



# SUCCESS STORY

## In Uzbekistan, Former TB Patient Finds Purpose in Reaching Out to Those Whose Experience He Knows Well

**USAID improves access to healthcare for vulnerable groups in Uzbekistan through peer outreach and support**



Photo Credit: USAID TB Control Program

Outreach worker Shavkat Tursunbayev encourages an elderly client to get tested for TB

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*Shavkat Tursunbayev*

Like many people in Uzbekistan, and around the world, Shavkat Tursunbayev has battled Tuberculosis (TB), a highly infectious but curable disease. After an initial infection ten years ago, he was re-infected while serving a prison sentence. Overcrowding and a lack of awareness of how TB infection is transmitted make inmates particularly vulnerable to TB. And compounding the problem, distrust of doctors and officials make former inmates particularly fearful of getting tested and seeking treatment.

In 2016, when he was still undergoing treatment for TB, which is free in Uzbekistan, Tursunbayev received support from a multidisciplinary team of health providers and outreach counselors established by USAID at a regional TB clinic in Karshi, a city in southeast Uzbekistan. To improve access to TB care, these teams provide comprehensive assistance, particularly to those who are most vulnerable to the disease, women, children, migrants, and former inmates. Outreach counselors taught Tursunbayev the importance of adhering to and completing his TB treatment and gave him the emotional support he needed to get better.

With a clean bill of health and a new approach to life, Tursunbayev decided to give help those who were struggling as he once had. He joined the multidisciplinary team that had supported him during his illness, starting as a volunteer and later, after receiving training from USAID, as a staff member responsible for outreach among one of the country's most vulnerable populations - one he knew well - former prison inmates.

Each day, Tursunbayev walks the streets of Karshi in search of individuals who may be at risk for TB. Looking in abandoned buildings, construction sites, or on the street, he finds potential clients and encourages them to get tested and seek treatment. Among his clients are individuals who previously started but interrupted TB treatment and now suffer from much more dangerous drug-resistant TB.

Understanding their challenges better than almost anyone else, Tursunbayev knows that many of his clients lack stable employment, a permanent home, or connections to their families and have personal and social needs that go be-

yond medical treatment. His experience in prison and his compassionate, non-judgmental approach makes Tursunbayev the perfect person to show these clients that health is their greatest asset and something they must protect.

“People come to trust me very quickly and agree to go to the TB clinic for testing,” reflects Tursunbayev. “I know how to talk to my clients and make them feel safe.” As a peer, he is able to forge strong connections that others can’t. “I love my work! Outreach is for me. If I can do some good and help people, I know my life is not for naught,” he reflects.

In the year since joining the multidisciplinary team, Tursunbayev has become a highly respected outreach counselor, valued equally by his teammates, his community, and the people he helps. His recent marriage and the upcoming birth of a child have been particularly encouraging for his clients. Through him, they see that TB can be cured and, like Tursunbayev, they can go on to lead lives full of purpose and fulfillment.

Since the start of the USAID TB Control Program in 2015, counselors like Tursunbayev have been working in four regions of Uzbekistan as part of multidisciplinary teams established by USAID and its national partners. The program has provided patient-centered outreach and support to nearly 28,000 individuals vulnerable to TB, with 148 patients enrolled in TB treatment and on the road to full recovery.