

South African Satisfaction Index 2005 results

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In its fourth year of existence, the 2005 SAS Index has measured two new industries - Medical Schemes and Municipalities - revealing that, overall, these industries have a big gap for improvement potential.

Medihelp evolved as a leader across the board with the highest satisfaction score and lowest proportion of dissatisfied customers. It is followed by the City of Cape Town, which showed the highest satisfaction levels amongst the municipalities researched.

Overall, however, the reported satisfaction is on average much lower for medical aids and municipalities than seen in Telecommunications, Banking and Long-Term Insurance last year, with cellular providers remaining unchallenged for first position.

Sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry (dti), the study is an annual initiative to encourage competitiveness across industries. It is consumer-driven and comparable to the American (ACSI) and European (EPSI) studies, showing once again that satisfaction levels in South Africa seem to be higher than those overseas, according to Albert McLean, managing director of global research company Synovate South Africa.

Looking at the industries individually, spiralling membership costs and uncertainty caused by changing legislation have exacerbated the negative sentiment felt by many South Africans towards what is essentially a grudge purchase - medical cover.

For all the companies measured, perceived value was the greatest stumbling block, with customers clearly not considering the costs to be reasonable. Recent changes to legislation, which will make medical aid more accessible to lower income groups, may make it increasingly difficult to meet customers' expectations in this regard.

Medihelp tops the list in terms of satisfied customers, outperforming their competitors in many aspects and achieving the lowest Dissatisfaction Index.

Discovery Health also proved to be performing satisfactorily in the eyes of their customers, achieving the second highest score amongst the Medical Aids. It is interesting that Discovery seems to have taken the first step towards overcoming the problem of lack of value for money - Discovery customers are more likely to believe that Discovery is doing what it can to keep premiums as low as possible.

Ethekwini Municipality (Durban), the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality (Port Elisabeth) could not match Cape Town's performance and also did not meet the standards set by most of the organisations measured by SAS Index in other industries.

While Cape Town Municipality generally outperformed the other three municipalities in terms of their service delivery, their superiority in satisfying residents was not limited to these services. When comparing the performance of their staff to those of private organisations, Cape Town's municipal staff compare favourably in many respects, including friendliness, honesty and helpfulness.

The City of Johannesburg disappointed its ratepayers arriving in the last place amongst the four measured municipalities. Areas of particular concern were health and transportation - actions taken in these areas is clearly not meeting the expectations of the people in this city.

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