

## PMTCT Project Helps Reduce Vertical Transmission in Ukraine, Improves Care for Women and Children with HIV

Since February 2005, AIHA's USAID-supported "Capacity Building to Prevent Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV in Ukraine Project" has been contributing to USAID's goal of providing comprehensive PMTCT services to 90 percent of at-risk women in eight high-burden oblasts by 2008.

Preliminary assessments and mentoring workshops indicate that the project has resulted in marked increases in key performance indicators, including prenatal registration of HIV-positive pregnant women, ARV prophylaxis for HIV-positive mothers and their newborns, family counseling for women living with HIV, and referral to NGOs for follow up care and support at all project sites.

In addition to demonstrating the many positive outcomes of the project, the assessment visits also revealed some of the key challenges pilot sites face as they work to implement prevention, treatment, and care activities. In particular, unreliable supplies of medications and testing reagents, lack of gloves and other supplies to help ensure the safety of healthcare workers, poor access to laboratory diagnostics to determine viral load, PCR, and CD4 counts, and lack of free family planning services emerged as the biggest obstacles for most sites.

These best practices and lessons learned were disseminated at a one-day conference conducted by AIHA on May 15 in Kyiv.

During the event, Dr. Nadiya Zhylyka, head of the Mother and Child Health Department at the Ukrainian Ministry of Health, talked about the important role partnerships between the Ministry and various international organizations are playing in the country's efforts to reduce



"This project has made a significant impact not only at the pilot site in Kryvy Rig, but throughout the whole oblast as well. Now we continuously disseminate information and work to expand the skills of our caregivers. The clinical results we've achieved have resulted in marked improvements in the quality of healthcare delivery to women with HIV at our maternity houses."

*—Dr. Valentyna Ginsburg, deputy head of the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Health Administration and AIHA project coordinator in the oblast.*

vertical transmission of HIV and otherwise improve treatment and support services available to women living with HIV – or those at risk of becoming infected – and their families.



Dr. Nadiya Zhyłka

“AIHA has helped us greatly in our efforts to implement effective, appropriate PMTCT services at the community and oblast levels,” Zhyłka said, explaining that one of the critical strengths of the project was its focus on integrating care and services across a broad spectrum of providers, including maternal/child health, AIDS care, and other clinical specialties, as well as professionals working with NGOs that provide social support to PLWH and their families.

Another Ukrainian expert, Dr. Alla Scherbinskaya, director of Ukraine’s National AIDS Center, discussed the impact the HIV/AIDS epidemic is having on Ukraine’s women and children while delegates from project sites in Crimea, Cherkassy, Chernigiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, and Odessa oblasts provided updates on the status of PMTCT services – as well as other related treatment, care, and support services – that are available in their regions as a result of the project.

Summing up the outcomes, Zhyłka concluded, “Each pilot site achieved substantial and sustainable results, and we are very grateful to AIHA – together with our caregivers – who helped many Ukrainian babies to be born without HIV.”