

South African Health Review

2019



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Foreword

This 22nd edition of the *South African Health Review (SAHR)* is offered in memory of Health Systems Trust board member, and health activist extraordinaire, Professor David Sanders.

The purpose of the *SAHR* has always been to analyse and assess progress and challenges in key areas of the health system, and to propose recommendations for improvement. We are pleased to continue this tradition in the 2019 edition, which features important information and commentary on the key issues, developments and challenges in our health system. These key issues, which are currently being debated, will impact the future of health care in South Africa significantly. We are also cognisant of the fact that South Africa's ambitious programme to implement National Health Insurance as a vehicle to enable transformation of the health system towards delivery of universal access to quality health services, has attracted significant attention in the global health community.

Additionally, this year's *Review* features the work of the first recipient of our Healthcare Workers' Writing Programme, which offers writing skills training and ongoing coaching throughout the publication process for identified first-time authors. In keeping with our commitment to strengthen public health capacity and expertise within the health arena, the programme will be extended over time to support more aspirant first-time writers for the *SAHR*, thereby growing the diversity of contributors to this important journal in the South African public health arena.

On behalf of the Board of the Health Systems Trust, I would like to thank the authors, reviewers, Editorial Advisory Committee members, editorial team and administrative personnel who have worked tirelessly to produce this *Review*. Collectively, your commitment and expertise have produced another excellent edition of the *SAHR*, and we thank you for your contribution.

Flavia Senkubuge
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees,
Health Systems Trust

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Flavia Senkubuge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Contributing authors

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Editorial

The 2019 *South African Health Review* presents a unique collection of perspectives on the key challenges in implementing universal health coverage (UHC) in South Africa, as analysed by experts in various fields. Each of the 20 chapters deals with aspects of the UHC journey, dedicated towards an equitable and inclusive national health system that leaves no-one behind. While some authors describe the fundamental changes and practical considerations required to reconfigure the country's health system, others have reflected on specific programmatic areas and have made recommendations from a National Health Insurance (NHI)/UHC lens.

In addition, we are pleased to announce that this year's edition includes two innovations. First is the provision of concise summaries of the chapters in the form of 'chapters at a glance'. These are positioned together at the start of the publication for ease of reference and to give a quick overview; their inclusion has also meant that the editorial has become more streamlined. The second innovation is the introduction of our Healthcare Workers' Writing Programme (HCWWP), which provides support to first-time authors wanting to publish in the *Review*.

Universal Health Coverage

The first five chapters are arranged to inform, stimulate debate and foster consensus, building on the challenges and opportunities brought about by the implementation of UHC.

In chapter one, Andy Gray and Yousuf Vawda deliver a detailed description of the policy and legislative framework enabling current health reforms in the country. This is followed by Diane McIntyre's chapter in which she calls for broadening of the national discourse on UHC and proposes that the term UHC should be replaced with the more inclusive and less misleading term 'universal health system'. Mark Blecher and his co-authors consider some of the challenges and potential solutions to NHI from a financing perspective in chapter three.

In chapter four on establishing a NHI service benefits framework, Jeanne-Marie Tucker and colleagues describe the process currently being led by the National Department of Health (NDoH) to develop an explicit list of conditions and services that will be purchased by the NHI Fund from public and private providers across the country.

Although not arranged consecutively, the *Review* includes three predominantly data-driven chapters on UHC, capturing the complexities and potential of measuring progress and identifying trends. In chapter five, Thulile Zondi and Candy Day report on progress made in the implementation of NHI towards UHC, and identify information gaps impeding accurate measurement. Building on chapter five, chapter 20 on health and related indicators by Candy Day et al. focuses on the calculation and measurement of a South African UHC service coverage index. Also using data from a wide array of sources, Nhlanhla Ndlovu and team provide an analysis of health, HIV and TB resource allocation by the South African Government and two donor organisations in chapter 19.

Quality, competition and transparency

Drawing on the South African Lancet National Commission Report, in chapter six Laetitia Rispel and colleagues summarise the progress made in the provision of quality health care over the last 25 years of democracy. In chapter seven, Lungiswa Nkonki and colleagues from the Competition Commission provide an overview of some of the key findings of the Health Market Inquiry and examine the implications of these findings for the second phase of NHI implementation.

Finally, the opacity of medical scheme benefits is the subject of chapter eight, with Phakamile Nkomo and colleagues describing the challenges encountered by consumers when choosing benefit options due to lack of transparency and absence of standardised information.

A life-course approach

The next cluster of chapters is arranged according to a life-course perspective, which underscores how the right interventions at key stages of life, from pre-conception through pregnancy, the newborn phase and early childhood, to adolescence, adulthood and ageing, can impact on health and well-being and affect one's life trajectory.

Lydia Cairncross and team report on a multi-pronged strategy to increase capacity for breast cancer care in chapter nine, while in chapter 10, Renay Weiner and colleagues describe the development of quality standards for the treatment of maternal hypertension. Understanding barriers to HIV testing and treatment in men is the subject of chapter 11, written by James Bell and colleagues.

The vulnerabilities and the short- and long-term morbidity and mortality of preterm birth infants are examined by Vundli Ramokolo and team in chapter 12. Chapter 13, written by Lesley Bamford and colleagues, highlights the importance of early childhood development, particularly in the first 1 000 days of a child's life. Providing universal health care to the burgeoning adolescent population is the subject of chapter 14, led by Kim Jonas, while an accompanying contribution from Anabel Gomez et al. (chapter 15) sheds light on barriers to HIV prevention in high-risk adolescent girls and young women.

In chapter 16, Geetesh Solanki and team reflect on how best to cater for the health needs of a rapidly ageing population in South Africa, beginning with the provision of comprehensive and multi-disciplinary interventions at primary care level.

Human resources for health

Adding to the body of information on human resources for health (HRH) recorded in the 2018 edition of the *SAHR*, chapter 17 penned by Zuki Tshabalala and team unpacks the contribution of clinical associates towards improving efficiency and effectiveness in the South African health system.

Still on the subject of HRH, Judith Mahlangu, the beneficiary of this year's HCWWP, and co-authors provide a rare glimpse into a community worker's experience of working with health science academics and students (chapter 18).

Conclusion

As 2019 draws to a close, South Africa stands at the threshold of a profound health system transformation. Twenty-five years post democracy, the NHI Bill submitted to parliament in August this year charts the way towards realisation of universal access to quality health care for all of South Africa's people. This edition of the *SAHR* highlights and provides a timely analysis of key issues debated in various fora over the past year that must challenge policy makers, providers, funders and users of healthcare services if the vision of equitable and sustainable access to quality health services is to be realised, in a manner that eliminates current disparities in access, and that overcomes the inefficiencies and challenges of the current health system.

All in all, this edition provides a panoramic snapshot of progress over the past 25 years, with a description of the current state and the gaps that exist in health service, financial and other information, with the intention of informing the journey across a broad spectrum of service areas. It is our hope that this edition will inspire further frank debate, analysis, research and innovation to guide the country on its ambitious journey towards universal access to a quality health system and service.

Themba L. Moeti and Ashnie Padarath
Editors