

# Centre for quadriplegics may have to close if Gauteng funding cuts are implemented

Gauteng Department of Social Development says funding decisions will be finalised before the end of March.

By Daniel Steyn 28 Mar 2024



Many non-profit organisations in Gauteng fear for their future in the face of looming funding cuts by the Gauteng Department of Social Development. Photo: Creative Commons Pixabay

- Non-profit organisations in Gauteng caring for children, the elderly, and disabled people fear that their funding may be cut in the new financial year, starting 1 April.
- The Gauteng Department of Social Development denies budget cuts are planned but the provincial budget for 2024/25 shows that funding for organisations will be reduced by R223m.
- Organisations that have received funding from the department for decades fear that they will be rejected based on unclear new compliance criteria.

July Mathebula, who manages the House Otto Self-Help Centre for quadriplegics in Kempton Park, fears that looming budget cuts by the Gauteng Department of Social Development may force him to close down.

According to the Provincial Treasury's budget, [subsidies for non-profit organisations](#) like House Otto are to be cut by R223m in 2024. Mathebula says that if the centre's application for funding from the department is unsuccessful, he will not have enough money in reserve to continue operating beyond April.

Quadriplegics are paralysed from the neck down. Without 24-hour care and regular turning and washing, they can develop life-threatening conditions, such as septicaemia.

House Otto has received government subsidies for decades. But beside the planned budget cuts, mystery surrounding new [adjudication panels](#), and a general lack of communication from the department have caused anxiety that subsidies will be cut from 1 April.

"We can't get out of bed on our own, we can't bath, we can't cook. If we need to turn, we cannot turn," says Chantelle Venter, who manages Remme-los, a self-help centre for quadriplegics and paraplegics in Primrose. Two of Remme-los's caregivers are funded by the Department of Social Development.



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The Gauteng Department of Social Development paid R2.1-billion in subsidies to non-profit organisations in 2023 - 39% of the department's total budget for that year.

The planned budget cuts have been criticised by the Gauteng Care Crisis Committee, a network of 50 organisations, in a [statement](#) on 7 March. In a subsequent [TV interview](#), MEC for Social Development Mbali Hlophe dispelled rumours of budget cuts. But the Treasury's budget [clearly shows](#) that R223m less has been set aside for organisations in 2024 than in 2023.

*GroundUp* asked the department's spokesperson, Themba Gadebe, to clarify Hlophe's remarks, but he did not respond.

A forensic audit of organisations that receive money from the provincial government was announced by Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi in February 2023. At least four senior Department of Social Development officials involved in grant funding allocations have since been [suspended](#).

Meanwhile, the new adjudication panels, set up to avoid the type of fraud and corruption the forensic audit seems to have unveiled, are [shrouded in mystery](#). R15m, diverted from a programme to supply dignity packs for women, was set aside to fund the independent panels, but so far no information has been provided about the structure of the panels.

In a [statement](#) on 20 March, the department said that adjudications will be completed by the end of March and funds would be allocated by the end of April. Organisations were told not to "panic" and that compliant organisations would not lose the funding.



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"Compliance is an important anchor of governance, transparency and ethos, and remains the responsibility of non-profit organisations to be always in good standing, ensuring safekeeping and care of our beloved beneficiaries," the statement reads.

But organisations told *GroundUp* they are concerned that the criteria for compliance have changed without notice and that they will be found non-compliant after years of receiving subsidies from the department. The department did not respond to *GroundUp*'s questions about compliance criteria.

Sima Diar, programmes manager at the Nisaa Institute for Women's Development, told *GroundUp* that usually by November every year, there would be a panel discussion between organisations and department representatives to discuss the organisations' reporting and targets. But no such meeting was held in 2023.

Three organisations *GroundUp* has spoken to have received visits from department officials in recent weeks.

Officials have been working off a new checklist and requesting documents that had never been required before, according to Trienie Drotschie, the director of child protection organisation Tutela Family Care. Meanwhile, emails sent to higher-rank department officials have gone unanswered, Drotschie says.

The business plans organisations had previously submitted to the department were valid for three years. Tutela's business plan was valid until 2025, but in November organisations were unexpectedly told to submit new business plans, Drotschie says.

The department [stated](#) that organisations whose funding is rejected will be given the opportunity to argue their case. “If there are justifiable reasons to reconsider, the department will certainly do so. This will be on a case-by-case basis,” the statement reads.



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Tutela Family Care, which has eight offices managing more than 2,000 cases of children who need protection from abuse, receives between 60% and 70% of its annual budget from the government. Drotschie says that most of the organisation's services will have to be stopped should government subsidies not continue in April.

The Nisaa Institute for Women's Development, which provides a range of services to abused women and children, is also highly dependent on government subsidies. About 90% of Nisaa's salaries are funded by the department, says Diar.

Impilo Child Protection and Adoption Services provides adoption services that involve specialised legal work. Impilo employs ten social workers and has 150 cases a month, ranging from adoption and foster care to abandoned children. “We're back to where we were at the end of the last financial year,” says Sue Krawitz, Impilo's director.

In 2023/2024, R417.6m was cut from the department's budget for social care services. “We were told we were getting 60% less,” Krawitz recalls. After protests by non-profit organisations, the decision to cut the budget was partially reversed, although R172m was still cut.

Krawitz says the top-down approach to cutting funding is damaging to the non-profit organisations and their beneficiaries. “If you want to cut our funding, do it in a way where you negotiate, and over a period of time,” Krawitz told *GroundUp*.

The Gauteng Department of Social Development's spokesperson, Themba Gadebe, did not respond directly to *GroundUp* questions and instead sent us a [media statement](#) dated 20 March that does not address all our questions.

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