

Press Release

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SOUTH AFRICAN
INSTITUTE OF
RACE RELATIONS

South Africa's Leading Research and Policy Organisation

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17 January 2013

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86% doctor vacancy rate in Limpopo

Limpopo has the highest public sector doctor vacancy rate in South Africa, at 86%. This is according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, to be published in Johannesburg next week by the South African Institute of Race Relations.

The provinces with the second and third highest vacancy rates are the Northern Cape and the Eastern Cape, at 57% and 48% respectively. The North West has the lowest rate at 26%. South Africa has an overall vacancy rate of 56% for doctors in the public sector. The vacancy rate refers to the proportion of total positions that are vacant.

Limpopo also has the highest nurse vacancy rate at 68%, followed by the Eastern Cape at 67%, and the Free State at 47%. Again, the North West has the lowest rate at 12%. South Africa has an overall vacancy rate of 46% for nurses in the public sector.

These figures were calculated by the Institute using Department of Health (DoH) data on the number of public sector doctors and nurses, and the number of public sector doctor and nurse vacancies.

At the launch of the Human Resources for Health Strategy in October 2011 Aaron Motsoaledi, the minister of health, attributed the shortage of health professionals to the stagnation of their training and production, inequitable distribution between the public and private sectors, and emigration. Dr Motsoaledi said that some of the interventions the DoH has employed to deal with worker shortages include working with health sciences faculties and colleges of medicine to increase the intake of medical students, entering into bilateral agreements with Cuba to train South African students in medicine, and hiring retired health professionals to fill the vacancy gaps in the short term.

Lerato Moloi, a researcher at the Institute, said that the high health professional vacancy rates were a worrying trend given the proposed National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme and its objectives. 'The three focal points of the NHI scheme as outlined by the DoH are to ensure every South African has access to quality health services, to decrease the burden of disease, and to improve the overall performance of the health system. With such vacancy rates, these objectives seem unachievable.'

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