

ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF THE FREE STATE, HONOURABLE SISI NTOMBELA (MPL) ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF BUSAMED BRAM FISCHER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT HOSPITAL, BLOEMFONTEIN, 4 MAY 2018

Programme Director,

Mr. Butana Komphela, MEC for Health;

Mr. Kopung Ralikontsane, Director General of Free State Provincial Government;

Special Advisors to the Premier: Mr. Sakhiwo TS Belot; Professor Aubrey Mokadi and Mr. Maditse Seoke;

Dr. David Motau, HOD for Health;

Members of Executive Management of Government;

Dr. Diliza Mji – Executive Chairman of Busamed;

Busamed Board of Directors and Shareholders;

Mrs. Philisiwe Mthethwa – Chief Executive Officer at the National Empowerment Fund;

Badisa Matshego – ACSA Group Executive Infrastructure Asset Management ;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed an honor and privilege for me to form part of this important milestone – an opening of a hospital. This is an important contribution by the private sector to strengthen the efforts of our government of widen access to quality health care to all the people of our country.

On the occasion of the tabling of the Budget Vote of the Premier, I stated that “We are well aware that unlike before, the people of the province have quality health care, education, houses, clean water, sanitation, electricity and social grants. Still, we are not oblivious to the challenges that continue to relegate many of our people to the doldrums of poverty in its varied forms. The path we have to travel is still long. Therefore, it’s not over up until it’s over”.

I shared with the audience that it is Tata Nelson Mandela who said “Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes, it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom” said our beloved Tata Nelson Mandela.

Our strategic objective as the Free State Provincial Government is to ensure that the people of the Free State enjoy the benefit of a long and healthy life. We are ensuring that our Department of Health pursues all strategic possibilities of increasing the life expectancy of the people of the Free State. I was pleased to hear recently during the Budget Vote of the Department on 18 April 2018 in Kroonstad that the efforts of the Department are steadily bearing fruit as our life expectancy at birth has increased from 53.3 years in 2011 to 55.7 years for males in 2016 and over the same period, the female life expectancy at birth has increased from 58.2 years to 61.8 years. I will be pushing the Department a little harder to rapidly improve these statistics. We need to have a productive population that lives longer.

I know that the Department contributes a larger chunk of the resources to the promotion of Primary Health Care Services. These are basket of services that ensures that we promote prevention of diseases. Through this strategic approach we ensure that we provide prudent health care for pregnant mothers to healthy babies to energetic teenagers, to healthy citizens and dignified elderly. This is an simplified ideal that we are striving for. Hospitalisation should not be a point of first contact but it must be a point of absolute necessity when all else has failed. That is why we are promoting Primary Health Care and Healthy Living amongst our people.

We are acutely aware of the things that shorten the lives of our people. We call them the Five Burdens of Health Care, namely:

- HIV, AIDS and TB
- Maternal and Neo-Natal Deaths
- Non-Communicable Diseases or Lifestyle illnesses such as Hypertension, Diabetes
- Violence, Trauma and Injury
- Mental Health Care

These five burdens of health care account for the majority of the causes of death in our country and they work against our objective of building sustainable communities and a prosperous nation. A nation that is plagued by illnesses is a dying nation and cannot stand to be counted in the community of nations.

It is important therefore to understand why the government is investing more of its resources in building of clinics, expanding the health care infrastructure to more 24 hour clinics and widening the scope of

prevention programmes that will see our communities embracing healthy lifestyles.

It is our responsibility to see to it that every member of our society has access to decent health care services. As I have mentioned, our aim is to prevent illness. However, if illness catches up with you or the need for hospitalisation arises, you should be afforded the best quality health care possible, irrespective of where you stay or your economic situation.

The current situation of inequality is not pleasant to anyone of us. We have seen people dying unattended simply because they do not have a medical aid. We have seen people being milked dry of their medical aid only to be dumped to overcrowded public health facilities when they are no longer able to afford private health care. Our quest for equality in our country has prompted us to systematically craft a Universal Health Coverage for all people in the form of the National Health Insurance. We are pleased that the President of the Republic gave the National Health Insurance some impetus when he was delivering the State of the Nation Address 2018. We want to see this being implemented in order to restore the dignity of all our people and to build a South Africa where every is and feels equal in every sense of the word.

The National Health Insurance (NHI) is a financing system that will make sure that all citizens of South Africa (and legal long-term residents) are provided with essential healthcare, regardless of their employment status and ability to make a direct monetary contribution to the NHI Fund.

We need the National Health Insurance because Healthcare is a human right – this is a widely accepted international principle. This right should not depend on how rich we are or where we happen to live. The right to obtain healthcare is written into our Constitution.

But large numbers of our people continue to die prematurely and to suffer unnecessarily from poor health. Treatable conditions are not being treated on time and preventable diseases are not being prevented.

This is in spite of the fact that government has tried its utmost since 1994 to ensure that everyone in this country has equitable access to necessary healthcare services. There are still serious challenges mainly caused by imbalances in healthcare financing system. Without NHI, the burden of disease in the country will not be reduced because the majority of the population – and the section suffering the greatest ill health – will not access good quality healthcare.

It pleases us to know that NHI will offer all South Africans and legal residents access to a defined package of comprehensive health services. The state is committed to offering as wide a range of services as possible.

It is a wonder to us as to why other people are opposed to NHI when the first world capitalist countries such as the United Kingdom as well as the United States are affording their citizens good quality health care services within a complex of public and private health care providers. I ask of this audience to join the voice of government is calling for a speedy implementation of the NHI. There will be no losers but the

playing fields will be levelled for all to play their part in effecting transformation habits that restore the dignity of our people.

We are a developmental state that champions the needs of all its citizens. It is our cardinal duty to see to it that everyone receives what is due to them under conditions of care and dignity.

The Free State is steadily becoming a force to be reckoned with, in the country. It pleases me to be a Premier of a champion province from whom many must come and learn. I have been informed that the good regulatory work that is put in place by the Provincial Department of Health to regulate Private Hospitals has attracted the other provinces who are now willing to come and learn from us.

The Free State Hospital Act, 1966 provides a framework on regulation and licensing of private facilities. The Regulations that we have were also benchmarked with provinces such as the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and Gauteng province.

The Free State Provincial Regulation is in place, gazetted and fully implemented as the Free State Private Health Establishment, 2014. No 78 of 2014 with amendments in 2017 as recommended by the outcome of the High Court.

Today as an outcome of all the analytical work and application of our regulations we are here to experience the opening of Busamed Bram Fischer International Airport Hospital.

This hospital is being opened at a time when our momentum towards NHI is gathering speed. One of the fundamental principles of Universal coverage is collaborations between Public and the Private sector to achieve access for all citizens including the poor. We currently have 14 private facilities in the Mangaung Metro Area with 1295 beds including Busamed.

As the province we need to ensure that quality services are maintained in both public and private sector. To this end with the anticipated NHI roll out, we have Ideal clinic program, the Office of Health standards and Compliance.

We will continue to monitor the private facilities to ensure that they do their work of providing good quality health care with due regard to the following:

- proper ethical practices,
- access for all people deserving to be provided with services
- and adherence to good quality health care standards.

We are at the moment one of the provinces that are getting health information and data from the private facilities onto our District Health Information Systems.

We thank you Busamed for this platform to share this joy of opening this state of the art facility in the critical N8 route between Bloemfontein and the populous Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu. I'm certain that this facility will not be complacent but will have its ear on the ground and be responsive to the health care needs of our people in its immediate surroundings.

As government we will explore various forms of collaborations such as shared services models or PPP through our Treasury regulations to realize efficiencies and better outcomes for our people.

I thank you.