

Community Healthcare Workers Meet in North West Province

By Zanele Nomdikinya

The Gauteng Community Health Care Forum (GCHCF) is mobilising in all provinces. For years Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs) have been volunteers of the Department of Health, yet have worked like slaves and earned low stipends.

In 2010, CHWs from Gauteng started to mobilise themselves and fight to become permanent workers and it took them years to finally have a breakthrough in this struggle. On 1 July 2020, CHWs were finally declared as permanent workers of the Gauteng Department of Health.

On 15 August 2020, the GCHCF went to North West province to mobilise other CHWs in the province. The meeting took place at the local church where they discussed their working conditions. CHWs from all the districts in North West came to represent their clinics.

The purpose of the meeting was to support and develop strategies to assist CHWs in other provinces in their struggle for permanent work. CHWs are tired of signing contracts every year, they want to become permanent and to be on the government's PERSAL (payment) System. North West CHWs were transferred from NGOs in 2013 where they were initially placed in the clinics, and where they do duties as nurses. They are trained for the re-engineering programme by the Department of Health.

When CHWs in North West get injured at work, they do not get compensation and the cases are often not followed up. Some have to work without Personal Protective Equipments. Some have contracted coronavirus and others have died because of the virus. Other CHWs have joined unions that have promised to help but have failed to do so.

The CHWs in North West are discussing actions to take, including going on a strike, having a march, sit-in occupations and getting media attention. CHWs have written a letter to the MEC for Health, but up until now there has been no response. CHWs have now drawn up a memorandum to the MEC which they will deliver; and if there is no reply within seven days they will do a sleep-in occupation until they are answered.

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