

**MEDIA RELEASE**      PSA warns: Failure to fill critical technical posts fuels KwaZulu-Natal water crisis

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about escalating water challenges affecting communities across KwaZulu-Natal and warns that persistent failure to fill critical technical and engineering posts is contributing to the deterioration of water infrastructure and service delivery across the Province.

Recent reports and provincial-level discussions highlighted the severe strain on municipal water systems, including water shortages, infrastructure failures, high water losses, ageing networks, skills shortages, and inadequate maintenance capacity. As a result, many communities lack reliable access to water, adversely affecting households, schools, healthcare facilities, businesses, and government institutions.

Several municipalities continue to have vacancies in critical technical positions, including engineers, artisans, technicians, project managers, process controllers, and other specialised personnel essential to operating and maintaining water infrastructure. This continuing erosion of municipal technical capacity undermines efforts to provide sustainable water services and respond effectively to infrastructure failures. Recent water crises in Newcastle, KwaMashu, Umlazi, Verulam, and other areas, where residents endured prolonged interruptions to their water supply, demonstrate the severe consequences of inadequate capacity and delayed infrastructure interventions. Communities should not be subjected to recurring water disruptions while critical technical vacancies remain unfilled.

The PSA noted statements by Premier Thamsanqa Ntuli calling for urgent intervention, greater accountability, improved water management, and the deployment of skilled technical personnel to struggling municipalities. The PSA welcomes these commitments but stresses that meaningful progress will require the immediate appointment and retention of suitably qualified public servants with the expertise needed to maintain and restore critical water infrastructure. Public servants in municipal water departments continue to work under extremely difficult conditions, often managing vast service areas with limited resources and insufficient staffing. They cannot be expected to compensate indefinitely for longstanding vacancies and chronic underinvestment in technical skills.

The PSA calls on all affected municipalities, the provincial government, and relevant departments to urgently fill all funded critical vacancies in municipal water services, and prioritise recruitment and retention of engineers, technicians, artisans, and other professionals with scarce technical skills. Preventative maintenance programmes must be strengthened to reduce infrastructure failures coupled with invest in ongoing technical training and skills development initiatives. Budget allocations intended for water infrastructure and maintenance must be protected and utilised effectively, with accountability measures where failures to maintain critical infrastructure have contributed to service delivery disruptions.

Access to clean, reliable water is a fundamental right and an essential service. The PSA believes that addressing the shortage of skilled municipal personnel is a critical step towards restoring public confidence, improving service delivery, and safeguarding the dignity and well-being of communities across KwaZulu-Natal. The PSA is committed to advocating for adequately staffed and resourced public institutions that can deliver the quality services citizens deserve.

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