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Budget for HIV Medications in 2017 Cut by 13.5% Despite Growing Epidemic

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Russia's Health Ministry has cut the budget allocated for buying HIV medications in 2017 by 13.5 percent — from 20.8 billion rubles ($320 million) spent in 2016 to 18 billion rubles ($277 million) in 2017, the RBC news website reported Friday.

As the result of the cuts, the newest HIV medications, recommended by the World Health Organization, haven't made the government's list of essential medicines that helps regulate the prices on drugs and is used for state procurement procedures. "Macroeconomic measures" are to blame for it, the Ministry's medicines department head Yelena Maksimkina is quoted as saying in the report.

Including new, more effective medications in the list does warrant more funds, but at the same time it helps stopping diseases from spreading and, in the long run, saves government money, director of the Pharmaceutical Innovations association Vadim Kukava told RBC.

"The system is not effective. In 10 regions [the authorities] unofficially declared an HIV epidemic, but [they are] trying to save money on [HIV medications]. Our research shows that twice more money should be allocated for the medications," he said.

Last week Russia's Health Minister Veronika Skvortsova announced that the spread of HIV has become "critical" in 10 Russian regions. The Sverdlovsk region recently made headlines when it was revealed that 1.8 percent of the capital Yekaterinburg's population is living with HIV, the highest rate in the country.

The number of new cases of HIV has been growing since the late 1990s, according to statistics of the Moscow-based Federal Center for Fighting AIDS. The number of cases of HIV registered in Russia reached one million in December 2015. Currently, there are more than 854,000 people living with HIV diagnosis. Only 261,000 of them are on treatment due to limited funds.

UNAIDS has reported that Russia has the largest HIV epidemic in the European region, and one of the fastest growing HIV epidemics in the world.

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