

the government to pronounce on equity principles and give a timetable for implementation, adding: 'paying health tax can be done yesterday'. 'The ANC can get this signed off in no time, they ran faster than this in getting rid of the Scorpions,' he added caustically.

Asked why he thought health care managers were not held more accountable, he said that if they were, this would increase the resource liabilities of government. Instead they held the private and NGO sector at bay because they knew these sectors were 'doing their jobs for them'.

'If you go to a private doctor to get treated and you run out of money and they refer you on to the state sector, the public sector throws you out; it's common practice. GPs have to falsify their medical history to get them accepted in. The state sector is so overwhelmed that they use your having had private treatment as an excuse to throw you out.'

Letlape said most people did not realise that the public sector was so overburdened that staff looked for the slightest excuse to drive patients away, adding: 'It's not just a resource

issue, it's also low morale and waning professionalism'.

Getting permission to work with government to help them fulfil their responsibilities to society remained an 'elusive target', but the Tshepang Trust would persevere in helping the less fortunate.

**Chris Bateman**

## Mostly warnings for welfare staff who stole/squandered R70 million

**Most of 116 social service staffers involved in a variety of scams and irregular tenders that cost R70 million and caused suffering for thousands of intended beneficiaries were 'reprimanded and served letters of warning' before controls were tightened.**

Revealing this last month, Social Development Minister Edna Molewa admitted that irregular expenditure and fraud by staff saw the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) notch up losses of more than R70 million during the 2008/09 financial year. Two officials were dismissed, two resigned (leading to criminal charges being withdrawn), one was suspended for three months without pay and two were facing trial. On the advice of SASSA's financial misconduct board, the remainder were reprimanded and served with letters of warning.

The bulk of the loss was due to irregular expenditure of more than R69m, incurred by officials failing to follow proper tendering procedures. This was discovered and probed during the previous financial year, but reported during 2008/09. Molewa said internal

controls had been strengthened to prevent future incidents, and as a result irregular expenditure for the 2009/10 financial year was cut down to R2.5m.

Fraud at SASSA's regional offices and one case at its headquarters involved an amount of R1.08m, with 15 officials from head office and the Western, Northern and Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo implicated in a variety of swindles.

*These included stealing money recovered from grant debtors, the theft of beneficiaries' banking details and withdrawals from their accounts, officials fraudulently receiving grants themselves, unauthorised changes to the grant system and orders placed with suppliers, the issue of medical certificates to grant applicants by an official masquerading as a doctor, and misrepresentation regarding fingerprints on grant application forms.*

### *Modus operandi*

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Molewa said SASSA also 'suffered wasteful expenditure' of more than R1.22m. An amount of R6 400 for personalised number plates on trucks allocated to KwaZulu-Natal and R9 000 in penalties and fines for the late renewal of licences made up the rest of the total amount of wasted taxpayers' money.

SASSA is responsible for overseeing the distribution of nearly R90 billion in social grants to over 14 million South Africans. It received R5.6bn to administer the system in this year's budget. The agency was set up in April 2005 to root out fraud, improve administrative efficiency and speed up

the delivery of social grants. It took over the administration of grant applications and payments from the country's nine provinces two years later.

## Streamlining grant administration

By shifting the social assistance function to national government and reducing the pressure of grant administration on provincial budgets, the aim was to

free up provincial departments to focus on improving core service delivery. According to its website, the agency 'will improve service delivery by employing competent frontline staff to process social grant applications at the point of delivery'.

At the same time, skilled back-office staff would ensure quicker verification and approval of applications by using advanced technology to communicate

with other key government data sources. The grant administration process would be streamlined, and the application process involve fewer people and fewer steps. Unfortunately the steps taken against the fewer staff seem to have failed to significantly reduce the numbers of those involved in suspect and costly practices.

**Chris Bateman**

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