



Partnering to Build HIV/AIDS Capacity in Russia: Strengthening Reproductive Health Services for Women in Prison

AIHA is collaborating with the Irkutsk Branch of the Russian Red Cross (RRC) to improve reproductive health services for incarcerated women in Eastern Siberia. Activities under this USAID-supported project focus on three prison settlements in Bozoi, a village situated 120 kilometers from the city of Irkutsk. Together, these installations house more than 2,000 female inmates—20 percent of whom are living with HIV.

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Launch Date

- February 2007

Target Region

- Bozoi (Irkutsk Oblast)

Key Objective

- Improve quality of reproductive health services for incarcerated women
- Raise awareness of incarcerated women about their reproductive health
- Help women inmates make a successful transition upon their release

Key Accomplishments to Date

- 11 penal system medical workers trained (6 attended multiple workshops)
- 34 non-medical workers trained (11 attended multiple workshops)
- 22 inmates trained as peer educators
- More than 450 inmates participated in patient education classes
- More than 300 inmates received medical consultations

Incarcerated women represent an extremely vulnerable yet underserved segment of the population. Despite wide variations in age, education, and interests among Irkutsk inmates, the project unites them for a common purpose: improving their reproductive health and preparing them for a healthier life after discharge.

AIHA and RRC—along with technical experts from Albany Medical Center's AIDS Program and its Center of Excellence in HIV Correctional Health Care—train and mentor medical personnel working in correctional settings and non-medical staff from local institutions that provide specialized care and support to prisoners. Intensive workshops cover a wide range of topics, such as STI diagnosis and treatment, HIV/AIDS, ART, patient counseling, and prevention of professional burnout.

Educating and empowering inmates and developing transition plans for women prior to their release also play an important role in the project. Bi-monthly workshops provide inmates with information on reproductive health issues, while regular medical consultations with clinical experts help ensure timely diagnosis and treatment of existing conditions. The knowledge and self-confidence women gain through this comprehensive, client-centered approach helps them take better care of themselves while incarcerated, as well as after they are released.

AIHA and RRC have established resource centers at each settlement as part of a comprehensive, sustainable knowledge improvement plan. These centers feature educational materials, anatomical charts, and models that help inmates learn about health-related topics. The centers also provide information on where to go for care once they are released and will serve as a base for ongoing peer education after the project has ended.

This pilot project represents an effective, replicable model for improving reproductive health services for incarcerated women in Russia and other countries.

