

IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN UKRAINE

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Background:

There is high HIV/Hepatitis C virus (HCV) burden among people who use drugs (PWUD) in Ukraine, with HCV prevalence estimated at over 63%. While the community views harm reduction, opioid agonist therapy (OAT), and HIV/HCV testing and treatment services positively, they have also reported new challenges, exacerbated by war: reduced operating hours, increased reporting burdens, phone-based verification as a condition for service access, uneven geographical coverage, and limited OAT dosing flexibility. It is essential that the community can report and monitor service delivery using methods that work best for them.

Methods:

To develop an effective community led monitoring (CLM) approach, PUD.UA piloted several data collection methods in 2025. These included digital questionnaires integrated into a Telegram chatbot for rapid service assessment (developed in partnership with Health Advocacy Coalition); online surveys (Google Forms and SurveyMonkey); focus group discussions (FGDs) with PWUD.

Results:

The Telegram chatbot demonstrated the highest level of user engagement due to widespread Telegram use in Ukraine (62% of population) and its ability to send assessments without external links; however, chatbot development required more technical resources than standard online survey tools. Google Forms enabled rapid survey deployment and basic analytics without additional costs, but required separate links for each data collection, reducing respondent retention, and many individuals without Google accounts experienced technical difficulties. SurveyMonkey provided advanced analytics and flexible survey logic options, but several critical functions required the paid version, limiting routine use. FGDs complemented quantitative data with additional information on barriers and client needs, but were resource intensive and security dependent.

Conclusion:

Our experience found that combining the Telegram chatbot for digital data collection with periodic FGDs was most effective. The CLM approach in 2025–2026 confirmed its relevance as a mechanism for supporting service quality and generating evidence-based recommendations for service providers and governmental institutions.

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