

## **Uzbekistan Short of HIV Drugs**

**Author:** [News Briefing Central Asia](#)

A shortage of retroviral medicines used to treat HIV/AIDS in Uzbekistan is being put down to the government's policy of understating national infection rates, and hence the amount of drugs it needs to buy.

The modern treatment method for people with HIV or AIDS is based on a combination of medical substances and is known as highly-active antiretroviral therapy, or HAART. The medication is supposed to be provided through Uzbekistan's state healthcare system, together with free consultations with outreach health workers.

One man from the town of Syrdarya in central Uzbekistan said he had been living with HIV for three-and-a-half years, but since the beginning of January his supply of free HAART medication had been cut.

"I was warned that if I made a fuss about the HAART shortage, everyone in the town would be told about my illness, and people would point me out like a leper," he said. "It would be easier to die more swiftly."

Irina Muromova, who works for an NGO in the capital Tashkent, believes health ministry has reduced availability of HAART because the statistics are held at an artificially low level.

In December, Normat Atabay, director of Uzbekistan's National AIDS Centre, told journalists that the number of new HIV cases fell by 13 per cent over the course of 2012. He said there were somewhere over 25,000 recorded cases in the country.

"In reality, the number of cases is increasing every year," Muromova said. "Many people are dying although they could live if there were drugs available. The government doesn't care what happens to them."

The United Nations HIV/AIDS programme, UNAIDS, believes the total number of cases is over 100,000, at least four times the official figure.

"Since 2006, new infections have been growing at a steady and high growth rate," a UNAIDS staffer said on condition of anonymity. "The significant reduction claimed by healthcare workers isn't happening."

The UNAIDS employee believes that the government wants to minimise the existence of HIV to in pursuit other authorities hide the real number of cases as a matter of national pride, and that it especially does not want publicity for cases of transmission via unsterile medical instruments.

An employee of the National AIDS Centre who did not want to be named acknowledged that there was not enough HAART medication for all patients, as only a fixed amount was purchased every year, with no allowance for the increase in demand.

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