

Publication: Chatsworth Tabloid - Main

Title: RK Khan Hospital repairs near completion as government clamps down on underperforming contractors

Publish date: 13 May 2025

Page: 5

Reach: 65000

AVE: R 56198.55

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REPORTER

RK Khan Hospital repairs near completion as government clamps down on underperforming contractors

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure in KwaZulu-Natal has warned that underperforming contractors can expect to be removed and replaced with immediate effect as part of a renewed focus on accountability and service delivery.

This follows a recent oversight inspection by MEC Martin Meyer at RK Khan Hospital in Chatsworth — one of several healthcare facilities severely affected by recent floods and storms in the province.

During the visit, it was revealed that RK Khan Hospital suffered storm-related roof damage estimated at R58 million. What initially appeared to be a straightforward roof repair project intended to last five months turned into a much longer undertaking after further assessments revealed extensive structural compromise, including damage to walls and internal areas. The knock-on effects included deteriorated working conditions for staff and disrupted healthcare services in at least two wards.

"The fact that this oversight happens as a result of storm damage shows us that the reality of climate change is here," said MEC Meyer. He noted that planning for future delays now requires factoring in adverse weather conditions. Meyer added that he recently reviewed a government document forecasting weather patterns, and while it predicted 150 millimetres of rain in a single day every 50 years, KwaZulu-Natal has already seen this level of rainfall five times this year alone. In a statement released by the department spokesperson Steve Bhengu, he said: "This means that when planning for delays in a project, adverse weather conditions now have to be factored in. This also means building hospitals differently in a way that makes them more resilient to the changing external environment and thereby making them better equipped to save lives."

In the statement, the department's zero-

tolerance approach to poor contractor performance was emphasised, noting that more contractors would be removed or blacklisted under the new direction of the department.

"In this new KZN Public Works and Infrastructure, poorly performing contractors will no longer be retained for the sake of it, but will be replaced with more competent ones," Meyer said.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) in KwaZulu-Natal welcomed the near-completion of the project, which is currently around 433 days overdue from its original planned conclusion in November 2023. According to DA KZN Spokesperson on Health, Dr Imran Keeka, the extensive delays caused major disruptions across the provincial health system, affecting patients, staff and even ambulance services.

"The delays at RK Khan caused immense inconvenience. Patients were transferred daily to Clairwood Hospital, using vital Emergency Medical Rescue Services (EMRS) resources. Instead of attending to emergencies, ambulances were used to ferry patients between facilities."

The situation also forced doctors to conduct

ward rounds at two separate hospitals, while specialised services available only at RK Khan meant some patients had to be brought back and forth multiple times for care.

"That these massive inconveniences are finally coming to an end will be a relief for everyone involved — management, medical staff, patients, and their families. The hospital's new, modernised wards promise not only improved aesthetics but also functional upgrades such as waterproof roofing and smoother service delivery."

"Water will no longer leak onto patients' heads. There will now be a more efficient flow of

services and a reduced burden on both EMRS and Clairwood Hospital staff," he said.

As part of KwaZulu-Natal's Government of Provincial Unity (GPU), the DA reaffirmed its commitment to collaborative governance that places citizens at the centre of service delivery.

"This requires sound political leadership within government departments and strong oversight. The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure plays a critical role in supporting the Department of Health, and the DA will continue to exercise diligent oversight to help restore confidence in public institutions," said Dr Keeka.

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