



South African Council of Churches

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15 August 2005

The Hon Dr ME Tshabalala-Msimang
Minister of Health
Private Bag X399
PRETORIA
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Dear Dr Tshabalala-Msimang

Re: DRAFT HEALTH CHARTER

The South African Council of Churches applauds the Ministry's efforts to develop a Health Charter. We believe that such a Charter has the potential to harmonise the efforts of public, private and non-profit sector health service provision to transform the health care system and to promote just and equitable access to quality health care for all South Africans.

We have had an opportunity to review the comments on the Draft Health Charter submitted jointly by the AIDS Law Project and the Treatment Action Campaign. We feel that their response is largely consistent with the policies and principles of the SACC.

In particular, the Council wishes to endorse the ALP/TAC's contention that:

- All stakeholders must be party to the Charter, including providers in all sectors, health care workers and organisations representing people who use health care services;
- The Charter should be informed by a vision of a unitary health care system which provides an essential set of quality health care services to all South Africans on an affordable basis, taking into account each user's ability to pay;
- These objectives of transformation, equity and universal provision of quality services through a unified system should be more clearly articulated in the Charter's objectives;
- The Charter should set measurable goals and time frames for the realisation of the vision set out in existing legislation and policy statements;
- Government must take charge of implementation, including the introduction of measures to control spiralling health care costs;
- Consumers of health care services should participate fully in structures set up to regulate the health care system;
- The subsidising of private health care should be phased out; and
- The Health Charter is not the most appropriate place to address BEE concerns insofar as they deal with the structure of ownership of private health care enterprises rather than the extension of equal access to quality treatment to all South Africans.

As a member of the People's Budget Campaign, the SACC also remains committed to the People's Budget call for the abolition of the present two-tiered health system and the introduction of a unitary National Health Insurance scheme that harnesses all of the country's health resources. Although such an arrangement would leave room for private providers, it

would do so through a national health system. We have been critical of Social Health Insurance options on the grounds that they would perpetuate the current dualistic system of health care delivery that obstructs the achievement of greater equity in provision of health care.

We trust that there will be further opportunities for engagement on the content of the health charter and we look forward to taking part in these ongoing discussions.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Molefe Tsele
General Secretary