

Govt mulls 3,000 low-cost drug stores in 2 years

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THE government plans to open 3,000 Jan Aushadhi stores, which sell unbranded generic drugs at heavy discounts to branded drugs, in the next two years, an official at the department of pharmaceuticals said. The government will also launch a national media campaign on the lines of the pulse polio immunisation programme to popularise the low-cost drug chain, the official said, requesting anonymity. The department of pharmaceuticals launched the Jan Aushadhi programme in late-2008 to sell unbranded drugs and medicine under their chemical names to the masses.

Drugs sold using the chemical name have the same therapeutic efficacy as branded ones. But, most people are not aware of this and insist on the costlier brand recommended by physicians. The planned expansion, which is expected to cost ₹100 crore, including the media campaign, will make Jan Aushadhi the largest pharmacy chain in the country ahead of Apollo Pharmacy that has 1,200 outlets. The proposal has been sent to the Planning Commission for approval, the official added.

At present, there are 44 Jan Aushadhi stores across seven states, including Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Orissa. This is way beyond the original plan of opening a Jan Aushadhi store in each of the 626 districts in India by the end of 2011. The Union health ministry and the governments of Rajasthan and Delhi have already made it mandatory for government-owned hospitals and autonomous institutions to mention the generic name of a drug when they prescribe a medicine. At present, Jan Aushadhi stores sell about 230 commonly used medicines such as antibiotics, painkillers, vitamins and gastrointestinal medicines sourced from the state-run drug companies.

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