

HEALTH NEWS DAILY

Wednesday 11 September 2024

The contents of this issue of Health News Daily are protected by international copyright conventions as well as a licence agreement between subscribing companies and the publishers, Health Matters. No part of this document may be copied (in any form whatsoever). This document may not be forwarded in any manner to any person not listed as a recipient in terms of the licence agreement. Contravention of the terms of this agreement will result in termination of your company's subscription.

CONTENTS

Budget cuts hurt provincial health services - Motsoaledi

Tamar Kahn | Business Day | 11 September 2024

Budget cuts strain South Africa's provincial health services, leading to staff shortages, longer wait times, and increased stress on healthcare professionals.

Big Pharma not investing in future pandemic vaccines

Aimee Donnellan | Reuters | 10 September 2024

Big Pharma is not investing enough in vaccines for future pandemics despite WHO warnings of a deadlier virus.

Budget cuts hurt provincial health services - Motsoaledi

Tamar Kahn | Business Day | 11 September 2024

BUDGET cuts by the National Treasury are making it hard for provincial health departments to fill key positions, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi told Parliament. This shortage puts pressure on healthcare staff and causes longer patient waiting times. In a written response to questions from Action SA MP Kgosi Letlape, Motsoaledi said provinces are struggling with fewer doctors, nurses, and managers. Doctor vacancy rates range from 22.4% in the Free State to 5.5% in the Western Cape. For nurses, vacancies range from 28% in the Free State to 5% in the Eastern Cape. More than 40% of senior management posts in the Northern Cape are vacant. Provinces like the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, and Mpumalanga have about 25% of their senior manager roles unfilled. Despite the budget growing by 3.4% over the medium term, inflation is expected to average 4.7%. This means the health budget is shrinking in real terms.

Fewer patients can be attended to

Motsoaledi said that the staff shortage increases workloads, which leads to stress and lower job satisfaction. Despite the challenges, he said, the remaining staff are still providing quality care, but fewer patients can be attended to. Letlape raised concerns that the vacancy rates don't fully reflect the population's healthcare needs. He warned that if the gap between funded and needed posts isn't addressed, the public healthcare system will continue to struggle. Staff shortages also affect healthcare professionals' mental health and work-life balance, said Letlape. This creates a stressful work environment, harming staff morale and patient care. Western Cape health MEC Mireille Wenger added that the ratio of healthcare workers to the population is worsening due to budget constraints and population growth. Public healthcare spending per person in 2023 is lower than in 2017, further straining the system. As provinces await the Treasury's medium-term budget policy statement in October, they are hoping for relief from these budget pressures.

[Back to Contents](#)

Big Pharma not investing in future pandemic vaccines

Aimee Donnellan | Reuters | 10 September 2024

COVID-19 showed how vital vaccines are. The pandemic caused 16 million deaths worldwide. The current concern around Mpox highlights people's fear of new outbreaks. However, major drug companies are not investing enough in vaccines for future pandemics. The World Health Organization (WHO) warns that the next virus could be 20 times deadlier than Covid-19. Scientists call this unknown virus "Disease X." They say future pandemics may come from new pathogens, not known ones like the flu. More frequent pandemics are expected because of increased travel and urban living. Pandemics have a substantial economic impact.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says Covid-19 cost the world \$13 trillion, lowering global GDP by 3% in 2020. Healthcare systems are still struggling to recover from the pandemic. Despite the risks, companies like Pfizer and AstraZeneca are focusing on cancer treatments rather than vaccines. Pfizer spent \$43 billion on cancer research last year but did not invest in vaccines for future pandemics. AstraZeneca spent \$39 billion to expand its rare disease treatments while its vaccine business remains small. Vaccine businesses are often valued higher than other pharma sectors. However, investors prefer vaccines for common diseases like flu, where demand is steady. High-impact, low-frequency diseases are less attractive to the market. The rise of Mpox is a current example. Bavarian Nordic, a company that makes a vaccine

for Mpox, saw its shares jump 50% this year. But before the outbreak, the market undervalued it. The same happened with Pfizer and Moderna after Covid-19. Their shares have since dropped sharply. Regulators also make it harder for new vaccines to compete with existing ones, slowing innovation. Governments could play a role by funding vaccine research. Health officials are working on a “100-day challenge” to develop and distribute vaccines within 100 days of a new outbreak. However, countries have struggled to agree on how to share vaccines in future pandemics. For now, the world relies on hope that another deadly pandemic won’t happen soon.

[Back to Contents](#)