



# SUCCESS STORY

## Overcoming Obstacles to Methadone Maintenance Treatment

**Injecting drug users get help entering methadone treatment.**



Mo Wencheng

Staff of the HIV Legal Aid Center from left to right are Xie Bin, peer counselor; Huang Xiang, attorney; Shao Fen, director and professor; and Mo Fei, peer counselor.

**The HIV Legal Aid Center promotes and protects the legal rights of people living with HIV and most-at-risk populations in Yunnan Province, China.**

China’s HIV/AIDS epidemic is heavily fueled by the use of injection drugs, which accounts for nearly 45 percent of all HIV infections in the country. For many, including 37-year-old Ming of Kunming, Yunnan Province, heroin is the drug of choice.

Struggling to overcome his addiction, Ming completed compulsory detoxification but was unable to abstain for long. Regretful and seeking help, he visited the Huxianghaoba Drop-In Center for injecting drug users (IDUs). The Center gave Ming some promising news. He could apply for methadone maintenance treatment (MMT), one of the most effective treatments for heroin addiction. However, he would need his household registration book and identification card – official papers he no longer had.

The requirements for proof of local residence and verification of identity are among the legal and procedural obstacles that IDUs in China must navigate when applying to MMT programs. Such obstacles are being addressed by the HIV Legal Aid Center. This legal center is implemented by RTI and funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development through the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, in partnership with the International Development Law Organization and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development.

Run under the auspices of Yunnan University, the HIV Legal Aid Center provides outreach services and peer counseling through local drop-in centers. During his visit to Huxianghaoba, Ming was able to consult a lawyer from the HIV Legal Aid Center about his missing papers.

The lawyer suggested Ming obtain copies of his papers from the Chinese Public Security Bureau (PSB). Still, Ming was worried. If he went to the PSB, he would be tested for drugs – and he knew the results would be positive. Then, he would be sent back to compulsory detoxification.

Hearing this, the lawyer contacted the MMT clinic to discuss its application procedures and went to the PSB to negotiate on Ming’s behalf. Three days later, Ming received the papers he needed. Accompanied by the lawyer and a peer counselor from the legal center, he brought them to the MMT clinic. While there,

Ming received a health check-up, which included voluntary HIV counseling and testing. He then applied for MMT and was accepted. He expressed heartfelt thanks to the staff of the legal center, saying he could never have gotten into the MMT program without their help.

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