

# Empowering Health Care Consumers in Europe and Eurasia

## Overview:

Europe and Eurasia health care systems are struggling to address the enormous burden of infectious and non-communicable diseases and injuries. Doing so requires a much more active role of health care consumers and changes in their behaviors. To better understand this problem and possible solutions, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Europe and Eurasia (E&E) asked the Academy for Educational Development's Communication for Change (C-Change) Program to assess the region's experience in motivating health care consumers to take more responsibility for their health, and to recommend how the Bureau and other donors can make their assistance more effective in this area.

This assessment focused on three countries representing distinct geographical regions within E&E – Kyrgyzstan, Albania, and Armenia – and consisted of four components: a literature review of the state of health promotion and primary health care in E&E countries; pre-assessment surveys and conference calls with USAID missions; country visits to conduct in-depth interviews and to visit active USAID-funded projects and health facilities in rural sites; and focus groups with health consumers in each country.

## Key Findings:

- Health promotion, empowerment and PHC are part of a continuum that support and sustain one another.
- Given the growing burden of chronic diseases in the region, now is a critical time to invest in and expand health promotion efforts.
- Government institutions are making efforts to address health promotion and disease prevention, though resources and staffing are limited and no sustained efforts currently exist to address chronic diseases.
- Consumers are interested in preventive health and eager for information but generally feel that they lack "power" in terms of their health and health care.
- A newer wave of donor programs in the region is beginning to focus on health promotion and empowerment, to which consumers are reacting very positively. One example is community-based volunteer groups supported by ZdravPlus in Kyrgyzstan, Project NOVA and PHCR in Armenia and Proshendetit in Albania. However, as these only affect a small percentage of the population, more needs to be done.
- Civil society organizations are becoming increasingly active in advocacy for health consumers.
- Members of the media are highly interested in health and prevention issues, though investigative journalism is in its infancy in this region.

**In order to have effective health care services, health care consumers must be empowered. Specifically, donors need to support programs that involve and educate consumers such as community-based volunteer groups.**

## Recommendations:

- Work with governments to create an overarching health promotion strategy with key stakeholders.
- Support government structures, programs and policies that address health promotion.
- Reorient existing health programs to address health promotion and disease prevention, including chronic diseases.
- Engage and support the private sector and NGOs to provide products and services directly to the consumer by supporting market development.

WHO's Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion and subsequent revisions served as the framework for C-Change's analysis of health care consumer empowerment:

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health by developing personal skills, embracing community action and fostering appropriate public policies, health services and supportive environments.

For more information on the C-Change program or to obtain a copy of the report, please contact: Tara Kovach at [tkovach@aed.org](mailto:tkovach@aed.org) or +1 (202) 884-8983.

