

# Russian Health Ministry Abandons Plans to Spend Additional 70 Billion Rubles on Fighting HIV Epidemic

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The Russian Health Ministry has abandoned a proposal to allocate additional funding to the fight against the spread of HIV. According to the RBC news agency, the ministry submitted a four-year plan to the federal government this week that does not include a proposal to spend 70 billion rubles (\$1.2 billion) on new efforts to treat HIV-infected patients and fight the spread of the disease.

The Health Ministry's plan reportedly abandons the injection of another 17.5 billion rubles (almost \$300 million) into Russia's annual budget for treating HIV patients and fighting the spread of the deadly disease, following objections from Russia's Finance Ministry.

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Supporters of the additional funding had proposed spending another 13.2 billion rubles (\$222 million) annually to treat patients diagnosed with HIV, and using the remainder of the money to help diagnose patients and control the spread of the disease.

The money, it was hoped, could have subsidized antiretroviral therapy for all patients registered with Russia's AIDS centers by 2020, and increased the share of the population being tested for HIV to 35 percent. In 2015, only 19.3 percent of Russia's population was being tested for HIV, and just a third of Russians infected with HIV were receiving drug therapy for the condition.

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According to RBC, Russia's Finance Ministry rejected the allocation of 70 billion rubles to fighting HIV over the next four years, citing a lack of federal funds. In a statement sent to the Health Ministry on Dec. 22, First Deputy Finance Minister Tatyana Nesterenko explained that additional government funds for fighting HIV will have to wait until the federal budget gains new sources of revenue.

According to the most recently published data, more than 854,000 people living in Russia today have been diagnosed with HIV. Due to limited funds and resources, only 261,000 of these individuals are receiving antiretroviral treatment.

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