

Germany passes unpopular health system reforms

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Germany's parliament Friday passed some unpopular reforms to the country's creaking health system that will increase the financial burden on patients in a bid to ease yawning healthcare deficits.

After months of squabbling, Berlin finally settled on a scheme that sees total premiums rise to 15.5 percent of employees' gross pay from the current 14.9 percent from January 1.

Deputies voted by 306 to 253 to pass the disputed legislation.

Federal Health Minister Philipp Roesler said the reforms would "not only solve the problems in 2011 but would be the start of a fair and better system."

"This is our contribution to growth and employment," he added.

Germany's healthcare system is praised for its quality but it is also one of the most expensive in the world.

Roesler has said that if he had not taken action, the system's deficit would have hit 11 billion euros (15 billion dollars) in 2011.

But the minister has come under fire for sparing privately insured patients, who are wealthier on average than those under the state insurance scheme and make up about 10 percent of the population.

Previous reforms in 2006 and 2008 also resulted in higher contributions.

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