



FOR PROFESSIONALS  
SINCE 1941

# SA DENTISTS' CONCERN ABOUT IMPACT OF NHI ON PROFESSION GROWS - SURVEY

The majority of South African dentists are growing increasingly concerned about the impact that National Health Insurance (NHI) and other industry developments will have on the future of their profession, according to the results of a new survey conducted by PPS.

The survey of more than 150 South African dentists revealed a five percentage point drop in confidence levels to 47% when asked whether they are concerned about their prospects of earning a sufficient income should NHI be implemented. Furthermore, when asked about their confidence in the future of the profession a six percentage point drop to 64% was revealed, while only 23% of local dentists would encourage their children to enter the profession, down nine percentage points.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the financial services provider focused on graduate professionals, the survey results indicate that South African dentists are highly concerned about the future of the profession in the country given the numerous developments and challenges facing the oral health industry. "This is evidenced by the drastic decline and low confidence in encouraging their children to enter the profession, which is highly worrisome to the sustainability of the dental health profession as a whole."

Furthermore, when asked whether the withdrawal of a National Health Reference Price List (NHRPL) approach - the basis upon which medical scheme rates were previously based but was withdrawn in 2010 resulting in medical schemes now setting their own rates by adjusting previous tariff lists for inflation - is beneficial to the dental and oral health professions, confidence levels were down two percentage points to 53%. In addition, the survey results showed that 94% of dentists believe that medical schemes do not provide adequately for oral health.

Joubert says the withdrawal of the NHRPL means that medical schemes determine their own benefits for dental procedures, often unequal to the actual cost of the procedure. "This has had a severely negative impact on the reputation of the profession as many consumers perceive dental practitioners to be overcharging for procedures, when in actuality the medical schemes are not providing sufficient cover."

"The drop in confidence levels does not come as a surprise and is reflective of the extent to which dentists in South Africa are increasingly feeling marginalized in the current healthcare dispensation", said Maretha Smit, Chief Executive Officer at the South African Dental Association (SADA). "In particular, the intended publication of tariff guidelines by the HPCSA has had an extremely demoralizing impact on practitioners and the sustainability of the profession is at stake."

Confidence in the future of the healthcare system over the next five years was also down three percentage points to 40%. Dentists also revealed a four percentage point drop to 47% when asked whether they agree in the principle of NHI, while 89% of dentists feel that NHI is not the solution to fix the country's ailing health system.

“Dentists are clearly lacking confidence in the way the country’s current healthcare system is operating in addition to the future plans of NHI aimed at improving the healthcare sector. This is highly concerning to the future of local oral healthcare, a very necessary service for overall wellbeing of South Africans,” says Joubert.

South African dentists also revealed a decline in confidence in other socio-economic factors. Confidence in the future of the standard of education over the next five years was down seven percentage points to 42%, while concern about the lack of mathematics and science graduates rose by one percentage point to 94%. When asked about the level of crime and unemployment improving over the next five years, both questions noted a two percentage point drop to 37%.

“In light of the dental profession currently experiencing a severe skills shortage, it is imperative that measures are taken to ensure dentists’ confidence in the future of the profession improves to ensure the sustainability of the South African oral health industry,” concludes Joubert.

**Other results from the dental professional survey:**

- Confidence in their ability to earn an income that keeps up with inflation was down four percentage points to 54%
- Confidence in the economic outlook for South Africa over the next 12 months was down three percentage points to 56%
- Confidence in the outlook for local equity / share markets was down one percentage point to 60%
- Confidence that South Africa has seen the worst of the global economic turmoil was down five percentage points to 46%
- Confidence that they have saved enough to retire was down one percentage point to 55%
- Confidence in remaining in South Africa for the foreseeable future was down one percentage point to 77%