

ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH: Response to the Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic in Ukraine

(Situation report as of April 30, 2020)



Key approaches to activities during the lockdown announced in Ukraine:

- **Maintaining the possibility to deliver services** to the members of key populations while complying with all the required safety standards and advocating for the access to services
- **Adapting and reformatting** the activities, which currently cannot be implemented due to the lockdown restrictions (organizing online workshops/trainings, remote consultations, etc.)
- **Changes in the program activities** agreed with donors to minimize the cases and negative consequences of COVID-19 (information sessions and materials, distribution of personal protection equipment, etc.)
- **Urgent procurement** of personal protection equipment and rapid tests for COVID-19.



Alliance for Public Health together with its partner organizations continues working on the frontline of the response to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis.

Problems and challenges

- **Complicated access to services** (HIV/HCV testing, access to consumables, detection of new TB cases) in some places due to the transportation being restricted or stopped or operation of the health facilities interrupted or reformatted. Solutions: sending materials via Nova Poshta delivery services, revision of the routes and schedules of mobile vans. Some activities have been temporarily suspended (TB detection).
- There is a **need in new services**. For instance, clients from among trans* people, people who use drugs and sex workers have limited resources, most of them have lost their jobs, so they need additional consultations and material support. Trans* people complain that they are not able to buy hormonal therapy medicines, which are vital for them. They need additional consultations and support.
- Some regions are **running out of pre-exposure prophylaxis drugs**. Solution: communication with PHC on timely delivery of such drugs.
- **Reduced number of clients** in some projects (in particular, some clients of the project for adolescents went back home to stay with their parents and/or lost access to stable internet connection).
- **The number of health facilities testing for HIV within HealthLink project considerably decreased** because infection disease hospitals (departments) operate as the key sites to provide medical aid to the patients with COVID-19, while others minimize the number of visits due to the quarantine measures (only 38 facilities out of 147 are still doing active testing).
- **Issues in separate regions:** problems with the launch of case management in Poltava and Khmelnytskyi regions among PWID and in Dnipro region among MSM due to the movement restrictions, reduction in the number of HIV cases detected at outreach routes, and problematic registration of clients in health facilities due to the restricted mode of their operation.

HIV

Activities within the current Global Fund grant

All the NGOs implementing the projects supported by the Global Fund **continue operating in their standard mode** complying with all the required prevention measures. Reformatting of certain service delivery procedures did not have a significant impact on the quality and results of their operation. To support partner organizations, **online workshops** were organized for case managers and social workers involved in *Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis of HIV Infection* project, **with revised guidelines** on implementing case management, PrEP, and optimized case finding.

Mobile clinics (MCs): 35.9 thousand visits of KP members were reported by 32 mobile clinics (97% of the target achievement).

- **Key changes:** changes in operation/relocation of the service delivery sites. MCs operate in all the regions, while some of them also deliver ARVs to the sites dispensing medications to PLWH in districts.



Overdose prevention with Naloxone: the activities are performed according to the plan, with 14.3 thousand ampoules of this vital medicine distributed since the beginning of this year.

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis of HIV (PrEP): the activities are performed according to the plan, with the total number of people taking PrEP amounting to 1.2 thousand, among them one thousand MSM (71% of the expected six-month coverage).

Prevention among trans* people: the activities are performed according to the plan, taking all the necessary precautions, with the coverage of 1.1 thousand people (52%).

- **Key changes:**
 - o Most consultations are provided online or in the venues agreed with the clients.
 - o Information and advertising are disseminated through social media.
 - o Online outreach approach is implemented to cover the maximum number of clients.



Case management: the activities are going on with minor changes in the format of work. Thanks to the project, 213 clients were registered for medical follow-up. Number of people initiated on ART – 164 (79% of the planned indicator for six months).

Optimized Case Finding/OCF with Case Management (Community-Initiated Treatment Intervention (CITI) (Supported by the Global Fund)

The activities are carried out according to the plan with all the necessary precautions.

- **Key changes:**
 - o Client visits are organized through prior appointments with mandatory telephone screening for symptoms.

- Case managers work with the clients remotely, with minimized visits to the health facilities.
- The six-month indicator is achieved by 41%.

Improvement of HIV detection and access to treatment for people who inject drugs in Ukraine (supported by CDC)

- Key changes:

- A scheme was developed and implemented to work with the clients, who due to the lockdown restrictions found themselves in the circumstances, which may lead to HIV treatment interruption.
- Recommendations on the additional epidemiological and personal protection measures are performed to prepare for any possible cases of infections among NGO staff members and actions in such cases.
- In March-April, 10,061 clients were tested for HIV in the OCF project, 585 of them tested positive and were referred to CITI to receive case manager's support in getting registered with an AIDS center and starting treatment.

Improvement of HIV detection and access to treatment for people who inject drugs in Ukraine supported by the Key Population Investment Fund (KPIF)

- Key changes:

- Partial reformatting of the operation of mobile teams with the focus on the clients with low adherence to ART.
- Delivery of ARVs to the project clients who live in remote areas to ensure uninterrupted provision of the health services.
- In March-April, 3,393 clients were tested for HIV in the KPIF project, 345 of them tested positive. With the help of social workers from mobile teams, 267 project clients started ART.



Innovative collaboration between civil society and the healthcare system to effectively identify and treat HIV in Ukraine as part of the HealthLink Project to Accelerate Ukraine's Efforts to End HIV in Ukraine

- Key changes:

- Despite the fact that there are fewer tests done in health facilities, testing is continued in community centers, NGO offices and through distribution of the oral self-tests.

- Innovative approaches:

- For HIV+ clients not to interrupt ART, NGOs reformatting their work, focusing on the delivery of ARVs.
- MSM projects started to actively deliver oral self-tests to their clients through postal services (with 479 tests distributed) and Safe Boxes. More details: <https://oraltest.org.ua/>.
- An additional module 'Doctors' is developed to provide online counseling to the key populations at the platform <https://help24.org.ua/uk/>



Photo: Contents of a Safe Box

Underage, Overlooked: Improving Access to Integrated HIV Services for Adolescents Most at Risk in Ukraine

- *Key changes:* partner NGOs actively implement online activities (webinars and consultations using Instagram, Telegram, Zoom and over the phone). In April, **308** online consultations were organized.
- *Innovative approaches:* To promote **Free2ask** mobile app, an online contest was held with prizes for active engagement of friends to follow the social media pages of partner NGOs. The post to announce this contest received **1,112** comments. The donor supported the idea to continue work in such format.

OPIOID SUBSTITUTION TREATMENT

Activities within the **Global Fund supported project** and International Technical Support Project **Improved Quality and Sustainability of Medication Assisted Treatment in Ukraine** funded by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The OST program in Ukraine is implemented according to the plan with additional precautions taken to prevent the spread of coronavirus. New patients continue to be enrolled.

- *Key changes:*
 - o Almost 90% of patients receive their take-home doses for up to ten days from health facilities.
 - o Online consultations are provided.
 - o Working hours of the OST sites were optimized to ensure comfortable distribution of the streams of clients and to avoid crowds of people.
- *Innovative approaches:*
 - o With informational support of the PHC, an RBF (results-based funding) project has been launched to motivate health workers to enroll and retain new patients in the program.
 - o One of the key prerequisites to facilitate fast approval of the OST patients to receive take-home doses for ten days: over 50,000 rapid tests to detect psychoactive substances (PAS) have been delivered.

About 90% of OST patients currently receive take-home doses for ten days

- *Advocacy* and protection of the patients' rights
 - o Detailed **information and request** has been sent to the National Police of Ukraine and other law-enforcement agencies on **prevention of any violations of the rights of OST patients**, who receive take-home doses of their OST drugs during the lockdown period.
 - o **The National Drug Use and OST Hotline** actively operates providing information on:
 - medical aspects of the safe use of medications for the OST patients
 - operation of the OST program during the lockdown period
 - advocating for the take-home doses to be given to patients

The Hotline interventions allowed issuing permits for the OST patients to use public transport in Kryvyi Rih and Dnipro

Detailed information on OST during the COVID-19 pandemic: <http://aph.org.ua/uk/novyny/zpt-v-umovah-pandemiyi/>

Improving Treatment Services for OST Patients' Mental Disorders

There have been no significant changes in the treatment of OST patients with antidepressants because of the lockdown. Antidepressants are dispensed to patients together with methadone/buprenorphine. New patients continue to be enrolled.

TUBERCULOSIS (Global Fund-supported projects)

- *Key changes:*
 - o Active detection of TB at **outreach routes** among homeless persons and ex-prisoners is suspended, with screening only partly offered in homeless reintegration centers in Poltava.
 - o As for the **prevention activities in Roma population**, screening is performed, but it is not possible to bring all the clients who screen positive for diagnostics as the public transport is not working.
- *Innovative approaches:*
 - o Remote control over the preventive treatment of TB clients has been introduced.
 - o Online counseling is offered.

HEPATITIS C

Management of HIV/HCV Co-Infection: Expanding Access to Community-Based Hepatitis C Diagnostics and Treatment for HIV/HCV Co-Infected Patients from the Key Populations

Almost 1,200 patients are currently covered with community-based treatment of hepatitis C.

- *Key changes:*
 - o The **direct physical contact** of doctors and case managers with patients in closed premises is minimized, with interaction organized outside with at least two-meter distance between people or remotely.
 - o Re-infection prevention sessions are postponed, canceled or organized **remotely**. The content of such sessions has been revised with a focus on counseling about the risks of COVID-19 and proper use of personal protection equipment.
 - o Considering that some patients live very far from the health facilities, multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) and doctors are **allowed to dispense a stock of drugs for 8-12-16-20 weeks** instead of the traditional four weeks. MDTs make decisions on the stock of drugs to be dispensed on a case-by-case basis depending on the patient's adherence to treatment and his safe behavior practices.



ADVOCACY

Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect HIV Response (PITCH)

Project activities are implemented according to the plan (Kyiv city and region, Poltava, Donetsk, Odesa, and Kherson regions), with a request submitted to donors on reformatting the activities to procure individual protection equipment for the staff of partner NGOs and their clients. Specialized awareness-raising materials are in the process of development and adaptation.

PROCUREMENT:

An extraordinary delivery of the first consignment of **personal protection equipment** for 97 partner NGOs and health facilities in all regions of Ukraine has been conducted (125 addresses):

- 750 liters of antibacterial and disinfecting substances
- 46,300 three-layer protective face masks
- 22,500 medical gloves (standard and reinforced)



The total value of the personal protective equipment delivered to the health facilities is almost one million hryvnias. The work is underway to procure innovative **rapid tests** for COVID-19.

INFORMATION SHARING:

- Specialized information materials are developed and distributed on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on various key populations (PWID, OST patients, sex workers, MSM, trans* people) and basic safety information (hands hygiene, safe sexual behaviors, COVID-19 and HCV). All the materials are freely available at <http://aph.org.ua/uk/novyny/alyans-ne-zalishayetsya-ostoron-pandemiyi-covid-19/>
- Latest information on the best practices of work in the times of pandemic can be accessed at the Alliance Facebook page (AlliancePublicHealth) with hashtag #ЗавждиНаПередовій (#AlwaysAtTheFrontline)

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