

COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING OF PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE AS A MECHANISM TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES

Authors: Dymaretskyi O¹, Kozar I¹, Deyneka Y¹, Matveyko J¹, Ahafonov K², Kolibabchuk O², Gustafson K³, Granger K³, Farley J³, Green K⁴

1. Charitable Organization "Charitable Fund "Ukrainian Network of People who Use Drugs", Kyiv, Ukraine. 2. PATH, Kyiv, Ukraine. 3. PATH, USA. 4. PATH, Geneva, Switzerland.

Background: Community-led monitoring (CLM) is a tool for identifying service provision and access gaps, mobilizing the community, and driving advocacy and policy. Ukraine's national network of people who use drugs (PUD.UA), would like to share CLM approaches for CLM in harm reduction settings that have proven effective despite limited resources, heightened risks, and other challenges.

Methods: With PATH's technical support, PUD.UA adapted their existing CLM questionnaire to include hepatitis C virus (HCV), and drafted other new CLM tools including focus group discussion (FGD) guides, a facility assessment tool, and a clinician survey. From October–December 2024, PUD.UA conducted four FGDs and gather surveys from 164 people who inject drugs (PWID), as well as a comprehensive assessment of the two harm reduction sites in Lviv and Sumy.

Results: Respondents were 77% men and 23% women. Nearly all (95%) used harm reduction programs; 83% were satisfied with opioid substitution therapy (OST); however, some were concerned about continued access to OST during the war due to their mobility. Over half (54%) of participants had received Naloxone for overdose prevention; and 73% underwent HIV testing every six months. 77% respondents are registered with a confirmed HCV diagnosis, and 49% respondents were tested for HCV in the last six months. More than half of the respondents received information on overdose prevention. Participants responded that insufficient needles and syringes were distributed at NSPs and some bought needles and syringes at pharmacies. PUD.UA was able to effectively perform CLM activities with new tools and training and analyze the results.

Conclusion: CLM activities enable direct community action: PUD.UA uses findings for paralegal support to PWID, clinician sensitization, service adaptation due to war, mobilization of partner organizations, and national advocacy. The active involvement of PUD.UA and other community members contributes to improved access to services among PWID in Ukraine.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.