

MEDIA STATEMENT

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EMBARGO: GEEN

GEMS DECREASES CONTRIBUTION INCREASE!

Educators in the employ of the Government are celebrating today!

Government employees are bound by a Collective Agreement to form part of the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS) should they wish to receive a medical aid subsidy from the employer.

GEMS, a medical scheme with close to 880 000 members, holds the monopoly on Government Employees, and misused this position by increasing member contributions excessively.

In a period where workers are under severe financial pressure, with increases in fuel and food prices, the recent 4% salary increase implemented in April, is not nearly enough to buffer these excessive GEMS contribution increases. In 2025 the average contribution increase was 13.5%. During information sharing sessions with labour GEMS indicated that the 2026 contribution increases would be less. It was therefore shocking when GEMS announced an average contribution increase of 9.8% for 2026.

After several engagements between labour and GEMS, the decision was taken to reduce the contribution increase to 9.5%. After peaceful protests in which the SAOU participated, where demands by labour was presented to GEMS, it was clear that a stalemate was reached.

Labour indicated that bullying by GEMS was no longer acceptable. After all these interactions GEMS announced today that the contribution increase would be reduced to 7.5%.

Why is this seen as a gain?

- GEMS (as medical aid) was established to be an organisation for Government employees.
- GEMS has a social responsibility to its members to provide affordable health care.
- In the current financial climate, teachers should not be confronted with a choice between a medical aid and the necessary means to survive. A closed medical scheme has the responsibility to be affordable to its members.
- It is, however, necessary that an entity such as GEMS should be held accountable for the management and governance as a scheme.

The SAOU would like to extend our appreciation to members for their dedication and support in this process, and we would like to assure every member that we will fight to protect your rights and benefits.