



Tennessee Rejects Money to Prevent HIV

Experts worry that the move is political and that other states may do the same.

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Tennessee's Republican leadership announced that the state's health department will turn down free federal funding to help prevent HIV, reported The Commercial Appeal.

"Restricting access to HIV prevention and testing could lead to increased rates of HIV infection, greater health care expenses and sicker communities," noted amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, in a statement urging the Tennessee Department of Health to reconsider its decision.

Health experts are concerned that other conservative states may also reject HIV funds. In Tennessee's case, the money was available through grants from the Ending the HIV Epidemic in the United States initiative, which was launched by President Trump and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Such funding goes through the Tennessee Department of Health and is distributed to nonprofits that provide HIV prevention, testing, treatment and other services.

The CDC provides as much as \$10 million to Tennessee for HIV programs, Greg Millett, the director of public policy for amfAR, told NBC News. It is unclear how much funding will be rejected this year. Calling the decision by Tennessee's officials "devastating," Millett added, "If other states follow suit, we're going to be in trouble."

Advocates and Democratic law-makers argue that Tennessee's decision is based on politics, not science. That's because some federal funding goes to HIV programs at Planned Parenthood, which provides sexual health services, including abortions, which many conservative leaders oppose.

Nonprofit groups in Tennessee that receive federal HIV grants were notified that the funding would end May 31 and that the state health department "will utilize other state initiatives to support all HIV prevention and surveillance staff and activities in funded metro health departments, and those contracts will be in place by June 1, 2023," reported The Commercial Appeal.

As NBC reports, about 20,000 people are estimated to be living with HIV in Tennessee. "I can't understand why the state would give back funds targeted toward health care," Diane Duke, president and CEO of Friends for Life, a Memphis HIV service provider, told NBC. "It's outrageous." Friends for Life is one of the organizations that received notice that its federal funding would end.

