



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

KAZAKHSTAN

CASE STUDY

Drop-In Center Helps People in Need

USAID helps open a center that provides counseling and medical support to drug users



The drop-in center in Aksu is ready for visitors. Photo: PSI

“Our drop-in center is a unique place where drug users can come and get help, where they can just have a cup of tea and share with others what bothers them.”

- Anar Aidarhanova, director of the Zhardem nongovernmental organization that runs the USAID-supported drop-in center.

CHALLENGE: Kazakhstan has more cases of HIV than any other of its four Central Asian neighbors. Currently, the infection is concentrated among injecting drug users and is mostly transmitted through infected syringes and needles while injecting drugs. There are 43 thousand registered drug users although the true number is estimated to be five times greater. Almost 90 percent of the HIV infected people are 15-39 year old, and nearly 80 percent of them are men, mostly unemployed or serving a prison sentence. Even though the epidemic is concentrated among this group of population, it has a high potential to spread rapidly into the general population.

INITIATIVE: To prevent the spread of the infection, USAID’s HIV/AIDS reduction project focused on improving preventive service for at-risk populations in one of the worst-affected areas of the country – Aksu City in Pavlodar Province. The closest AIDS center is located far away from Aksu, and very few injecting drug users can afford to visit it on a regular basis,” says Anar Aidarhanova, director of *Zhardem* nongovernmental organization. To help injecting drug users and sex workers receive medical support and counseling, USAID’s project worked with *Zhardem* to open a pilot drop-in center in Aksu. The USAID project helped the nongovernmental organization to secure funding for the center, develop its operations, and organize outreach work.

RESULT: Within the first six months, more than 600 people received services and information at the center. “We have already earned credibility and people are not afraid to and seek help from us,” says Aidarhanova. The drop-in center provides medical and social services for drug abusers, and conducts educational discussions and consultations. Drug abusers are able to receive referral for medical treatment. Those counseled have an opportunity to shower, wash their clothes, and receive other basic services. The center also conducts trainings for the city’s medical staff, law enforcement bodies, teachers, and students.

The referral system is another unique feature of this initiative. “So far, this center is the only place in the area that offers short detoxication courses,” says Aidarhanova. “Only yesterday we had parents asking to help their children to get detoxication.”

Aidarhanova is convinced that such centers are needed in many parts of Central Asia. “The drop-in center is a unique place where drug users can come and get help, where they can just have a cup of tea and share with others what bothers them.”