

Body to drive talks on health insurance scheme 'finalised'

KARIMA BROWN

PUBLISHED: 2009/11/05 06:24:08 AI

AN ADVISORY body to drive consultation on the government's National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme has been finalised and is expected to be announced soon by Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi.

It is understood that the Human Sciences Research Council's Olive Shisana, Treatment Action Campaign's Mark Heywood and academic Di McIntyre are among those who will serve on the body.

The advisory body is expected to co-ordinate discussions on and the design of the NHI months after an early draft of the scheme was revealed but panned for not being well thought through.

Yesterday government sources dismissed media reports suggesting that the NHI was going to be delayed because of funding.

There had been concern that the architects of the NHI had not taken into account the full fiscal and technical implications of the scheme.

But senior ruling party figures were adamant the NHI was the only solution to creating sustainable healthcare especially in the face of skyrocketing private medical aid costs, which they said would deprive millions of affordable health facilities.

The white paper process that will outline the legislative framework for the proposed NHI is also expected to be released by the end of the month after the Cabinet had signed off the document. The NHI is the subject of heated debate within the African National Congress-led alliance with the ruling party's leftist allies pushing for the scheme to be implemented.

Quality health care is one of President [Jacob Zuma](#)'s five key priorities for his five-year term in office.

On Tuesday, ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe told journalists in Johannesburg that the NHI was on track. He was responding to questions about the apparent lack of resources for the scheme given that Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan's medium-term budget policy statement had made no mention of any fiscal plans for the NHI.

"We are in the phase of creating the legislation, so looking to the medium-term statement as an indication says nothing. There will be another budget statement in February and thereafter in October, so as far as we are concerned, we are on track," Mantashe said.