



PERMANENT ABSORPTION OF COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS (CHWs) BULLETIN

JUNE 2020

This bulletin serves to update Community Health Workers (CHWs) on the progress regarding their permanent absorption by the Department of Health.

On the 12th June 2018, parties at the Public Health Social Development Sectoral Council (PHSDSBC) signed Resolution 1 of 2018. The purpose of this resolution was to ensure standardisation of payment of remuneration for CHWs in the Department of Health, to ensure adequate protection for the remuneration payment of the CHWs into Personnel and Salary (PERSAL) System and to ensure appropriate implementation and management of recruitment, selection, appointment, placement, remuneration, skills development, dispute resolution and occupational Health and Safety processes for all members of WBPHCOTs.

In clause 5.5 of this Resolution (1 of 2018) parties agreed as follows:

To ensure the development of Standard Operational Procedure for the recruitment, selection, appointment, placement, remuneration, skills development, dispute resolution and occupational Health and Safety processes, and the absorption in the Health system for CHWs and subsequent process that may follow in line with policy framework and strategy for ward based outreach teams.

The implementation of clause 5.5 of the resolution was not concluded due to a non-agreement between parties. On the 11th July 2019 parties signed Resolution 2 of 2019 to extend the duration of Resolution 1 of 2018. This was done with the expectation that it will allow ample time for parties to conclude the Standard Operational Procedure (clause 5.5) which, to us means nothing less than the permanent absorption of Community Health Workers.

On the 7th October 2019, the national union tabled a demand at the PHSDSBC for the permanent absorption of CHWs. This led to the establishment of a Task Team to develop Standard Operational Procedures in line with Clause 5.5. The task team developed a draft Standard Operational Procedure which we rejected on the basis that it did not cater for the permanent absorption of CHWs.

On the 18th May 2020, the union submitted a draft agreement for the permanent absorption of CHWs to the council for the employer's consideration, conversely the employer tabled a counter draft agreement that seeks to extend the duration of Resolution 1 of 2018 and 2 of 2019 with another 12 months.

In the PHSDSBC Council meeting held on the 17th June 2020 organised labour was divided on this matter therefore unions pronounced independently, as a result, NEHAWU was the only union that refused to sign the agreement on the following basis:

1. The employer's refusal to include a clause that commits to a reasonable timeframe for the implementation of clause 5.5 of Resolution 1 of 2018 is a clear indication that the Department of Health has no intention to employ Community Health Workers on a permanent basis.



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2. The employer has failed to uniformly implement Resolution 1 of 2018 across all provinces. Currently, some provinces are employing CHWs in lesser terms than what is stipulated in the Resolution, for instance, others have extended contracts with 6 months whilst others are paying CHWs less than R3500.00 monthly.
3. The current conditions brought about by COVID-19 has proven that services rendered by CHWs are critical for the provision of quality healthcare services for our communities yet this cohort of workers remain highly exploited and marginalised by the department of health.
4. Just recently we have seen provinces recruiting nurses and other professions into the department yet Community Health Workers are told to wait yet another 12 months with the pathetic R3500-00 salary they are getting, despite the fact that they are in the frontline assisting in fighting against the pandemic.
5. The continued exploitation and casualization of CHWs will never end if we continue signing agreements that are not aimed at improving their conditions of service.

The union has since declared a dispute of mutual interest against the department of health at the PHSDSBC Council on the 17th June 2020. The aim of this dispute is to force the department of health to employ all Community Health Workers on a permanent basis and parties to deal with their conditions of employment. We are not willing to abdicate the mission of fighting for CHWs until they are treated with the dignity they deserve.

Conclusion

The union will report back and mobilise Community Health Workers across all provinces to prepare for a fight against the department of health. The Conciliation period is 30 days and should the employer not accede to our demand of employing CHWs on a permanent basis, the union will take to the streets and bring the health system to a halt.

NEHAWU is proud of the work that Community Health Workers are doing currently in ensuring that our communities are provided with proper health services.

END.

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