

Government welcomes scientifically based healthcare tariffs proposal

Deputy Health and Childcare Minister Aldrin Musiiwa has commended the Association of Healthcare Funders of Zimbabwe (AHFoZ) and the Zimbabwe Medical Association (ZiMA) for pursuing a scientifically based fees tariff that is fair to all parties.

“As government we expect that this will bring to an end the perennial quarrels over fees and bring much needed relief to patients,” he told participants in the AHFoZ Annual Stakeholder Conference in Victoria Falls today (Friday).

The Deputy Minister said healthcare service providers and funders had both given strong arguments in support of their preferred fee structures. Service providers would like funders to pay their charges in full. Funders said they could not afford increased charges without increasing membership subscriptions, which they did not believe their members could afford.

“I must commend the Association of Healthcare Funders of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Medical Association (ZiMA) for seeking a way out of this impasse by proposing and commissioning research into the costs of both service providers and funders, as well as the affordability of health service costs and medical aid membership fees in the current economic environment.

“The objective is to establish a scientifically based tariff that is fair to all parties. The establishment of such a researched tariff would bring transparency to fee setting. The nation has been eagerly waiting for this researched tariff, in the hope that it will ease the burden of shortfalls,” he said.

The Deputy Minister sought to assure medical aid societies that the proposed regulatory authority, provided for in a Draft Medical Aid Societies Bill was not intended to be an oppressive body but to facilitate the creation of a conducive environment for everyone in the health ecosystem.

“I would like to assure you that, while regulation does imply rules that have to be complied with and penalties for non-compliance, the proposed regulatory authority is not intended to be an oppressive overseer of medical aid societies but rather an agent for the creation of a conducive environment for all players in the ecosystem,” he said.

He encouraged medical aid societies to expand their membership and find ways of including those working in the informal sector. Healthcare funders played an important role, but the majority of people did not belong to any medical aid society or have any health insurance, he pointed out. This often meant they were unable to access health services when they needed them.

The government was committed, he said, to introducing a National Health Insurance scheme to ensure everyone had access to affordable health services. It was important, he said, that such a scheme should benefit not only those who were employed and able to contribute to the scheme but those in the informal sector and the unemployed.

“The quality of life from a health perspective will only be satisfactory when all Zimbabweans have equal access to affordable healthcare. That is our goal,” he said.

He added that government was aware that achieving this goal would be a process rather than an event.

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“We also realise that we cannot achieve universal healthcare alone. We need the private sector and partners within the health ecosystem to play their part. In that regard, the opening of clinics and other health institutions by some medical aid societies to complement existing public and private healthcare services is appreciated, particularly where fee levels are affordable.

“The public health sector is struggling with inadequate resources, due to general budgetary constraints. Any additional provision of health services is welcome, as we work towards improving the quality of life, from a health perspective, of our people,” he said.

Dr Musiiwa commended AHFoZ for the supportive role it was playing in promoting ICD10 coding. He said Zimbabwe was lagging behind in implementing this World Health Organisation international classification of diseases coding system, which was endorsed by the World Health Assembly more than 27 years ago.

He emphasised the need to focus on prevention and wellness when it came to health issues. While the prevalence of HIV and AIDS and AIDS-related deaths had gone down, there had been an increase in instances of non-communicable diseases, especially cancer, he said.

He stressed the role that the individual could play in his or her own health by adopting a healthy lifestyle, which included a healthy diet, plenty of exercise and avoiding things that were harmful to health, such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and dangerous driving.

What was of key importance, he said, was for all players in the health sector to work together promote good health and ensure those with health problems had access to high quality affordable health services.

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