

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA deeply concerned about state of Limpopo Health services**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about the general state of Limpopo Health services, with the Department of Health not complying with its own policy on the implementation of 24-hour service at clinics.

This action contravenes the Nursing Service Regulations, by forcing lower-level employees to work without supervision. The termination of the service of 706 nurses is also a matter of grave concern for the PSA. The PSA recently called on the Provincial Health Department to stop implementing 24-hour service at clinics without complying with the policy on infrastructure, human resources, and security at clinics. This followed after the PSA was alerted by members who were forced to provide services without the required staff. This poses a risk to them as they perform duties beyond their scope. The Department responded in a shocking manner and deliberately misled the public when it indicated that the PSA is relying on an expired policy, that it is negotiating with local unions and not forcing employees to provide 24-hour service.

The Department is further contravening regulations by forcing lower-level employees such as enrolled nursing assistants and enrolled nurses to work without supervision. This may result in lawsuits against the Department. Furthermore, employees could be charged by the Nursing Council for undertaking responsibilities beyond their scope of work.

The PSA stresses that the mentioned policy does not expire and remains valid until reviewed through proper structures. No department can negotiate outside the Chamber with local shop stewards as the Public Health and Social Department Sectoral Bargaining Council is the only forum where negotiations can take place. The PSA is currently assisting members to file grievances against this unfairness, which is contrary to the Department's indication that employees will not be forced to work at 24-hour service clinics but are now threatened with disciplinary action if they refuse to honour the illegal roster. The termination of service of 706 nurses will worsen the situation. The Department also lost some 230 post-community service Nurses in March 2023, and the recruitment process is very slow. The Department is failing to fill funded positions, yet it expects the provision of health services.

Most health institutions do not have basic, adequate, and operational working tools and most clinics do not have medicine. Health services in Limpopo are in shambles, with patients waiting for hours to receive chronic medication owing to long queues at clinics and hospitals. Employees are overworked and fatigued, resulting in errors. It is not surprising that the Department is experiencing a rising number of lawsuits for medical negligence. The PSA calls on the MEC of Health to act promptly to ensure that the Department can provide services before the provincial health system collapses completely. The MEC must urgently fill vacancies and engage Treasury to get funds to retain the 706 nurses to prevent a severe crisis.

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