

**Public statement  
by Rt Hon Sir Mekere Morauta  
Port Moresby, 23 May 2017**

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**Health crisis to get worse**



Former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta fears a worsening of the nation's health care crisis this year following more savage cuts to the sector in the 2017 budget.

"Prime Minister Peter O'Neill has slashed health spending for the past three years, despite promises that he would protect it and other essential services from his cuts," Sir Mekere said.

"We have now reached the point where his corruption, waste and mismanagement threaten to bring the entire health system crashing down around us."

Sir Mekere said the past two years have been bad enough, with medicines running out across the country, health facilities lacking essential equipment and in a state of disrepair, health workers not being paid properly, and many other indicators of system failure.

The Prime Minister likes to boast about his free health care policy, Sir Mekere said, but if people cannot get timely and appropriate treatment, or no treatment at all, then it is a waste of money. No matter how much he tries to paint a pretty picture of the health system, we all know the truth – people are dying for lack of medical care.

"This week LOOP PNG news told us the story of Paramana village in Central Province – in the PNC electorate of Abau held by the former Health Secretary, Sir Puka Temu," Sir Mekere said.

"A ward councilor there estimates that more than 20 people have died over the past two years because of a lack of medicine at the aid post. There is no aid post orderly and there is no equipment. People have to be taken to Port Moresby for treatment, and some have died on the way.

"This inexcusable state of affairs exists all over the country in Peter O'Neill's health system."

Sir Mekere said there had been a health funding cut in real terms of 40 percent from the 2015 Budget to the 2017 Budget – from K1.7 billion to K1.2 billion. A further cut of 30 percent in real terms over the next five years (to about K850 million) is planned.

Mr O'Neill's cuts hurt many people last year, but the impact was softened by the availability of external health funding. But international agencies and NGOs fear that there will not be enough external funding to prevent further deterioration this year.

The need for adequate Government funding is urgent. For example the tuberculosis crisis has still not been brought under control, according to the latest reports. Child-Fund Australia estimates that about 9000 Papua New Guineans have died from tuberculosis – a preventable disease - in the past three years. About one-quarter of detected cases in PNG are children.

On Papua New Guinea's maternal and child mortality, Mr O'Neill's decision late last year to pay for women to give birth in a clinic or hospital is in reality an admission of defeat, Sir Mekere said.

"Experts in the field say it demonstrates that his funding cuts have destroyed rural and remote health services, where people need it the most," he said. "It is a cop-out – he has put the proper funding of the health system into the too-hard-basket.

"It is the same with his decision to bring in foreign doctors and nurses. He would rather do that than train Papua New Guineans – another lazy, uncaring cop-out."

Sir Mekere, who is standing as a candidate for the seat of Moresby North-West, said the statistics were shocking. About 1500 women die in childbirth every year, and about 45 babies out of every 1000 die. The UN estimates that about 12,000 children under five die each year.

A recent ADB report shows that PNG has some of the worst health indicators in the Asia-Pacific region:

- The prevalence of stunting among children under the age of five is 49.5 percent, ranking 29<sup>th</sup> of 30 countries with information
- The prevalence of malnutrition (wasting) among children under five is 14.3 percent, the highest rate for 30 countries
- The maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births is 215, the equal third highest of 40 countries
- The under-five mortality rate per 1000 live births is 57, the fourth highest of 43 countries
- The number of new HIV aids infections in 2015 is 0.36 per 1000 of the uninfected population, the highest of 21 countries
- The tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 people is 432, the second highest of 44 countries
- The incidence of malaria per 1000 people is 185, nearly double the next highest incidence

"This is why Papua New Guinea needs a properly planned and adequately funded reform program with the assistance of our international friends and partners," Sir Mekere said.

"Nothing else can repair the immense damage Peter O'Neill has done to the health system, and undo the immense suffering his corruption, waste and mismanagement have caused."