SECTION III - IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE

1. HEALTH POLICY

What do people need to be healthy?

For people to be healthy it is necessary that families earn enough money to be able to live decent lives, and work under safe conditions. People need decent housing, clean water, and sufficient food. There must be adequate and decent toilet facilities, and effective waste disposal. Health is also improved where people have a reasonable standard of education, and opportunities for rest and recreation.

To improve and protect the health of our people, we need a health service that promotes good health, prevents illness, provides care to the ill and rehabilitation facilities for the disabled.

What is the current state of health services in South Africa ?

The health services in South Africa reflects all the injustice and irrationality of Apartheid. The health service is controlled by a multiplicity of departments - in each of the bantustans and a single, separate one for each of the coloured, white and Indian "own affairs" houses. It is impossible to effectively plan and co-ordinate health care between these different ministries.

The government's policy of privatisation and cuts in spending on health has meant that insufficient resources are being channelled into health services. As a result the quality of health has deteriorated.

The private sector focuses its efforts on those who can pay, emphasises the treatment of disease, and so neglects the promotion of good health, the prevention of disease and the rehabilitation of the disabled. The focus on individual care also conceals the Socio-economic causes of ill health. Health and lack of health are rooted in the economic and social fabric of any society.

PRINCIPLES OF ANC HEALTH POLICY

In a just society, the provision of equitable health care should be guided by principles which reflect the Primary Health Care Approach adopted by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Children's Fund.

Access to health care is a basic human right. This right should be incorporated in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and these constitutional rights should be enforced by law.

A National Health Service (NHS)

The ANC proposes the creation of a comprehensive, national and integrated National Health Service.

There will a single Department of Health for the whole country, which will coordinate all aspects of health care delivery, and will be accountable to the people of South Africa through democratic structures.

The homeland and own affairs departments of health will be integrated into the NHS, and segregation and racial discrimination will be eradicated from the health services. In line with the ANC commitment to a mixed economy, the provision of health care by the private sector will continue to be acknowledged and regulated.

The responsibility for health care will be divided between national, regional and district authorities. These will, as far as possible coincide with regional and local government boundaries. Authorities, responsibility for and control over funds will be as decentralised as is compatible with rational planning and the maintenance of good quality care.

The health service should give priority to children, mothers, the elderly, mentally ill, the unemployed, workers in hazardous occupations and the disabled. In addition, there must be a focus on the eradication and control of the major diseases, including AIDS, tuberculosis, measles, polio and others. Attention should also be given to sex education, sexual hygiene as well as to family planning on a voluntary basis.

Within the National health services, health workers must respect the right of their patients to be treated as equals in all respects. Furthermore, individuals, interest groups and whole communities must be able to participate in the process of formulating and implementing health policy.

It is imperative that the health service should be planned and regulated to ensure that resources are used in the best way possible to make essential health care available to all South Africans, giving priority to the most vulnerable groups.

Health education and community involvement in hygiene should be given high priority, with clinics, nurses and community health workers on the spot to encourage healthy life styles and habits and to provide the first point of referral for medical ailments.

Inter-sectoral co-operation

At all levels of government the health service should promote inter-sectoral co-operation to promote the health of communities. The health service should take a leading role in the coordinating government authorities responsible for sanitation, water supply, housing, and other social services. To the extent that a threat to public health is identified, the health service has a

responsibility to ensure that the necessary steps are taken to remove such a threat.

Financing health care.

It is the responsibility of the government to mobilise sufficient funds to ensure a basic service of free and equal access to essential health care for all South Africans. No-one should be excluded from any public health facility because they cannot afford such services. Only when this is achieved, will it be possible to reduce the gap in access to health care between rich and poor; black and white; and urban and rural communities.

Since, however, government resources are limited, those who can afford to, will have to contribute to the cost of health care, either through general taxation, or by contributing to a national health or social insurance fund, or both. The costs of medical care should be kept down by careful accounting and the rational use of resources.

The private sector

In the longer term, most health care should be provided by the public health service. The public service must be strengthened and made accountable to the communities its serves. It will therefore be necessary to create incentives to induce many of those health workers, who have chosen private practices, to return to the public sector. At the same time, we envisage active cooperation between the two sectors with the common goal of improving the health of the nation.

A national pharmaceutical policy.

At present there are many parts of the health service where there is not enough medicine in store, or where medicine run out from time to time. On the other hand, in the private sector, there is little doubt that too much money is spent on medicine. A national drug policy is required to deal with these and other problems.

Personnel

There are racial and gender inequalities in the training of health workers. In particular, Africans and women have historically formed a small minority of the total number of trained doctors, or persons in middle or senior management. Affirmative action needs to be undertaken to correct this imbalance.

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