

# Partnering with the Ministry of Justice to launch and scale Ukraine's first-ever medication-assisted treatment as part of comprehensive HIV prevention services for prisoners with opioid dependency.

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## Background

- HIV prevalence in prisons in Ukraine was 8.9% in 2019, and 90% of people incarcerated for drug crimes continue using drugs while in prison.
- Access to harm reduction services in prison settings is critical to prevent HIV transmission while addressing substance use disorders.
- No drug-related harm reduction programs existed in Ukrainian prisons before 2019.
- To address this, the USAID-funded, PATH-led Serving Life project partnered with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) of Ukraine to launch and scale the first medication-assisted therapy (MAT) pilot in prisons.

## Description

2018

- No MAT services available in Ukrainian prisons
- Project-led advocacy to MOJ to integrate MAT into the comprehensive care package in penal settings
- Development of an SOP to guide MAT program enrollment
- MOJ order signed to pilot MAT at one prison
- MOJ MAT pilot working group created and supported

2019

- MAT pilot launched at one pilot prison
- Medical advisory board and multidisciplinary care team created.
- Psychosocial support, MAT adherence counseling, and HIV testing services provided as part of MAT services
- Linked to MAT in civil sector upon release
- MOJ order signed to expand MAT to four more prisons

2020

- Four MAT sites were opened
- Established MAT rooms at pilot sites equipped with required commodities
- Linkage to MAT in civil sector upon release

2021

- Plans to scale up MAT to 3 more prisons
- Continued advocacy for approval of the Inter-ministerial Order that will officially allow MAT in prisons to sustain its availability and continuation

2022

- As of February 24, 2022 (beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war):
  - Scale-up of MAT to three more prisons halted during the war
  - MAT stopped for 73 clients in the temporarily occupied Khersonska oblast (after detoxification)
  - 4 clients evacuated from Zaporizka oblast and continued MAT in the other region
  - As of June 30, 2022, 34 clients continue receiving MAT in Poltavaska oblast without interruption (supported by Serving Life) and 85 clients receive MAT in six penal settings (supported by MOJ.)

## Lessons

**187** clients received MAT through Serving Life from December 2019 to June 2022.

Among these, **62** are PLHIV, **60** of whom are on ART

**34** clients are currently receiving MAT with Serving Life support (as of June 2022)

Among **143** clients who completed MAT:

- **34** were linked to MAT services upon release
- **77** received detoxification
- **20** refused MAT
- **12** released



### MAT implementation during war

- The Russian-Ukrainian war, beginning on February 24, 2022, led to disruptions in MAT implementation
- The war has created challenges to linkage to MAT sites in the civil sector upon release, and this is no longer possible in occupied Khersonska oblast, and other temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine including Autonomous Republic Crimea, Donetsk, Luhanska, and Zaporizka oblasts.
- No overdoses have been reported.
- Prisoners are reporting health benefits of MAT, and no longer buy illegal drugs or share injecting equipment, decreasing HIV and viral hepatitis risk.



Implementation of the first pilot on medication assisted therapy for opioid-dependent prisoners in Ukrainian prisons supported by the PATH-led USAID Serving Life project. Photo/Mykola Dziuba, Coalition of HIV-Service NGOs.

## Conclusions

- Providing MAT services in Ukrainian prison settings is feasible and acceptable.
- MAT enables prisoners to decrease HIV risk and improve health outcomes, as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention package.
- Close partnership with the MOJ was critical to obtaining political will to launch MAT, and all efforts aim to transition MAT to MOJ for scale up.
- While war has compromised some activities and timelines during the project period, MOJ demonstrated the political will to continue MAT in those Ukrainian prisons that are located in non-occupied territories of Ukraine. As of June 30, 2022, **119** clients receive MAT in Ukrainian penal settings.