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**Author:** Asanda Nini

# E Cape's R42m diesel lifeline to keep health facilities running

## LOAD-SHEDDING RESCUE PLAN



### Calls for consequence management in medico-legal claims

**ASANDA NINI**

In a bid to keep the lights on at provincial health facilities despite persistent load-shedding, the Eastern Cape government has set aside R42m for diesel purchase and other energy-related expenses.

The diesel is to be used to power generators at provincial health facilities when load-shedding hits.

This was announced by finance MEC Mlungisi Mvoko when he tabled his midterm budget speech at the Bisho legislature late on Thursday.

Mvoko's announcement will come as a relief for many health facilities in the province, many of which have been buckling under the strain of load-shedding, leaving doctors unable to perform emergency surgeries timeously and putting patients' lives at risk.

Recently, the Health Professions Council of SA warned of the dangers posed by load-shedding at health facilities across SA and made an urgent appeal for hospitals to be exempt from load-shedding, with council president Prof Simon Nemutandani saying load-shedding placed further strain on the healthcare system.

"As a result of load-shedding and various stages of power outages, hospitals in the country are buckling under pressure. This has created more strain on the already overstretched healthcare system," said Nemutandani.

"Load-shedding has negatively affected the provision of quality care in all our health facilities and placed an enormous strain on the health practitioners in their daily routine of

work.

"Healthcare practitioners in hospitals are unable to perform emergency surgeries timeously and this puts the lives of patients at risk."

Nemutandani at the time said more than 80% of South Africans relied on public healthcare services and the rolling blackouts, coupled with the lack of a robust contingency plan, "has proved to be catastrophic in the healthcare environment".

"There are about 420 state-run hospitals and more than 3,000 state-run clinics across the country. While private facilities and secondary and tertiary-level public hospitals appear to be well equipped with generator banks, power supply interruptions place critically ill patients on life-support machines at risk," he said, adding that "the performance and lifespan of medical equipment and devices are also negatively affected by power interruptions."

This is what Mvoko's R42m diesel allocation is trying to avert.

Mvoko has increased the health department's baseline by a net R896.8m, which he said included R442m for compensation of

employees, R316.5m for payment of medico-legal claims and R38m for the payment of Microsoft software licences.

"A lot of attention is being given to the department of health because of a number of challenges in the healthcare system.

"At the core of these challenges are the medico-legal claims that are draining provincial coffers, leaving health with serious cash flow challenges.

"To turn around the department, provincial government has adopted a comprehensive health turnaround strategy, whose main purpose is to steer provincial health services into becoming more comprehensive and balanced in responding to individual patient, family and community health needs," Mvoko said.

"For us to achieve that, however, will require some reorganisation of current delivery platforms with increased emphasis on e-health and patient health data."

"The strategy will look at improving the department's financial sustainability, strengthen integrated medico-legal support and prioritisation of digitalisation and e-health, among other objectives.



**MIDTERM BUDGET:**  
Finance MEC Mlungisi  
Mvoko

**Load-shedding has negatively affected the provision of quality care in all our health facilities ... practitioners in hospitals are unable to perform emergency surgeries timeously and this puts lives at risk**

"I wish to encourage the department of health to hold those who are implicated in negligence cases accountable, and thereby institute consequence management when necessary. It is bizarre that we settle millions of money for negligence cases and no-one is held accountable," he said.

Mvoko also allocated an additional R21.7m to education infrastructure for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools damaged by floods last year and also made an allocation for the roads network damaged by the same floods.

An amount of R627.8m was allocated to the maintenance of provincial roads.

The health and education departments account for more than 70% of the provincial budget.

Mvoko raised concerns about the province's ability to collect revenue despite having potential revenue of R7.6bn in a financial year.

"The current economic challenges and constrained fiscal environment demands that we up the ante in revenue collection, if we are to find the balance between income and spending.

"The early signs on revenue collection shows that the implementation of the revenue plans is not progressing satisfactorily.

"The four key revenue generating departments, public works and infrastructure, health, transport, and department of economic development, environmental affairs and tourism, must come to the party, failing which, very soon the province will not be able to fund its own priorities, and will also fail to address its budget pressures," warned Mvoko.

The province was allocated an additional R3.1bn.