

France saves 1bn euros on health insurance spending

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At a time of deep austerity across Europe, France has managed to spend one billion euros (\$1.4 billion) less than expected on health insurance last year, the government said Tuesday.

"Not only will the national objective for health care insurance spending be respected, but we already know that we registered under-spending of more than one billion euros," Budget Minister Bernard Cazeneuve told a parliamentary finance committee.

But state [health care insurance](#), which is partly funded out of payroll taxes, still ran a deficit of 7.7 billion euros last year. The government wants to get that under 6.2 billion euros this year.

Health spending in France, envied for its robust public health care system, is an unwieldy section of the budget, but has risen less than forecast in recent years.

In 2013, the spending increase had been set at 2.7 percent, to a total of 175.4 billion euros.

The savings came mainly on less spending on transport, massage and physical therapy, and daily allowances for the long-term ill.

French President Francois Hollande has urged the public health sector to help cut spending by reining in excessive drug prescriptions.

Cazeneuve also said Tuesday the government had cut its wage bill by 200 million euros in 2013. The figure is a target for big austerity cuts in France, which plans to cut 3,000 state jobs this year, mainly from "non-priority" ministries such as defence and finance.

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