



# NEHAWU STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL NURSES DAY



## MEDIA STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Monday May 12, 2025**

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union [NEHAWU] conveys its militant salute to millions of nurses across the world celebrating International Nurses Day which is celebrated annually on the 12th May.

As NEHAWU, we recognise and appreciate the critical role of nurses as the backbone of our healthcare system and the sterling role they play in promoting health and wellbeing of our people.

We are commemorating this year's International Nurses Day under the theme: Uplift austerity measures to free nurses from the bondage of staff shortages – Towards the full implementation of NHI”.

Indeed, the theme succinctly captures the critical need to investment more resources in the nursing fraternity to improve patient-centred quality of care and to prepare for full implementation of National Health Insurance. As the adage goes “A country that does not value the health of its citizen deserves no future”, but most importantly a country that does not invest in nurses deserves no future.

Nurses play a critical role in health promotion, disease prevention and treatment of our people. Nurses are the closest health professionals to the community working together with Community Healthcare Workers and they have a particular role in, not only developing innovative models of community-based care and support local efforts to promote health and prevent disease, but also in transforming society.

It is for this reason that we are calling on government especially National Treasury to uplift austerity measures to free nurses from the bondage of staff shortages. The austerity measures program of government has had a particular impact on the capacity of the state to deliver service in health, thereby hindering the quest building of a capable and developmental state that intervenes to societal needs.

As a result of austerity measures, the government has not invested adequately in the healthcare system more especially on health workforce as per the 2030 Human Resources for Health Strategy.





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Currently, there is a high-vacancy rate in public healthcare especially in nursing, which goes contrary and undermines the vision of the Human Resources Strategy for the Health Sector.

The Nurses-to-patient ratio is unregulated and highly disproportionate in South Africa. Currently One (1) Nurse is to more than 200 patients and this compromises the quality of service provision and it strains the health of nurses especially in the Public health sector. The international nursing shortfall has skyrocketed since the COVID-19 pandemic, the global shortage of nurses was estimated at 5.9 million nurses prior to the pandemic and nearly all of these shortages are concentrated in low- and lower middle income countries, South Africa being of one them.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Health Employment and Economic Growth Report highlights a widespread shortage of health workers, including nurses, on a global scale. The report underscores the critical need for substantial investment in the health workforce to achieve universal health coverage and global health security.

The urgency of the global nursing shortage is further underscored by the World Health Organization's (WHO) State of the World Nursing Report. This report reveals a glaring mismatch between the global nursing workforce and the objectives of universal health coverage and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

South Africa has around 15 625 vacant nursing position for all categories. The government needs to urgently address this towards the full implementation of the National Health Insurance. The NHI is a radical and progressive step towards the realisation of Universal Health Coverage [UHC], ensuring that every citizen of South Africa has access to free, quality and accessible healthcare.

Lastly, as we mark International Nurses Day, we reiterate our call to the government to do away with its austerity measures program to free nurses from the bondage of staff shortages towards the full implementation of the National Health Insurance.

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**Issued by NEHAWU Secretariat.**

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