

STRATEGIC PLAN

2022 - 2024

SUMMARY

The global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed massive inequalities in public health. Prior to COVID-19 only about half of public health spending in South Africa went to the poorest 82% of people who have the greatest burden of disease. Internationally, while less than 5% of Africans are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, countries in the global north are administering 'booster' shots. Indefensible knowledge monopolies to maximise profits have caused unequal access to health products to become the key international, human rights, legal and moral issue of our time.

The **Health Justice Initiative** (HJI) works to change this. The HJI uses the law, research, and advocacy tools to work towards ensuring access to lifesaving diagnostics, treatment, and vaccines by advocating for a more inclusive, equitable public health system, and not just for COVID.

The HJI was launched in July 2020 in South Africa, in response to the clear crisis in public health that was aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We work to address the factors that influence inequity in health access, leveraging lessons from the pandemic to reform the system, with a specific focus on inequalities based on race, class, and gender and on access to medicines.

With extensive experience in social justice and health activism, research, and the law, including in the fight for anti-retroviral drugs during the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa, the HJI team is well positioned to use lessons from public health crises of the past and present to change the rules of the game for future generations. The process to complete our exciting new 3-year strategy has just been completed, setting out the following objectives:

OBJECTIVES

Over the next 3 years, using research, advocacy, litigation, education, and training tools, the HJI aims to:

1. Reform legislation to support Universal Health Coverage.

- Develop a framework for transparency in selection, procurement, private sector contracting and the pricing of health products;
- Conduct research on how the medicine pricing system in South Africa could be amended;
- Develop educational materials, submissions and training that advance the implementation of National Health Insurance.

2. Address the structural determinants of ill health and the legal and socio-economic barriers to health for the most vulnerable.

- Advocate for the repeal and amendment of laws and policies that create barriers to health for women, poor people, marginalised and criminalised populations;
- Support laws and policies that provide an enabling environment for health rights and defend attempts to erode these.

3. Reform law and policies to address barriers to affordable and fair access to life-saving medical technologies.

- Advocate for non-market-based solutions and the de-commodification of medical technologies locally and globally, with a focus on intellectual property rules and trade and competition barriers to access;
- Use constitutional and competition law, industrial policy, and other legal avenues to scale up affordable access to medicines and other technologies;
- Track the Research & Development pipeline of key health innovations (especially for diseases considered as 'neglected').

4. Ensure transparency and accountability of the public and private health sectors.

- Advocate and litigate for transparency of health product regulatory agencies, the Health Department, and the private sector;
- Advocate for greater funding and independence for the health product regulator and other relevant statutory bodies.

THE HJI'S APPROACH

We use a wide range of tools to respond to every opportunity for systemic change. We conduct research and time-sensitive analysis and submissions, convene educational webinars, and initiate innovative advocacy campaigns. We identify opportunities to translate research into policy and legal precedent, and strategically use social and traditional media to disseminate information, to educate, and to help shape progressive narratives on health justice.

THE HJI'S TEAM, ADVISORY GROUP, AND KEY PARTNERS

Fatima Hassan founder and director	Dr Marlise Richter senior researcher	Althea Adonis project administrator	Yanga Nokhepheyi junior researcher
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The HJI has a committed **Board** and **Reference Advisory Group** made up of some of the most respected voices in public health and social justice in South Africa and across the globe.

We recognise the value of partnership in building a transformative regional and global coalition of access advocates. We work with local stakeholders that focus on rights protections within the health sector more broadly, adding our unique focus on intellectual property reform and accountability of the pharmaceutical industry. We partner with international NGOs, regional and global multilateral bodies, and draw on the evidence and expertise of researchers in law, public policy, economics, and public health, as well as universities and scientific experts in and outside of South Africa.

We are fiscally hosted by Speer, a division of the WITS Health Consortium, ensuring strong fiscal management and oversight of our operations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

With just a small team and some seed funding over the past year, we have been able to achieve a lot:

- With allies, public health experts, advisors and pro bono legal teams, we supported (through an amicus submission, research and advocacy campaigns) the introduction of single vaccine roll-out programme in South Africa, to ensure that wealth or medical insurance did not become a proxy for priority access.
- We have been advocating for greater transparency of all scientific advice and decision making to ensure that science, not politics or commercial considerations determines access. In addition, we are now ready to commence litigating to compel the disclosure of all vaccine manufacturer contracts, to break the secrecy that is characteristic of this pandemic.
- We worked for months to track missing vaccine supplies in the country. With investigative journalists, whistle-blowers and partner organisations we helped expose a pharmaceutical giant that was, without government restriction, exporting vaccines filled in South Africa to Europe at a time when the continent desperately needed supplies. When the story broke, internationally, this led to the AU stepping in more forcefully, the EU pausing the exports. This in turn led to a commitment by the company to prioritise supplies for Africa.
- We have become one of the leading voices on vaccine apartheid and health equity in this pandemic, frequently writing for major publications, being called on by several international media houses, journalists, civil society, funders, government officials, academia and the private sector to share our ideas on how to generate efforts to overcome inequity in vaccine access.

South Africa is a perfect test case for our ambition of transforming the rules underlying the unequal global health system. We can use the unique and time-bound opportunity afforded by the pandemic to hold pharmaceutical companies accountable, to reset Intellectual Property laws and to overcome secrecy in the development and production of life-saving health technologies, for everyone, everywhere.

For more information, please contact: Fatima Hassan, Founder and Director

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