

Featured SET policy:

Promoting health (Chapter 10, NDP)

In a series of articles, the NSTF is unpacking the National Development Plan (NDP). The focus is on understanding it from a science, engineering, technology (SET) perspective. The NDP is seen as a blueprint/guiding document for South Africa. The NDP aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030.

- The complete document – ‘[National Development Plan – vision for 2030](#)’
- The executive summary ‘[National Development Plan 2030, Our future – make it work, executive summary](#)’.

<p>NDP chapter: Overview</p> <p>This considers the context and background of the NDP. See 1 – Understanding the context of the National Development Plan (NDP). It also sets the stage for understanding what makes a developmental state. See 2 – The National Development Plan and the developmental state. There is also a summary of the plan and key targets and actions.</p>	
<p>NDP chapter 1: Key drivers of change</p> <p>The synopsis is called 3 – Science and technology as drivers of development</p>	
<p>NDP chapter 2: Demographic trends</p> <p>The synopsis is called 4 – Demographic trends PLUS the NDPs 5th anniversary</p>	
<p>NDP chapter 3: Economy and employment</p> <p>The synopsis is called 5 – National system of innovation and R&D critical for growing the economy</p>	
<p>NDP chapter 4: Economic infrastructure</p> <p>The synopsis is called 6 – Developing a strong network of economic infrastructure – transport, energy, water resources, and ICT</p>	<p>An economy that will create more jobs </p>
<p>NDP chapter 5: Transition to a low carbon economy</p> <p>The synopsis is called 7 – Transitioning SA to a low carbon economy that responds to climate change</p>	<p>Transition to a low-carbon economy </p>
<p>NDP chapter 6: Inclusive rural economy</p> <p>The synopsis is called Section 8 of the NSTF series – An inclusive rural economy</p>	<p>An inclusive and integrated rural economy </p>
<p>NDP chapter 7: Positioning South Africa in the world</p> <p>The synopsis is called Section 9 of the NSTF series – Positioning South Africa in the world (Chapter 7, NDP)</p>	
<p>NDP chapter 8: Transforming human settlements</p> <p>The synopsis is called Section 10 of the NSTF series – Transforming human settlements (Chapter 8, NDP)</p>	<p>Reversing the spatial effects of apartheid </p>
<p>NDP chapter 9: Improving education, innovation and training</p>	<p>Improving the quality of education, training and innovation </p>
<p>NDP chapter 10: Promoting health</p>	<p>Quality healthcare for all </p>
<p>NDP chapter 11: Social protection</p>	<p>Social protection </p>

NDP chapter 12: Building safer communities	Building safer communities 
NDP chapter 13: Building a capable state	Reforming the public service 
NDP chapter 14: Promoting accountability and fighting corruption	Fighting corruption 
NDP chapter 15: Transforming society and uniting the country	Transforming society and uniting the country 

Chapter 10, National Development Plan – Promoting health

According to the National Development Plan (NDP), South Africa should promote a healthy lifestyle incorporating a healthy diet and physical activity. It advocates a culture of wellness that is part of home, work, communities, and schools. This would include elements such as compulsory physical education in schools, and communities with facilities for exercise and sports. Health and wellness are seen as “critical to preventing and managing lifestyle diseases” like heart disease, high blood cholesterol, and diabetes.

The message is: “Health is not just a medical issue”. There are many other factors that impact on health. These range from daily conditions, the environment, housing and sanitation to security and levels of poverty.

According to the NDP, South Africa’s health system is based on the principles of primary healthcare and the district health system. Primary healthcare refers to universal access, equity, participation and an integrated approach. It includes focusing on prevention first with a patient-focused approach. The district health system is supposed to be decentralised, area-based and people-centred.

However, this is not what is happening in reality. South Africa has imbalance and fragmentation between the public and private sectors – from spending to distribution of services. The NDP notes: “The inability to get primary healthcare and the district health system to function effectively has contributed significantly to the failure of the health system.” There are further issues:

- A lack of accountability with weak institutional links between different levels of services
- Provinces controlling hospital budgets and key functions (like supply chain management). This has not worked, with health issues competing with other priorities for funding. Consequently, different provinces allocate health spending in different ways.
- Health infrastructure is in a desperate state, with lengthy backlogs to sort it out.

The aim is to have a health system that:

- Raises the life expectancy of South Africans to at least 70 years. It would include dealing proactively with HIV and reducing injury, accidents, violence, and substance abuse.
- Significantly reducing the burden of disease. Beyond HIV, South Africa needs to improve TB prevention and cure, and reduce the prevalence of non-communicable chronic diseases (eg cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases)
- Reducing maternal, infant and child mortality

People must behave responsibly ie they have agency. The NDP emphasises raising awareness, public education and other measures but it notes that the final choice is in the hands of the people.

The health system needs to be reformed and strengthened. The NDP looks at, among other things:

- Integrating the different parts of the health system but separating policymaking from oversight and operations. There would be active engagement with communities, as well as communication and coordination mechanisms across all spheres.
- Decentralising authority and administration, with organisational structures supporting primary healthcare.
- Creating better governance and management frameworks, from national to local levels, with the emphasis on accountability to users and communities.
- Good management and implementation, with practices measured against benchmarks and evidence-based decision making.
- There should be overall quality control. (The NDP proposes the Office of Health Standards Compliance, responsible for ensuring that standards are met in every sphere and at every level.)
- Making more use of ICT. Imagine integrated national, district, facility and community health information systems. These would link to electronic patient records and other databases (such as those in government).

Competent human capacity is key – at all levels including leaders. Managers, doctors, nurses and community health workers need to be appropriately trained and managed, produced in adequate numbers, and deployed where they are most needed. The latter needs to take into account distribution between urban and rural areas.

The NDP advocates for properly-resourced primary healthcare teams providing care to families and communities. Beyond doctors, specialists, physicians and nurses, each household should have access to primary healthcare outreach teams. These comprise a professional nurse, a staff nurse and community health workers. (Community health workers can contribute to comprehensive health care, undertaking a range of activities and forming the base of the health pyramid.)

The idea is to have larger community-based roles for family doctors and specialists. The NDP proposes family physicians (in the district specialist support team) taking primary responsibility for developing a district-specific strategy and an implementation plan for clinical governance. They would take overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of the district’s clinical service quality. Along the same lines, specialists would focus on improving the quality of care (in their field) in district hospitals and surrounding health centres and clinics.

The aim is to have universal healthcare coverage. This means everyone has access to an equal standard of care, regardless of their income. The NDP proposes a national health insurance (NHI). The NDP notes: “The success of NHI in South Africa will depend on the functioning of the public health system.”

For South Africa’s health system to be effective, there needs to be collaboration across sectors and government departments, and across all levels. Private health providers, traditional healers and other sectors play a big role. As the NDP notes: “Health is everyone's responsibility.”