Positive People to Receive First-Time ARV Therapy in Afghanistan

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Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) will for the first time offer antiretroviral (ARV) therapy to 40 of the 504 known HIV-positive people living in the country, IRIN/PlusNews reports. There are 2,000 to 2,500 suspected HIV/AIDS cases nationwide.

According to the article, multiple donors provided funding for the drugs, which will be distributed at no cost in the Kabul and Herat provinces with the possibility of future distributions. "We have earmarked $50,000 for the initial procurement," said Saif ur-Rehman, head the MoPH's national HIV/AIDS program.

Yet while more than $30 million has been pledged to Afghanistan's HIV/AIDS control program since its 2003 launch, IRIN/PlusNews reports that the nation is relatively late in terms of the global battle against HIV/AIDS. The number of Afghanistan's officially documented cases is among the world's lowest, but the potential for further infections remains high due to the country's armed conflict, lack of HIV/AIDS awareness, limited access to health and education, rising rates of intravenous drug use and the poor social status of women.

Health officials and aid workers say they hope the Joint U.N. Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) will bring Afghanistan up to speed. UNAIDS plans to open an office in the country this year.

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