

# ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH Response to the Challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic in Ukraine (Situation report as of August 17, 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 for organizations and institutions serving vulnerable populations



**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



- **Changing healthcare priorities in the regions** — the problem of HIV has given way to the issue of COVID.
- **Work at healthcare facilities is complicated:** severe restrictions aimed at fighting COVID at healthcare facilities, shifting hospital departments to serving COVID patients, periodic coronavirus outbreaks in some of the departments that get then quarantined, placing health workers on mobile coronavirus testing teams — all these factors lead to reduction of the quantity of healthcare facilities involved in HIV testing and other services.
- **Complicated regular training** of social workers and NGO area managers due to unavailability of offline training sessions. *Solution: developing online training; a series of new trainings has been planned for the second half of the year.*

## 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 **has had no significant impact on the quality and results of their operation**. The NGOs are daily supported through phone calls and Zoom meetings. To support the partners, 7 online trainings (for 120 social workers, case managers, case finders and line managers) were held and two video-guides were produced in the period from April to June.



**Mobile clinics** (MCs) were the most in-demand service in the first half of the year.

- Clients from risk groups paid 73895 visits to 32 MCs
- MCs operate in all the regions, and some of them also deliver ARVs to the sites dispensing medications to PLWH in district center towns.

**Overdose prevention with Naloxone:** the full scope of Naloxone required to prevent overdosing was procured. The activities are conducted in a routine mode, with necessary measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis of HIV (PrEP):** 25 partner NGOs in 23 regions of Ukraine and the city of Kyiv implement this activity routinely. In the first six months, PrEP services were provided to 1669 persons, including 1345 MSM (135% of the six-month indicator) and 324 persons representing other KPs.

**Prevention among trans\* people:** the activities are performed in the normal mode, with the necessary prevention measures. 10 NGOs reached 1996 trans\* people (95%).

*Key changes:*

- Most consultations are provided online or at venues agreed with the clients.
- NGOs disseminate information about the prevention services via social media and perform online outreach to reach to the necessary number of clients.
- In two oblasts (Odesa and Lviv), a pilot project on introduction of a self-testing service with a chat-bot was launched.

**Case management:** the work continues within a slightly changed format. The project linked 343 clients to care. 253 persons started ART, which is over 100% of the six-month indicator.

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

The activities are carried out as usual, with the necessary prevention measures.

- *Key changes:*

- 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:*
  - An algorithm was developed and implemented for working with clients at risk of HIV treatment interruption due to the lockdown.
  - Two three-day online trainings on implementation of new project components were held for partner organizations.
  - A series of online meetings for technical assistance to project teams was held.
  - Recommendations were given on additional anti-epidemic measures and personal safety to prepare to infections among NGO staff, and on the procedure for such events.
  - From March to July, 26 315 clients were tested for HIV under the OCF project; of them, 1311 were tested positive and referred to the CITI to receive case management services on reaching the AIDS center and initiating treatment.

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

- *Key changes:*
  - In March and April 2020, the format of work of 4 mobile teams was somewhat changed to focus on clients with low adherence to ART; ART medicine delivery was arranged for project's clients residing in remote rayons of the oblast to ensure continuity of health services.
  - Since May 1, 2020, all the teams fully resumed their work under the previously established model.
  - An intervention was launched to provide long-term social support to clients who were prescribed HIV treatment aiming to create strong adherence to ART and receiving health services among PWID.

### **The lockdown has not affected achieving program targets:**

- In the period from March to July, 11 268 clients were tested, including 1087 who were tested positive for HIV.
- Social worker helped 873 clients of the project to start ART. Mobile teams organized delivery of 657 dispatches with ART medicines for clients of the KPIF project and other projects living in remote rayons

### **Innovative collaboration between civil society and the healthcare system to effectively identify and treat HIV in Ukraine as a part of the HealthLink Project to Accelerate Ukraine's Efforts to End HIV in Ukraine implemented with the support from USAID**

- *Key changes:*
  - Despite the fact that fewer tests are done at healthcare facilities, testing continues at community centers, NGO offices and through distribution of oral self-tests.
  - To restrict access to NGO offices and community centers, it is now required to get a prior appointment for testing.
  - Supervisions are now exclusively remote.
  - The format of the survey among residents of 11 large amalgamated communities was changed. The survey is



a part of an operational study of the needs of socio-medical services. New survey modalities were introduced: via phone, online, via official web sites of amalgamated communities, and at Administrative Services Centers (ASCs).

From May to August 10, the number of new persons to have received consultations and testing for HIV and learnt their results decreased by 3% compared with the previous period. Overall percentage of HIV detection has changed: it has become lower at HCFs (1.7% compared with 2.2% in the previous quarter), yet higher at NGOs' — 3.4% in comparison with 2.8% respectively. Figures of prevention services for MSM remain unchanged.

- *Innovative approaches:*

- **Visits by infection disease doctors from the AIDS Center to HCFs** for registration of patients and prescribing and dispensing ART to patients who were tested positive for HIV (the city of Mariupol). During lockdown, this form of work allowed shortening the time for linkage to care and prescription of ART.
- Free distribution of oral tests, condoms and lubricants via **testomates/condomates**. 10 testomates/condomates have been installed in 4 regions of Ukraine: Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. From May to August, 319 oral tests and the same number of prevention kits were distributed through the testomates.
- **Delivery of ART medicines to HIV-positive clients** (Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad oblasts) via "Nova Poshta" delivery company (369 packages), road transport (32), pedestrian routes/city transport using special passes for social workers provided by municipal authorities for the time of the lockdown (11).

## ADOLESCENTS

HIV prevention among adolescents with risk behaviors: due to the lockdown, more efforts were targeted at online activities. Meeting new and previously engaged clients is in outreach mode: distribution of handouts and medical testing are done with the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Presently, visits to sites in the oblast have been resumed, and all stationary centers for adolescents are operating while abiding by lockdown-related requirements. From March to June 2020, the services were provided to **768 clients**.

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

- Partner NGOs are actively implementing online work formats (webinars and counselling via **Free2ask** mobile app, Instagram, Telegram, Zoom and by phone).

### Voices of Youth project supported by Flexible Investment Fund

- In May, four Zoom-webinars were conducted for adolescents who use psychoactive substances. Topics of the webinars were "Leadership", "Advocacy", "Mental Health" and "Sexual and Reproductive Health". The webinars were attended by **104** adolescents and **8** youth workers from 9 regions of Ukraine.

## OPIOID SUBSTITUTION THERAPY

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 80% of patients receive their take-home doses for up to ten days from health facilities.
  - o Online consultations are provided, including trainings for site personnel.
  - o Working hours of the OST sites and social workers providing psychosocial support for OST patients were optimized to ensure comfortable distribution of streams of clients and to avoid overcrowding.



**About 80% of OST patients have been switched to 10-day take-home doses**

- *Innovative approaches:*
  - o With informational support of the PHC, an RBF (results-based funding) project has been launched to motivate health workers to enrol and retain new patients in the program. Under this new model, **250 new patients were enrolled** in the period from April to July.
  - 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, as well as additional 12,690 PAS tests in July.
  - o During the lockdown until the end of 2020, it is planned to reconstruct and equip 10 new sites, including 3 at SPSU institutions and 7 already existing sites.

### 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)

Currently, all early detection projects are basically resumed, and screening is actively implemented among homeless people, former convicts, Roma population, IDPs, residents of "grey zones" of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, as well as people in difficult life situations who practice alcohol abuse. **In the first six months, the screening has covered 96% of virtually all target populations (85% among Roma people).**

- *Innovations and good practices:*
  - o Under the project of early detection of TB among contact persons, all indicators are at **100%** of targets.
  - o After loosening of lockdown restrictions, the project of early detection of TB among risk groups is gradually resumed. For a more effective work of NGOs, a series of **webinars "Remote motivational counselling of clients on TB in the situation of new challenges"** was held and attended by over 300 participants.



- Under the project “Medical and Social Support of Patients with Drug-Susceptible/DR TB” involving continuing support of patients with TB/DR TB, with the target indicator being up to 5%, only two patients with drug-susceptible TB terminated treatment, which is equal to 0.27%, and **no patients with DR TB terminated their treatment.**

## 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

Presently, 2300 patients are covered with community-based treatment of hepatitis C. During the lockdown:

- there were **no cases of treatment termination** because of lockdown restrictions — thanks to committed work of social workers
- more than **1200** patients completed a full course of treatment
- retention rate during the lockdown reached **99.5%**
- social workers were provided with **personal protection equipment**
- three mandatory sessions on prevention of re-infection were held with each patient individually



*Photo: a patient's drawing from a session on preventing an HCV re-infection*

No **new patients** were enrolled for treatment in the period from March to June. **Since July, the second enrolment stage started.** Enrolment rate is slowed down by lockdown restrictions on daily receipt of planned patients at HCFs.

## ADVOCACY

### Activities under Global Fund Project

- detailed information and a demand to prevent violation of rights of OST patients switched to unobserved OST with 10-day take-home doses were submitted to the National Police of Ukraine and other law-enforcement authorities.
- A series of workshops for police officers on HIV prevention, drug dependence and OST was conducted in the regions (1436 participants)



### 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 personal protection equipment for the staff of partner NGOs and their clients, etc. In particular, extra funding has allowed to extend the operations of the [National Hot Line on Drug Dependence and OST](#). Until the end of the year, operators will respond to phone calls daily, from 06:00 to 23:00. There were 5% more calls than in the same period of 2019. Also, the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown restrictions imposed in the country led to significant changes in topics that were discussed. In the first half of 2020, calls with questions about the

coronavirus (what it is, how to behave, what to do, where can masks be obtained, how the lockdown is going to affect the program) comprised almost 9% of the total number of calls.

## PROCUREMENT:

**Personal protection equipment** is procured on a regular basis. The total cost of the PPE procured for partner organizations and healthcare facilities all around Ukraine was almost 1 million hryvnias. **12 thousand litres of disinfectants, 344 thousand masks and 34.6 thousand pairs of gloves were distributed.**

Responding to a request from the State Penal Service of Ukraine, the Alliance supplied PPE for personnel of penitentiary institutions and patients that continue their opioid dependence therapy and hepatitis C treatment with our support in the context of COVID-19. The following PPE was handed over: alcohol wipes — 500 thousand pcs., medical gloves — 5.6 thousand pairs, antibacterial hand sanitizer — 75 litres, disposable masks — 51 thousand pcs.



## 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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