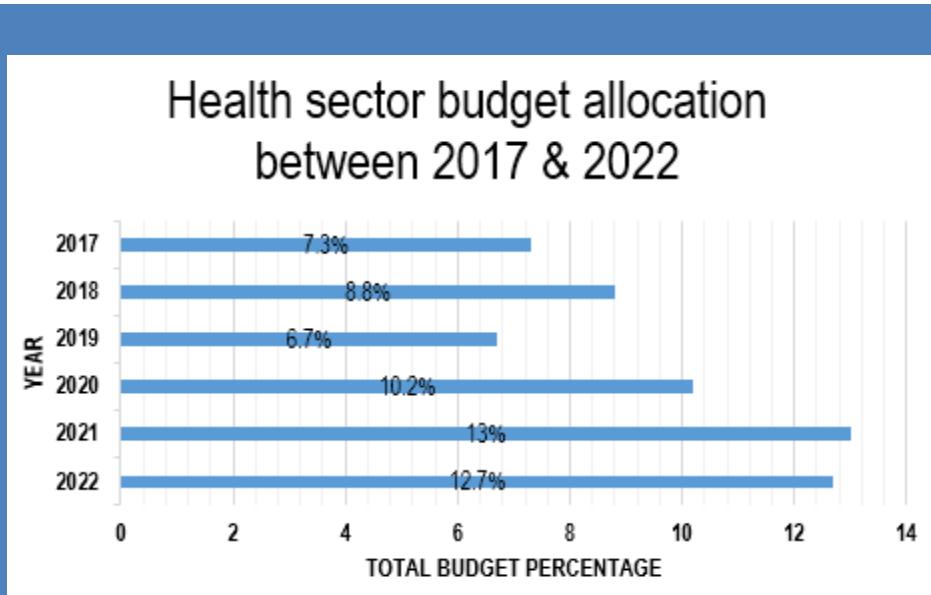


ZIMBABWE DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE (ZDI) ACCESS TO PUBLIC HEALTH MONITORING REPORT

JANUARY 2022

THE UNENDING COVID-19 VARIANTS: INCREASED PUBLIC HEALTH SPENDING A MUST FOR ZIMBABWE



About the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI)

The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) is a politically independent and not for profit public policy think-tank based in Zimbabwe. Founded and registered as a trust in terms of the laws of Zimbabwe in November 2012, ZDI serves to generate and disseminate innovative ideas, cutting-edge research and policy analysis to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe. The institute also aims to promote open, informed and evidence-based debate by bringing together pro-democracy experts to platforms for debate. The idea is to offer new ideas to policy makers with the view to entrenching democratic practices in Zimbabwe. The ZDI researches, publishes and conducts national policy debates and conferences in democratization, good governance, public policy, human rights and transitional justice, media and democracy relations, electoral politics and international affairs.

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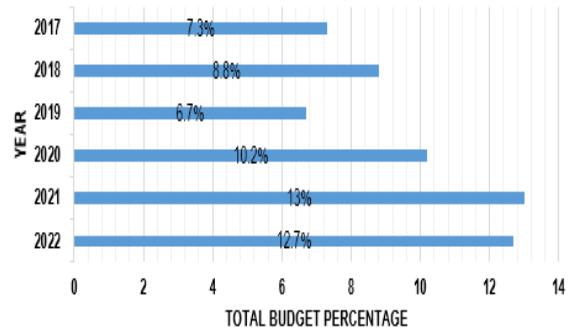
Introduction

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe in March 2019 exposed the country's healthcare system as the health sector became the major talking point insofar as the pandemic's response was/is concerned. The continued discovery of new Covid-19 variants is a clear indication that the pandemic is far from over. As such, the health sector calls for an increased public health spending as a tool of fighting the pandemic.

Health Sector Financing

The Covid-19 in Zimbabwe came at a time when the country's healthcare system was faced with a number of challenges most of which were linked to funding. The attainment of the universal health coverage in Zimbabwe therefore remains constrained by the inadequate health sector funding. However, it is worth noticing that public health spending has increased over the years as shown in figure below;

Health sector budget allocation between 2017 & 2022



Source: ZDI 2022, Dataset: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development National Budget Presentations, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 & 2022

As shown above, Zimbabwe's public health funding increased from 7.3% in 2017 to 13% in 2021. However, it dropped to 12.7% in 2022. During the presentation of the 2022 National Budget, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development Professor Mthuli Ncube said;

The 2022 National Budget has allocated ZWL\$117.7 billion to the Ministry of Health and Child Care which represents 14.9% of the Budget.¹

However, the actual allocation of the health sector for 2022 stands at 12.7% of the total national budget. This is because the sector was allocated a total of ZWL\$117.7 billion against a

¹ Zimbabwe Treasury. 2021. The 2022 National Budget Speech. "Reinforcing Sustainable Economic Recovery and Resilience." Available at: http://www.zimtreasury.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&download=442:2022-national-budget-speech&id=67:2022-budget&Itemid=793

total budget of ZWL\$927.3 billion. In other words, the Minister lied to the nation that Zimbabwe had almost achieved the 15% Abuja Declaration² target.

With the increased spending needs that are related to Covid-19 response, it was of great importance that Zimbabwe increased the health budget by at least meeting the 15% Abuja Declaration target.

Health Sector Human Resources

Zimbabwe's health sector has, for a long time, borne the brunt of industrial actions by the health personnel over poor working conditions among other grievances. In 2019, the country was faced with one of the elongated strike by doctors and nurses as they demanded better working conditions and this situation further crippled the health sector.³ The impasse between the government and the health sector workers still exists and has generated an incapacitated and demotivated and workforce that hinders the delivery of quality healthcare across public health institutions in the country.

² In April 2001, heads of state of African Union countries met and pledged to set a target of allocating at least 15% of their annual budget to improve the healthcare delivery system. For more information, see: <https://www.who.int/healthsystems/publications/Abuja10.pdf>

³ For more information, see: UNICEF Zimbabwe. 2021 Health Budget Brief. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/media/5176/file/2021%20Health%20Budget%20Brief%20-%20Final.pdf>

In line with the above challenges, the country's health sector has faced brain drain as the welfare of health workers and their poor working conditions have since been neglected by the government of Zimbabwe.⁴ The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in Zimbabwe in March 2019 has further deteriorated the well-being of doctors and nurses as they became vulnerable to the coronavirus due to poor working conditions characterised by lack of personal protective equipment (PPEs).⁵ This situation has triggered the mass exodus of health workers from the country to other countries.⁶ The government has and continues to face the challenge of retaining the critical healthcare staff due to its limited fiscal space to address health staff needs.

Health Sector Corruption

Zimbabwe's response to Covid-19 has been marred with cases of embezzlement of funds meant to fight the pandemic. The Auditor General's special report released in August 2021

⁴ This is further elaborated by Makoni (2020). COVID-19 worsens Zimbabwe's health crisis. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31751-7/fulltext?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&hash=d78276a1-ce55-43cb-8db1-8f8127176b1f](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31751-7/fulltext?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&hash=d78276a1-ce55-43cb-8db1-8f8127176b1f)

⁵ On 25 March 2021, the Anadolu Agency reported that doctors and nurses in Zimbabwe have gone on strike because they cannot get personal protective equipment (PPE) in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/zimbabwe-health-workers-strike-amid-covid-19-pandemic/1779474>

⁶ For more information, see ZDI Access to Public Health Monthly Monitoring Report: Health Sector Brain Drain: An Indication of Sector Decay – October 2021. Available at: <https://kubatana.net/2021/10/29/health-sector-brain-drain-an-indication-of-sector-decay/>

on the financial management and utilization of public resources in combating the Covid-19 pandemic in the country by ministries, government departments and agencies uncovered the abuse and misappropriation of over \$890 million which was meant to fight Covid-19 in the country.⁷ The country's health sector is riddled with corruption which occurs in a number of ways such as bribery, public procurement corruption as well as the diversion of critical drugs and medicines the black or illegal market.⁸ In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, corruption in the public health sector retards sound healthcare delivery system.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe's public health spending has increased ever since the inception of President Mnangagwa's government in November 2017. The spending, however, remains below the 15% Abuja Declaration target. Despite this fact, the health sector in Zimbabwe continues to be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the national budget. For instance, in the 2022 National Budget the health sector received the largest budget allocation of ZWL\$117.7 billion and no any other

⁷ As reported by the NewsDay newspaper edition of 5 August 2020, the Auditor-General (AG) Mildred Chiri unearthed gross irregularities and deliberate manipulation of figures to facilitate theft of donations meant for COVID-19 relief allowances and projects that saw undeserving government officials and individuals benefiting. The article is accessible at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2021/08/ag-uneearths-gross-covid-19-funds-abuse/>

⁸ For more elaboration, see Transparency International Zimbabwe report titled: Corruption in the public health sector in Zimbabwe.

portfolio received more than that. The inadequate funding of the health sector coupled with the incapacitation of the healthcare workforce and mismanagement of funds in the sector stands in the way of provision of quality healthcare service in Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

Aware of the vital role played by an efficient public healthcare delivery system in advancing sustainable development, the ZDI in line with its aim to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe recommends the following;

Government of Zimbabwe

- ✓ Increasing domestic funding of the health sector in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in a bid to boost the sustainability of the country's health sector financing and this will go a long way in safeguarding against unpredictability that is mainly associated with external funding.
- ✓ Immediately improving the conditions for Human Resources for Health thereby standing a good chance of retaining critical healthcare staff.

Civil Society

- ✓ Exerting pressure to the government to comply with the international commitments thresholds of health sector funding such as the 15 % Abuja Declaration target.

Media

- ✓ Reporting about the need for adequate and increased funding of the health sector in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.