

South Sudan Doctors' Union calls for increased health sector budget

The South Sudan Doctors' Union (SSDU) recently made submissions to the National Legislative Assembly to strongly advocate for an increase in the health sector budget from the current 2.1% to at least 15% of the total national budget for 2023-2024.^[1] This call is in line with WHO recommendations and the Abuja Declaration by the African Union Heads of State to achieve Universal Health Coverage.^[2] The current national health budget covers only chapters one (salaries) and two (operation costs). Chapter three which covers infrastructure development is left out. Additional aid by development partners (donors and NGOs) supports primary health care. The urban populace has to pay for their healthcare costs and have no health insurance.

The low budget allocation has led to a shortage of health workers, facilities, equipment, and medicines, contributing to high maternal and child mortality rates and preventable diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. There is only one doctor per 65,574 people, one nurse per 3,000 people. The few available health facilities are poorly equipped and lack basic medical supplies. This has resulted in patients travelling long distances to access healthcare services, which is not only expensive but also time-consuming especially during medical emergencies. The lack of medicines has also led to patients being unable to access essential drugs for their conditions.

The consequences of underfunding the health sector are not limited to human suffering. The economic costs are also significant. Poor health outcomes lead to lost productivity, increased healthcare costs, and reduced economic growth.

To achieve the health sector budget increase, the SSDU suggests the following: 1) the government /parliament adopts the intermittent or biennial health budget increase model where the government tops health budget by 10% every other year, 2) the government supplements the health budget by imposing VAT and taxes on cigarettes, sugar, and related products, and 3) the 'oil for health' funding initiative is used to provide stable funding for quality healthcare services to all citizens.

In conclusion, the SSDU urges the government of South Sudan to increase the health sector budget. This increased budget allocation would enable the recruitment of more health workers, construction and equipment of new health facilities, and purchase of essential equipment and medicines. The SSDU is committed to working with the government in efforts to increase the health sector budget and create a healthier future for all South Sudanese people.

References

1. South Sudan Doctors' Union, Position Statement on Low Health Sector Budget Allocation, Juba, South Sudan. 21 July 2023. <http://www.southsudanmedicaljournal.com/news/ssdu-submission-on-the-health-sector-budget-allocation.html>
2. Organization of African Unity, Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases, Abuja, Nigeria, 2001 <https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/32894-file-2001-abuja-declaration.pdf>

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