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SUCCESS STORY

SUPPORTING RELEASED PRISONERS IN TRANSITIONING TO CIVILIAN LIFE

USAID TB Control Program ensures continuity of TB care for released prisoners in Tajikistan



Photo Credit: USAID TB Control Program

Ahmad Safarov and his grandson, Vose District, Tajikistan

"Thanks to the training from the USAID TB Control Program, I did not even think about interrupting my TB treatment after returning home."

Ahmad Safarov

"When I was in prison, I was very worried about my family, which was left without a breadwinner," recalls 54-year-old Ahmad Safarov, "but what worried me even more was that I had the symptoms of tuberculosis (TB)." Ahmad made this realization when he attended an information session on TB prevention that the USAID TB Control Program held at his prison in Tajikistan. After learning about the symptoms and suspecting that he might have this infectious disease, Ahmad turned to the prison doctor for help. Further testing confirmed the diagnosis and Ahmad was immediately enrolled in treatment.

The burden of TB in Tajikistan is very high, but it is even greater in prisons. Overcrowding and a lack of awareness of how TB is transmitted are among the major reasons that prison populations are twice as likely to be infected with TB, compared to the general public. To help, USAID supports Tajikistan's National TB Program by training healthcare providers and inmates at penitentiary facilities on TB prevention, transmission, and the importance of staying in and completing treatment.

Being cured from TB can take as long as two years, and many inmates who start treatment while in prison must continue it long after their release. Recognizing the importance of ensuring a smooth transition and continuity of TB care, USAID provides support to TB patients who are returning home so that they successfully complete TB treatment.

Like other inmates who are transitioning to civilian life while undergoing TB treatment, the USAID TB Control Program enrolled Ahmad, upon his release, in START Plus – an outreach initiative that ensures patients diagnosed with TB or HIV while in prison continue and complete treatment after their release. "Thanks to the training provided by the USAID TB Control Program, I did not even think about interrupting my TB treatment," recalls Ahmad. When Ahmad returned home, a USAID-supported social worker accompanied him to the TB clinic, introduced him to a TB doctor, and helped him register for TB treatment continuation and social support.

For the next five months, Ahmad regularly visited the TB clinic for checkups and received legal aid counseling, food packages, and personal hygiene products. In January 2017, Ahmad completed TB treatment and received a clean bill of health. "The program staff treated me with great respect and they were like brothers and sisters to me," he noted.

Since 2015, the USAID TB Control Program has trained and provided services in TB prevention, treatment and care to over 1,200 inmates and 188 staff throughout Tajikistan's penitentiary facilities. USAID supports the Tajikistan Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population in implementing the National TB Program by providing more effective and accessible TB prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for all, including vulnerable populations. The main objective of the five-year, \$13.2 million USAID TB Control Program is to reduce the burden of tuberculosis and prevent multidrug-resistant forms of the disease. The program covers a wide range of technical areas, including strengthening the health system's capacity, expanding interagency coordination and cooperation, and improving timely access to TB diagnosis and treatment.