's emphasis on strengthening human resources for health, enhancing governance and financial management, and ensuring equitable access to healthcare products and services.

In light of our concerns, SAMA calls for an open and inclusive dialogue on the best path forward to achieve UHC. We urge that future references to the NHI in the Presidential Health Compact be revised

to reflect a broader spectrum of potential solutions and that stakeholder engagement remains a cornerstone of this ongoing reform process.

(ENDS)

Notes to Editors

About SAMA: The South African Medical Association (“SAMA”) was established in 1927 and became known as it is today through the unification of a variety of doctors’ groups on 21 May 1998 that had represented a diversity of interests. SAMA is a non-statutory, professional association for public and private sector medical practitioners. SAMA is registered a non-profit company in terms of the Companies Act. SAMA is a voluntary membership association, existing to serve the best interests and needs of its members in all healthcare-related matters.

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