

All Ukraine Network of People Living with HIV (PLWH)

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In 1999, seven HIV-positive activists came together to create an initiative group to protect their rights, lobby for access to medical treatment and improve the quality of life for HIV-positive people in Ukraine. In 2000, the first general meeting of the Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWH) was organised and the Network was formally registered in 2001.

The Network has developed from a small group of activists to an all-Ukrainian organisation well known at national as well as international levels. Serving as an umbrella for regional representative offices and local organisations, initiatives and self-help groups, it has over 300 members and more than 13,000 clients, covering all 26 regions of Ukraine.

The Network's strategic directions are focused on improved access to non-medical care, treatment and support for PLWH; lobbying, advocacy and the protection of rights of PLWH and increased primary and secondary prevention of HIV and AIDS; promoting a tolerant attitude towards PLWH; and enhancement of its own organisational capacity. It has achieved significant impact in all these areas, particularly in lobbying and advocacy. As a result of meetings arranged between the President of Ukraine and representatives of the HIV-positive community, HIV and AIDS has been designated one of the priorities in the Ukrainian national health care sphere. Most recently, the Network, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, successfully lobbied for a threefold increase of the National Budget for HIV and AIDS in 2007. It was also influential in a decision to cancel the results of non-transparent tenders on the purchases of anti-retroviral therapy drugs, allowing more PLWH to access affordable treatment.

To address the stigma and discrimination against PLWH, the Network conducts relevant actions and media campaigns throughout Ukraine and has reached up to 19 million people. Its action, for example, on the Day of Solidarity with HIV-positive people (among other activities), raises attention regarding the HIV and AIDS epidemic and fosters solidarity with HIV-positive people, increasing the level of awareness on HIV and AIDS issues among the general public and fostering a more tolerant attitude towards HIV-positive people. The Network received an international Red Ribbon award for its achievements in combating stigma and discrimination related to PLWH. The award was presented to the organization at the XVI International HIV and AIDS conference in Toronto.

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Its progress in organisational development, including development of workplace and gender policies, geographic expansion, monitoring and evaluation systems, has led to its selection as a principal recipient in the 6th Global Fund round. The Network's wide success has become an inspiring model for other PLWH organizations in the former Soviet Union. It played a key role in the recent establishment of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Union of PLWH organisations (ECUO), which now represents 14 PLWH organizations and serves as a collective lobbying force in major decision making processes at national, regional and international levels. This is among the first regional grassroots initiatives to successfully emerge from the former Soviet Union. The Network's best practices are now being adapted and adopted across national boundaries, benefiting PLWH communities in nearly every country of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

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