

MEDIA RELEASE	Nurses' Day 2021: PSA calls for urgent measures to save nursing profession
DATE	11 May 2021
EMBARGO	None
ENQUIRIES	communication@psa.co.za

In South Africa, nurses constitute 56% of the country's healthcare workers and play a vital role in upholding the healthcare system. Yet, despite their fundamental role, nurses are expected to perform their duties under increasingly pressing circumstances. Severe staff shortages and poor infrastructure hamper nurses in rendering critical services to communities.

The International Council of Nurses' theme for Nurses' Day 202, "Nurses: A Voice to Lead" with "A Vision for Future Healthcare" as sub-theme does unfortunately not ring true in South Africa. The Public Servants Association (PSA) is appalled with deteriorating circumstances in the nursing profession. This situation was laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic, which deepened the country's economic woes and claimed the lives of 500 healthcare workers, including many nurses.

At the start of the pandemic there were problems with supplying proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to nurses owing to, amongst others, alleged fraud, corruption, and misappropriation of funds. In addition, nurses are notoriously underpaid and immigrating in droves in search of better work opportunities. The fact that almost 48% of nurses will have reached pensionable age in 15 years further cause for alarm.

This scenario is indicative of a looming crisis and holds danger for the implementation of Government's long-touted National Health Insurance scheme. For this scheme to succeed and serve communities as planned, urgent measures are required to save the nursing profession and attract the youth to the profession. This will, however, be difficult to achieve, as Government has failed for two consecutive years to implement wage increases for its employees, which include nurses.

Nurses remain at the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic and are key role players during the vaccine rollout. The PSA pays tribute to the country's nurses for their dedication and selfless service with the pledge that the Union will continue its efforts to promote and protect their workplace rights and interests.

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