

Mpumalanga CHWs Forum and The Forum Discuss Challenges and Exchange Strategies

By Lillian Nhlapo

Release date: 19 February 2021

On 30 January 2021, the Gauteng Community Health Care Forum (GCHCF or the Forum) held a meeting with a group of Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs) from Mpumalanga in Vlaklaagte 2, Mpumalanga. The meeting was attended by 14 comrades – 2 un-contracted CHWs, 4 from the contracted CHWs, and 8 from the GCHCF. The meeting was held to discuss the struggles and challenges Mpumalanga comrades face in their province, how they can deal with them and keep fighting and how the Forum can assist.

The Mpumalanga comrades who are absorbed in the Department of Health said they have a challenge in their clinic of unions claiming that they are the ones who fought for the comrades to be on the government's PERSAL system. These unions are recruiting using the Gauteng permanent CHWs' victory, are claiming they are the ones who made CHWs in Gauteng permanent and that they are fighting for the Mpumalanga CHWs to be permanent as well. The Mpumalanga comrades said many of the carers in the clinic refused to listen to them because they believe the stories told by unions but they acknowledge it was the Forum that fought for them at the Bargaining Council (Public Health and Social Development Sectoral Bargaining Council) in 2019. Even though they know who was fighting for CHWs of Mpumalanga to be absorbed on the PERSAL system, many of the carers still join the unions.

The un-contracted comrades in Mpumalanga are having a challenge with the Department of Health in Mpumalanga since they were sidelined from absorption in 2019. The Department advertised their posts and told them they should apply for the job they already held. The Mpumalanga comrades submitted a memorandum last year in September 2020 at the health offices in Kwa-Mhlanga but until today the Department hasn't responded. On 18 December 2020, Mpumalanga un-contracted CHWs wrote another memorandum demanding the Department withhold the posts and interviews set to happen since they were still waiting for a response from the first memorandum. But the Department was adamant to go ahead with the short-listing and interviews.

A meeting was called this year by the ward councilors of the two wards affected; Boekenhout and Mathys Loop. The meeting had the district manager, clinic managers, chiefs, clinic committee, and the un-contracted CHWs. The comrades were told they must withdraw the memorandum they sent in December since it's affecting the community and there is no screening done in the community. The comrades refused to withdraw the memorandum and told the officials that they want to be absorbed onto the PERSAL system like other CHWs in other areas of Mpumalanga. The comrades said the department can't force them to apply for their jobs which they were already doing before the PERSAL system came. The comrades insisted that they want the Department to practice the same criteria it used on other CHWs who were in NGOs and have been absorbed onto the PERSAL system. Otherwise they will fight until the right thing is done by the Department of Health.

The GCHCF gave Mpumalanga comrades petition forms to get them filled in by other CHWs and the community they serve as a way to support them in their struggle for PERSAL absorption. The Forum shared with the meeting how important it is for contracted comrades to support the un-contracted comrades in their struggle to be absorbed onto

PERSAL so that the whole province can fight together for permanent status without other comrades being left behind. In the meeting, comrades explained that CHW comrades should know the history of the struggles of CHWs well and share it with CHWs so they don't believe what the unions say. The meeting also spoke about how comrades can start recruiting and mobilising other CHWs to join them to fight their struggle.

It's not easy to fight the system but we must be patient and keep fighting. It took Gauteng the Forum many years to fight for permanence, even though it had won the Arbitration Award in 2018, the implementation of the Award only happened in July 2020. The GCHCF will continue to assist the comrades in Mpumalanga to hold meetings regularly and assist the un-contracted CHWs to fight the Department of Health for their absorption into the PERSAL system.

This article was submitted on 10 February 2021. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online (www.Karibu.org.za), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.