

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**PSA disturbed by Provincial Health Departments' debt of R8.9 billion to National Health Laboratory Service**

**DATE**

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**EMBARGO**

None

**ENQUIRIES**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) has noted with extreme concern that all provincial health departments, except the Western Cape, owe vast amounts to the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) for pathology services rendered.

The CEO of the NHLS has already hinted that it will be difficult to deliver on the entity's mandate with insufficient cash resources owing to the provincial health departments' having reached unsustainable levels. The NHLS is the sole provider of diagnostic pathology services to over 80% of South Africa's population and has some 8 000 employees. The recent annual reports of the NHLS indicated that it has more than 1 000 vacancies, and like many government entities that suffer from chronic staff shortage, this is ascribed to budget cuts and austerity measures by government.

The NHLS has laboratories in all nine provinces with a mandate to provide cost-effective and efficient health laboratory services to all public-sector healthcare providers. This mandate will, however, not be attainable without the necessary resources. A failing NHLS is not good for the country as it affects the health system and the justice system owing to a backlog in conducting tests. The NHLS is suffering owing to the outstanding debt and had to stop manufacturing much-needed snake, spider, and scorpion antivenom. It is unable to fill vacancies and cannot upgrade laboratory equipment to ensure efficiency and competitiveness. The NHLS may further not be able to respond to the call by the Minister of Health for 1.1 million HIV patients to receive treatment.

The PSA urges the Minister of Health to intervene as the situation to ensure that the NHLS does not fail to fulfil its mandate. Debt by provincial health departments have reached an unacceptable level and is affecting the ability of the NHLS to provide efficient and quality service. The PSA has members at the NHLS, and the Union cannot allow inefficiency and financial mismanagement to negatively affect these employees and service delivery.

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