GOVERNMENT HAS INJECTED an additional half-million dollars into the HIV/AIDS campaign.

Minister of Health John Boyce said yesterday that the injection for this financial year was approved because the Ministry of Finance “readily” realised that starting the new Treat All programme “would be an investment which would reduce health costs in the long term”.

Speaking at the official launch at the Ministry of Health, Boyce explained that Barbados was adopting the Treat All recommendation by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in September 2015 that all people living with HIV should start treatment as soon as possible after diagnosis.

The programme, which will see them receiving life-long treatment, was started in March with pregnant women. It was expanded to patients at the Ladymead Reference Unit in October, and as of yesterday, would now be offered at facilities islandwide.

The estimated cost to run the programme was just under $6 million per year.

There were 1 700 people in care at the end of last year. Close to 600 more people, who have already been diagnosed, will now be eligible for lifelong treatment as well.

Boyce was positive that offering lifelong treatment to all infected people would be a sustainable undertaking for the Government.

“I spoke during my brief presentation to the whole question of an investment, recognising that it is an investment in health care for the future. Once this treatment kicks in fully, the actual overall cost of treating HIV persons in Barbados will be ultimately reduced. That is the objective, and it is sustainable,” he deduced.

Pan-American Health Organisation representative for the Eastern Caribbean, Dr Godfrey Xuereb, echoed the minister’s sentiments.

“What we are saving, apart from saving lives, is we are saving money from complications, because if a person with any disease, not just HIV, gets complications, the bill for the Ministry of Health is higher. So this is something that is an approach I know that the minister is very keen on, to have prevention at an early stage, to have treatment at an early stage.

“And that was why my message to those who are on treatment is take your medication . . . . Somebody who takes their medication and prevents complication saves the Ministry of Health. So it’s an investment and it’s a positive investment which should get return . . . .” Xuereb said.

Boyce noted that implementation of the WHO Treat All approach would build on the gains they had been seeing with the HIV response over the last decade.

He encouraged Barbadians to assist in the efforts by practising safe sex, getting tested for HIV, accessing HIV care services if necessary, and to stop the discrimination against those with HIV or who were considered to be at greater risk for HIV. (YB)