



UNHAPPY: South African Liberated Public Sector Workers (Salipswu) members held a picket at the Department of Health offices in Memorial Road on Friday.

Picture: **Soraya Crowie**

■ HEALTH STRIKE

Health workers set to strike

SANDI KWON HOO
CHIEF REPORTER

SOUTH African Liberated Public Sector Workers Union (Salipswu) members intend embarking on strike action at health facilities in the Northern Cape as from today after the MEC for Health, Mase Manopole, failed to respond to a list of grievances on Friday.

A picket was held at the provincial Department of Health offices in Memorial Road in Kimberley on Friday after a meeting between the union and the MEC did not take place.

The provincial organiser of Salipswu, Thapelo Thole, said that they were informed that no one was available to address them.

“The 14 days that were given to provide feedback on our grievances expired on Friday – after we handed over the memorandum on November 4.”

Thole said he believed that ever since their contracts were signed with the Department of Health their conditions of employment had deteriorated.

Benefits

“We are not receiving any bonuses, we have no pension or medical aid benefits, no maternity leave. There have been no unemployment insurance fund deductions made and we do not know if community health care workers are registered with the Department of Labour. At least we used to get a 13th cheque when we were still sub-contracted through non-profit organisations,” said Thole.

He added that PAYE tax appeared on their payslips although the caregivers did not earn enough to pay tax each month.

“The job title of community health care workers indicates that they are learners or interns, while they are fully qualified staff members.

“Some of the contracts of health care workers in Frances Baard and Pixley ka Seme expired without reason, while community health care workers in the Phokwane district have not been paid.”

Thole added that nurses were assaulted by frustrated community health care workers at Dr Harry Surtie Hospital in Upington while Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers downed tools in Postmasburg last week.

“We are concerned that the MEC for Health indicated in her budget speech that only 130 community health care workers would be permanently absorbed, while 2 400 workers require employment in the Province.”

The spokesperson for the provincial MEC for Health, Lebogang Majaha, stated that the MEC had never made any major pronouncements on the absorption of community health care workers.

“The statement released by the said union is malicious and devoid of any truth. It is very disturbing, as it seeks to discredit and tarnish the good name of the MEC. The union is aware that a bargaining chamber process focusing on community health care workers is under way between the national Department of Health and all unions recognised in the public health service,” said Majaha.

He also stated that no strike action was reported in Upington.

Majaha added that the department had engaged with Salipswu to seek clarity as to whether the union had embarked on illegal strike action and also if members reported for duty prior to marching to their offices.

“The response provided in the presence of the police was that they were not on strike and they requested permission for their members to be released.”

He indicated that it was agreed that the response to their memorandum would be provided to the union in writing today.

“A follow-up meeting will be arranged to discuss other important matters,” Majaha added.