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SUCCESS STORY

Engaging Communities to Support TB Patients and Their Families in Tajikistan

95 Community Health Committees (CHCs) and 25 Patient Support Groups (PSGs) have been established in Tajikistan through USAID TB Control Program



Tohirjon receives a daily checkup and medications



CHC members meet to discuss their community's support for TB patients and their families

"If the medicine hadn't been provided for free, I would not have been able to afford treatment and would never have been cured. Thanks to the support from the USAID TB Control Program and from my community and my family, now, my life is full of hope"

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Photos: Firuz Barotov

When 64-year old Tohirjon Negmatjonov from Yova Jamoat in Tajikistan's Sughd Region, felt weak, unwell, with high fever, and was unable to go to work as a security guard, his wife took him to a health facility where he was diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB).

Tohirjon and his wife were devastated to hear this news. They had heard that TB was incurable and feared that they would be ostracized by their community, and even if treatment were available, they would not be able afford it. Tohirjon's meager wages were barely sufficient to pay for the most basic needs of his family, including his grandchildren whom he has been supporting since the untimely death of his son – a migrant worker and the sole breadwinner for his family.

Damp and cold conditions at work and at home and electricity blackouts during long winter nights, coupled with shortages of food and a deep depression over his son's death further exacerbated Tohirjon's condition. In despair, he resigned himself to the fact that TB would kill him soon as well.

Tohirjon's dire outlook changed dramatically as a result of help from one of the 95 Community Health Committees (CHCs) and 25 Patient Support Groups (PSGs) that the USAID TB Control Program has established in Tajikistan by engaging communities to reach out to TB patients and encourage them to seek treatment. The assistance from CHCs and PSGs together with medical treatment dramatically improves TB outcomes. "This support ensures that patients complete the prescribed treatment," says Rano Rakhimova, the director of the Bobojon Gafurov District TB Center where 438 patients like Tohirjon are treated.

After completing the two-month free treatment at the hospital, Tohirjon continues to receive care at home. "Doctors and nurses come every day and personally give me four pills. If the medicine hadn't been provided for free, I would not have been able to afford treatment and would never have been cured. Thanks to the support from the USAID TB Control Program and from my community and family, now, my life is full of hope."

In addition to improving patients' access to diagnosis and treatment adherence through CHCs and psychosocial support through PSGs, the USAID TB program has provided TB prevention and TB stigma reduction education to 16,437 individuals throughout Tajikistan. Moreover, CHC members worked closely with Tohirjon's physician, Rafoat Mamadjonova, to encourage the community to support Tohirjon's and other TB patients' families with regular visits and meals from neighbors, and with food donations and free utilities provided by local authorities.

The USAID TB Control Program is a five-year program implementing an integrated and patient-centered approach that ensures better outcomes in TB treatment and prevention through training and implementation of successful cooperation among healthcare facilities, social services and local communities.