

MEDIA RELEASE Human Rights Day: PSA highlights growing concern over unaffordable healthcare for public servants

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As South Africa commemorates Human Rights Day, the Public Servants Association (PSA) emphasises that the protection of human rights must extend beyond historical reflection and translate into tangible socio-economic security for public servants.

The Day serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made during the Sharpeville Massacre, where citizens stood against injustice and inequality. The principles arising from history demand that government must continuously safeguard dignity, fairness, and equal access to essential services, including healthcare. Against this backdrop, the PSA is extremely concerned about continued contribution increases implemented by the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS). The latest increase, adjusted from 9.8% to 9.5%, follows a significant increase in the previous year and places additional financial pressure on public servants whose salary adjustments remain limited.

Access to affordable healthcare is directly linked to fundamental human rights, particularly the rights to dignity, equality, and access to healthcare services as enshrined in the *Constitution*. When medical-aid contributions rise at a rate that outpaces income growth, public servants are effectively forced into difficult financial trade-offs that undermine these rights. Human Rights Day, therefore, exposes a critical policy contradiction. Public servants are expected to uphold constitutional values and deliver essential services to communities, yet many are increasingly struggling to afford the healthcare system designed to protect them and their families. Rising medical-aid costs risk excluding lower-income employees from adequate healthcare cover, which is against the spirit and intent of Human Rights Day.

The PSA reiterates that the marginal reduction of the increase does not adequately address affordability concerns. Meaningful engagement, transparent cost management, and sustainable solutions are urgently required to ensure that GEMS fulfils its original mandate of accessible and affordable healthcare for government employees. Decisive actions are required to prevent the erosion of workers' socio-economic rights. The PSA will continue to engage stakeholders and advocate firmly for interventions that protect public servants from escalating healthcare costs and preserve their dignity and well-being.

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