

spotlight

**In-depth,
public interest
health journalism**

I am writing an article for Spotlight on unemployed doctors in KZN.

Please respond to each of the following questions by end of day on Tuesday, 20 October 2026:

1. According to the latest District Health Barometer, KZN has a doctor-to-patient ratio of just under 0.4 per 1 000. This is well below the widely quoted target of 1 per 1 000. Does the department accept that there is a shortage of doctors employed in the province's public sector?
2. Some doctors have suggested to us that these shortages constitute a crisis. What words would you use to describe the shortage? Would you agree that it is a "crisis"?
3. The department's most recent annual report blames budget shortfalls for the shortages of doctors and nurses. Can you confirm that a budget shortfall is the main reason why the department is not employing more doctors?
4. According to a recent Auditor General report in parliament, the KZN Depart of Health had more than R3.6 billion in irregular expenditure in 2025/2026 and got a qualified audit. Given these facts, how would the department respond to the suggestion that it is not a shortage of funds that is the problem, but how the department is managing the funds?
5. Please outline the department's short and long-term plans for addressing the doctor shortage in the province. (Please feel free to share any other planning documents with us that can shed light on this.)
6. Some sources have suggested to us that the department has essentially accepted that there are doctor shortages and that that will simply be the case for the foreseeable future. How do you respond to this suggestion that the department has essentially given up?
7. We understand that the MEC and the department met with a group of unemployed doctors on 6 July 2026. We have been told that at that meeting, the MEC/department indicated that they are "comfortable with the numbers of doctors in the province". Is this an accurate description of what the MEC/department communicated at that meeting? If not, please explain.
8. Does the department know how many unemployed doctors there are in the province? If you do, please share the number and explain the source of the number.
9. Based on our research, there are well over a hundred recently qualified doctors in KZN who are unemployed, many of whom grew up in KZN, studied medicine in KZN, and wishes to serve their communities. What is your message to this group of doctors who cannot find jobs in the public sector and who are currently struggling to make ends meet?
10. What is your message to young people who are considering a career in medicine, but who are now being put off that career choice by reports of young doctors not being able to find jobs?

11. Some doctors have suggested to us that Cuban-trained doctors are prioritised ahead of locally trained doctors for some jobs in the KZN public healthcare sector. Can you please respond to this suggestion and clarify what contractual obligations the government has with Cuban-trained doctors when they return to South Africa?
12. Why are doctors being sent for training in Cuba if we can't employ all the doctors we train locally?
13. We understand that the department undertook to release 50 posts for doctors following meetings with unemployed doctor groups in June/July this year. However, it appears these jobs have not yet been advertised? Why have they not been advertised? When does the department intend advertising and filling these posts? (Please provide as much detail as possible on where in the process of being filled these 50 posts are.)
14. Does the department believe that these 50 additional posts are sufficient, considering that well over 100 doctors from the 2025 and 2026 community service cohorts are still unemployed and that the province's doctor-to-patient ratio is only 0.4 per 1 000?