

Lok Sabha passed a 'historic' HIV AIDS Prevention and Control Bill



The Lok Sabha passed a crucial bill to ensure equal rights to the HIV affected people in terms of getting jobs or admissions and verbal promises to stand committed for free treatment to all HIV patients.

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Bill 2017 was passed by Lok Sabha on Tuesday. The Bill aims to achieve equality and ensure that the HIV/AIDS positive people are not discriminated in terms of getting jobs or education; but it also mentions that the access to treatment for HIV positive people be given 'as far as possible'.

To camouflage that, Union Health Minister J P Nadda made a verbal commitment in the House that all the HIV/AIDS positive patients would get free treatment. Nadda added that "We do not have to write this in the Bill, we stand committed [to providing free treatment to HIV positive people].".

According to the newly passed bill, there will be no discrimination with HIV and AIDS patients and is meant for their empowerment and whosoever does not adhere to the provisions of the bill will be penalised; and there will also be civil and criminal legal proceedings against them. The Bill lists various grounds on which discrimination against HIV positive persons and those living with them is prohibited. It has provisions to safeguard the property rights of HIV positive people. The minister said that every HIV infected or affected person below the age of 18 years has the right to reside in a shared household and enjoy the facilities of the household.

The new law also partially covers the treatment section with the provision stating that the central and state governments are obliged to provide Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) and management of opportunistic infections which are the viruses and bacteria who take advantage of the weakness of HIV patient's immune system and occur frequently.

Nadda also said that the rate of new HIV infections has dropped by 67%, from 2.5 lakh to 85,000 and AIDS related deaths have declined to 54% per cent, which is more than the global average. India runs the second largest ART programme in the world and it is said that the government has spent Rs 2000 Crore on ART alone in the past year.

The battle against the fatally spreading disease persists and with new laws and support from the government, new hopes of triumph against vile disease raises and as always, hope sustains life.