

COMMUNITY WORKING GROUP ON HEALTH



MAY 1, 2018: NATIONAL WORKERS' DAY SOLIDARITY MESSAGE

The CWGH joins the rest of the world in celebrating the Workers' Day. We commemorate those lost to accidents and injury at work. Today we add thousands more lost to diseases that could have been prevented like AIDS, TB, Malaria, Typhoid and Cholera.

Poor people depend on public health services and cannot afford private services. Yet the cost of health services in these institutions has also gone beyond the reach of many, with impact being felt seriously by chronic ill patients. People have a role to play in health being a major stakeholder in the promotion of Primary Health Care at community level. However, government has the first responsibility to make sure that public funds are allocated and spent on services that communities need, and also support and recognise the importance of their input and decisions in matters of significance to their health.

The way the government Health budget is structured also does not reflect the needs of the population, or even the policy priorities of the Ministry of Health. The low-income population can no longer afford to get ill, because they cannot afford expensive curative services. With so many diseases that can be prevented, a reasonable share of funds should go to preventing disease (Primary Health Care), such as through building safe water supplies and sanitation, immunising children, antenatal care, malaria prevention, family planning and so on. There is need therefore for major focus on preventive strategies and outreach programmes.

CWGH is worried by the perennial job actions by health workers protesting against low remuneration, poor working conditions and absence of the tools of trade in the country's health institutions, a situation that has resulted in the suffering, pain and avoidable deaths of many people in the country. The impact of the strikes has strained the already broken and collapsing health system characterized by shortages of medical personnel, drugs, equipment and dilapidated infrastructure.

The frequency of protests by health workers occurring in this country is frightening and points to an urgent need to develop mechanisms to deal with labour issues. Zimbabwe cannot afford to let job actions go for as long as a month without a solution as happened with the doctor's strike in March this year that resulted in preventable and avoidable deaths. CWGH calls for the formation of a negotiation forum comprising key stakeholders in the health sector and government, as the employer, that would quickly address labour disputes whenever they occur.

It is worrying that a huge percentage of workers in the country are not on medical aid cover because they cannot afford. Only 10% of people in Zimbabwe have medical aid insurance, and the rest are not only poor but they are denied their right to health as enshrined in section 76 of the country's Constitution which clearly states that everyone has a right to have basic health-care services, including reproductive health care services. Even those on medical aid cover are

also denied access to health care when they fail to raise the “core payment” demanded by most health institutions before service is provided.

Falling government expenditure has adversely affected the lower levels of the health system, the clinics. Clinics have the worst level of drug supplies and staff availability. The Health Levy from 5 % on airtime and data bundles use has collected millions of dollars, but the funds in some areas have not reached the intended beneficiary. Greater transparency is needed around the Health Levy. The public needs to know how much has been collected, where the funds have gone to, who is involved in the distribution and administration of funds at all levels and who has benefited from the funds.

The CWGH expresses its solidarity with the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union and the workers in formal, informal, rural, urban and domestic employment in Zimbabwe. Many work under very harsh conditions and live under even worse environments.

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