

SUCCESS STORY

TAJIKISTAN TAXI DRIVERS VOLUNTEER TO HELP EDUCATE PASSENGERS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TB TESTING AND TREATMENT

USAID trains taxi drivers to recognize the symptoms of Tuberculosis and encourage their passengers to get tested



Photo: USAID TB Control Program

Tuychi Bobokulov (center) distributes brochures on TB prevention and treatment to passengers

"TB makes the poor poorer and the vulnerable even more vulnerable. Knowing that I can help those with TB get healthy again makes me very proud of my work as a TB outreach volunteer."

Tuychi Bobokulov

For Tuychi Bobokulov, a taxi driver in Temurmalik district, Khatlon region, Tajikistan, everything changed in 2015 when he gave several USAID TB Control Program doctors a ride to check on a TB patient outside of the city. During the ride to the patient's home, the doctors explained that many people in the area were not seeking TB treatment because they believed a common misconception that TB is hereditary and not curable. Hearing that TB can be cured if the symptoms are recognized and treatment starts early, Bobokulov realized that his job provided the perfect opportunity to help people with TB get tested and cured.

According to the World Health Organization, every year, an estimated 4.1 million people worldwide contract TB but are not diagnosed and do not receive the necessary treatment. Engaging communities in TB prevention and detection can help reduce the spread of this infectious but curable disease. With this aim, USAID has trained over 620 volunteers, including community leaders, taxi drivers and staff at pharmacies and airline ticket sales offices across several regions of Tajikistan to raise TB awareness among the public and vulnerable groups. Volunteers were trained to recognize potential TB symptoms and to encourage those at risk to seek testing and treatment.

Driving the regular 3.5 hour route between Temurmalik and Tajikistan's capital city of Dushanbe, Bobokulov encounters as many as 40 passengers a day. Many of his passengers are labor migrants traveling in search of work or returning home, who are particularly vulnerable to TB infection. "Thanks to the USAID training, now if I hear a passenger coughing, I ask how long they have had the cough, if they have lost weight or their appetite, and whether they have experienced night sweats," notes Bobokulov, who keeps brochures on TB in his taxi and is always ready to share information about TB symptoms.

Knowing that a proper TB diagnosis is critical to ensuring the most appropriate treatment, Bobokulov explains that TB is curable and urges his passengers to get tested at a TB clinic. He often accompanies them to the TB center for testing and, if necessary, for treatment. After they are released from the hospital, he has continued to take some of them for outpatient treatment.

Reflecting on his commitment to TB control, Bobokulov explains: "TB makes the poor poorer and the vulnerable even more vulnerable. Knowing that I can help those with TB get healthy again makes me very proud of my work as a TB outreach volunteer."

USAID supports the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan in implementing its 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 USAID TB Control Program is to reduce the burden of TB and prevent multidrug-resistant forms of the disease in Tajikistan. The USAID TB Control Program covers a wide range of technical areas, including training health care workers to strengthen the health system, improving interagency coordination and cooperation, and increasing access to diagnosis and treatment.