

Atlantic Centre  
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Women's Health

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## RESEARCH PROJECT:

**GENDER  
DIFFERENCES IN  
PERCEPTIONS ON  
NATIONAL HEALTH  
INSURANCE IN  
SOUTH AFRICA**



## National Health Insurance (NHI) in South Africa: What's in it for women's health?

By Meredith Evans (mgbevans@gmail.com)

### What is the research project?

Meredith Evans is one of two ACEWH CIDA IYIP interns currently in Cape Town, South Africa at the Human Sciences Research Council. Meredith and Dr. Olive Shisana, CEO of the HSRC, published a paper titled "Gender differences in public perceptions on National Health Insurance" in the *South African Medical Journal* this December (2012;102(12):918-924). The data for this study comes from the 2010 South African Social Attitudes Survey, a nationally-representative survey that solicits public opinions.

### Why is NHI an issue for women?

The authors highlight that South Africa's current transition to universal health insurance through National Health Insurance (NHI) is an important issue for women: they shoulder a huge burden of disease, particularly high rates of HIV/AIDS and TB, and they face high rates of maternal mortality and gender-based violence. Furthermore, as the authors note, women are major users of the public health care system, with the result that their health will be significantly affected by the shift to

National Health Insurance.

### Which women are affected and involved?

Because women are more likely than men to live in poverty and are less likely to have access to private medical insurance, NHI will have a significant effect on women in South Africa, particularly low-income black women who suffer most the inequalities that are the legacy of apartheid and that continue to define who has access to private medical insurance. The authors argue that a well-funded public health system through NHI will reduce the disproportionate economic barriers to health care experienced by women.

### What did they find?

The authors found that although public support for NHI is very high amongst all South Africans, women demonstrate higher rates of support for the policy than do men. Support also differed significantly according to race, with white South African men and women least supportive. The authors argue that high public support for NHI among women and non-whites reflects how NHI has the potential to positively affect women's lives, especially the lives of low-income black women.

### What key themes emerged?

A key theme that emerged from in the research was the importance of including women's voices, needs and experiences in the planning and delivery of NHI. This will also ensure that future NHI implementation and interventions strategies are gender-sensitive and will address women's and men's gendered needs in the new health care system.

### What was the feedback?

Dr. Shisana presented "Public Perceptions on National Health Insurance" on December 6, 2012 in Pretoria, South Africa at the 2012 International Science Seminar on "Practical aspects of implementing a single payer National Health Insurance (NHI) universal coverage in South Africa: Experiences from other countries." The findings were extremely well-received by other conference presenters and participants.

You can view Dr. Shisana's presentation at:

<http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Document-4630.phtml>

and the SAMJ article at:

<http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/6397/4634>