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Ministry Funding Healthy Lifestyle Advertisements

By Lena Smirnova

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Despite the latest state campaign, funding for the media plan is down. **Andrei Makhonin**

The Health Ministry is pushing ahead in its efforts to wean Russians off tobacco and drugs through a series of television advertisements that promote healthy lifestyles, although this year the number of ads has been cut in half.

The ministry has allocated 55 million rubles ($1.7 million) for a media plan to place healthy lifestyle ads on a variety of television channels.

The goal of the initiative is "to motivate the residents of the Russian Federation to lead healthy lifestyles, including decreasing the levels of tobacco consumption," according to the tender documentation posted on the state's purchasing website.

But a tender for
a media plan to

place TV
advertisements
promoting
health living is
valued at less
than half the
cost of last
year’s program.

The videos will also direct Russians to sources where they can get additional information on a better health regimen, specifically the Internet portal takzdorovo.ru and a hotline for questions about tobacco, alcohol and drugs, as well as nutrition.

Similar videos were released last year, except at that time the contract for the television media plan was pegged at 176.6 million rubles. In the end, the contract was for to 131.8 million rubles, more than twice the current offered price.

Officials at the Health Ministry said that less money was allocated for health ads in 2013 because the videos are meant to reach a smaller audience. State run health center experts were also quick to assert that the television advertisements are helping to improve people's attitudes to health.

"This is the most effective method of getting through to people," said Grigory Gerasimov, acting head of a health clinic in Moscow. "When people are hit in the face with what they didn't expect to see, it helps them to rise up against evils."

He added that government spending on these health ads would be justified if they are professional produced.

In the past, the Health Ministry released ad campaigns where cartoon people are complimented for having an "attractive liver," "charming blood vessels," and "elegant joints." Most infamously, the ministry launched an ad featuring a so-called "squirrel from hell," which threatens to plague the minds of delirious drunks.

"Look me in the eyes. In the eyes, I said! I'm not the Health Ministry. I'm not going to warn you," the squirrel admonishes in a sequel to his first performance, which debuted in 2011.

The new 15- and 30-second ads to promote healthy lifestyles will appear no later than Sept. 30, according to the tender documents. There will be at least three types of clips to be run on at least six television channels, including during prime time.

The advertising campaign follows a state program against smoking and alcoholism, initiated in 2010. Some of the key aims of the new program are to decrease consumption of pure alcohol to 10 liters per capita from the current 19 liters, and reduce the number of smokers from 40 to 25 percent of the population by 2015.

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