USAID | KAZAKHSTAN
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CASE STUDY
Improving Access to Services

New voucher system expands access to health services to include most-at-risk populations

Photo: PSI Kazakhstan

Denis, right, providing information to injecting drug users at a World AIDS Day event.

"I want to keep working on case management, prevention, treatment, advocacy and human rights for people living with HIV/AIDS – this is my way of life."

–Denis, HIV positive outreach worker

After a decade of incarcerations and intravenous drug use, Denis was ready to turn his life around. Being HIV positive meant he often ran into barriers trying to access basic health services. He turned to the USAID Dialogue on HIV and TB project for education and assistance. Now, he is a senior social worker with the project and provides outreach and support to other HIV positive people. His passion for his work is clear. "When I got out of prison, I understood that no one knew our needs better than us, and programs and projects could not exist without us."

Denis can testify to the barriers people most-at-risk to contracting AIDS experience trying to access health services. Often they are discouraged from receiving social and medical services because of stigma. Due to their lifestyle or migrant status, they lack the documents (ID, passports) required for registration at medical facilities. In Kazakhstan, in order to receive social and medical services, an individual needs to be registered as living in that area, which makes it especially difficult for migrants and prisoners to receive access to services.

Thanks to the hard work of committed individuals like Denis, access is increasing for those who need it most. HIV advocates have been working with the government of Kazakhstan to create an alternative way for people to access care without needing residency documentation. In summer 2011, government orders were issued to implement a referral voucher system in state health care facilities in Ust-Kamenogorsk and Karaganda. A voucher allows people to access HIV and TB services without presenting local identification and residency documents.

This decision improves the quality of free healthcare services in diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis, HIV, and drug addiction. It also ensures effective collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations. The orders make the provision of free health care services to populations most at risk of contracting AIDS compulsory, regardless of an individual's place of residence, as long as the individual has a voucher.

Trainings for health providers were held to familiarize participants with the referral voucher system. More than 2,000 people most at risk of contracting HIV now have the chance to receive confidential social and medical services free of charge because of this change. In 2011, USAID's prevention activities reached 11,663 people most at risk, and linked 946 clients to HIV testing through the voucher referral system.

Denis is committed to using his new skills to do outreach work in Ust-Kamenogorsk and to help others. "I want to keep working on case management, prevention, treatment, advocacy and human rights for people living with HIV—this is my way of life."