

Alternative Georgia

Annual Report  
2010

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## From the Executive Director

2010 was an interesting and busy year for Alternative Georgia. Addiction Research Center has conducted several research projects - completed research on home-made stimulants and risk of HIV infection as well as street drug testing while started a new randomized clinical trials focusing on Subutex injectors. These studies respond to the existing challenges in the country in the drugs field from the perspective of public health, policy or legislation.

We were actively engaged in the drug policy advocacy process. In 2010 main focus was made on the involvement of policymakers from the law enforcement and health agencies in the process of drug policy reform.

Major achievements of the year 2010 can be named allocation of financing in the 2011 Tbilisi municipal budget for drug dependence services, as well as engagement of several law enforcement agencies in a dialogue. First result was achieved by the active involvement of the Georgian Harm Reduction Network and proactive advocacy with members of the municipality. As to the second result, police and prosecutor's office are considered to be major stakeholders in the drug policy reform and last year we had a successful effort to engage in a meaningful dialogue with them. Current year will be very important for strengthening this dialogue.

Regarding capacity building of the organization, I want to stress that for the first time we had an opportunity to recruit an advocacy officer in the Alternative Georgia's team. Hopefully, this appointment will strengthen our ability to promote evidence based decision-making process in the field of drug policy in Georgia. Also, a financial manager has joined our team that gave us an excellent opportunity to free project coordinators from the duty of financial administration of projects. I also would like to mention with great pleasure that from 2010 Alternative Georgia moved to a new and comfortable office. I'm sure that new environment will have a positive impact on the employees and quality of the organization's performance.

David Otiashvili, M.D.



## About Alternative Georgia

Alternative Georgia, as a non-governmental, non-commercial organization, was founded in September 2004. Its main spheres of activity are drug dependence research and harm reduction advocacy focusing on the promotion and support for effective evidence based strategies in the drugs field, as well as development and support for pragmatic and humane drug and HIV legislation and protection of the rights of marginalized groups.

The main focuses of the research (behavioural and clinical) are opioids and home-made stimulants, often with emphasize on HIV/AIDS risk behaviors. Alternative Georgia has been collaborating with several leading international research institutions, such as Johns Hopkins University, University of Pennsylvania, Research Triangle Institute and Charles University in Prague.

Alternative Georgia along with six other NGOs is a founder of the Georgian Harm Reduction Network (GHRN). The Network now unites 18 organizations from all over the Georgia and is a major provider of harm reduction services in the country.

In the field of drug policy Alternative Georgia's activities are the development of a National Drug Policy Concept, development of a National Action Plan for Drug Policy for the period 2007-2009, organising the first National Drug Policy Conference (in 2005) and the development of the Proposal for Legislative Changes to Drug Legislation in Georgia. For the later initiative Alternative Georgia and other members of GHRN conducted a support campaign and collected more than 58,000 signatures of citizens in support of the legislative proposal. The draft bill is to be reviewed by the Parliament.

In 2010 Alternative Georgia implemented the following projects:

- ✓ 2009-2011 Suboxone and Methadone for HIV Risk Reduction in Subutex Injectors
- ✓ 2009 – 2010 New trends in HIV-related risky patterns of injecting drug use and drug distribution in 4 Eurasian countries with substantial presence of ATS – pilot study
- ✓ 2009-2011 How Effective Is Street Drug Testing?
- ✓ 2009 – 2011 Humanity at First

## Projects

<b>Project</b>	<b>Donor</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Budget (USD)</b>	<b>Time frame</b>
Suboxone and Methadone for HIV Risk Reduction in Subutex Injectors	NIH/NIDA	Obtain pilot data on the impact of a 12-week course of daily, observed Suboxone vs. methadone on HIV risk associated with buprenorphine and opioid injecting.	220,000	05/2009-05/2011
New trends in HIV-related risky patterns of injecting drug use and drug distribution in 4 Eurasian countries with substantial presence of ATS	NIDA /CRDF	Gain better understanding of emerging changes in substances used and patterns of use among injection drug users in two Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Ukraine) and two Southern Caucasian countries (Armenia, Georgia) countries, in particular regarding the risk of HIV transmission related to injection of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS).	14,239	08/2009-11/2010
How Effective Is Street Drug Testing?	OSI	Estimate the state expenditures and outcomes of the specific law enforcement intervention – forced street drug testing	81,174	09/2009-02/2011
Humanity at First	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands	Improve the human rights of people using drugs in Georgia and reduce repression attached to drug use	236,250	11/2009-10/2011

## 2009-2011 Suboxone and Methadone for HIV Risk Reduction in Subutex Injectors

*International collaborative study (R21)*

*Sponsor – NIH/NIDA*

*Collaborators – University of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania, USA), Clinic Uranti (Tbilisi, Georgia)*

*US PI – George E. Woody MD*

This study will obtain pilot data on the short-term impact of a 12-week course of daily, observed Suboxone or methadone on HIV risk and opioid use, and on outcomes at week 20 when patients will have completed a 3-week dose taper following the 12-week period of stable dosing, transferred to methadone or residential treatment, or dropped out of treatment. Either medication, if given as a daily, observed dose, may reduce Subutex injecting. Patients will be 80 opioid dependent patients (40/group) who have injected Subutex 10 or more times in the past 30 days. Outcomes will be HIV injecting risk, self-reported use of Subutex and heroin with weekly counts of fresh puncture marks, urine test results, and measures of overall outcome. The study will be done at the Uranti Methadone Program, affiliated with the Addiction Research Center, Union Alternative Georgia.

Primary aims of this randomized controlled trial were to obtain pilot data on the impact of a 12-week course of daily, observed Suboxone vs. methadone on 1) HIV risk associated with buprenorphine and opioid injecting; 2) The degree to which the target population accepted each treatment.

## 2009 – 2010 New trends in HIV- related risky patterns of injecting drug use and drug distribution in 4 Eurasian countries with substantial presence of ATS – pilot study

*Multi-site international collaborative study*

*Sponsor – NIDA/CRDF*

*Collaborators – Johns Hopkins University, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of Colorado Denver, Charles University in Prague; US PI – Robert Booth PhD, Eurasian PI – Tomas Zabransky MD, PhD.*

The **purpose** of the proposed project was to gain better understanding of emerging changes in substances used and patterns of use among injection drug users in two Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Ukraine) and two Southern Caucasian countries (Armenia, Georgia) countries, in particular regarding the risk of HIV transmission related to injection of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS). Special attention was paid to networking within and between drug using/producing groups and to different patterns of sexual behavior related to different drugs. The **background and significance**

are emerging and changing phenomena of HIV prevalence and incidence and the injection use of amphetamine type stimulants in Armenia, Czech Republic, Georgia, and Ukraine.

The **research design** was mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative). Each of the 4 participating institutions (1 per country) recruited two focus groups – the first with 6 to 8 street-workers from programs offering low threshold services for drug users and the second with 8 injecting drug user (4 with a longer history of use and 4 with shorter history). Based on results obtained from the qualitative research, each site administered one questionnaire survey to  $\geq 100$  drug users who use low-threshold drug services in the selected region/city of each country.

## 2009-2011 How Effective Is Street Drug Testing?

*Sponsor – PHP OSI*

Collaborators – Tbilisi State University, Association of Young Economists of Georgia, Centre for Protection of Constitutional Rights, external consultants – Tomas Zabransky MD, PhD, Charles University in Prague; Curatio International Foundation, Tbilisi, Georgia

The aim of the project was 1) to estimate the state expenditures and outcomes of the specific law enforcement intervention (street drug testing and consecutive administrative or criminal measures) and 2) quantify outcomes that could have been achieved with OST if the funds spent on street drug testing would be used for this treatment modality.

Research Questions:

- a) How much did the Republic of Georgia spend on random street drug testing and consecutive legal measures in 2008?
- b) What were the impacts of the random street testing for the drug users in terms of their drug career/use, and the related disorders?
- c) What could be achieved if the funds specified in a) would have been spent on increase of the availability of OST, or possibly other treatment or prevention measures?

Study results show that the punishment and imprisonment of drug users in Georgia has no or little influence on the drug related behaviour and is a dramatically inefficient waste of limited resources of law enforcement and judicial system. Punitive measures that have no analogue in the developed democratic countries did not result in any measurable reduction of drug use, caused harmful criminalisation of 1,605 persons that notoriously leads drug users to involve not only in “consensual” drug crime but also to criminal activities significantly more dangerous for public order.

As such, we can safely conclude that the random drug testing did not fulfil the expectations of its proponents in terms to decrease drug use, and caused significant economic costs to the Georgian society, together with difficult-to-monetarise intangible costs (secondary market consequences, humiliation of those tested, suffering of families, criminalisation of drug users, etc.). Moreover, given

the zero impact of the tested interventions on the drug use, we can safely conclude that the focus of two Police branches on street-hunting of young people diverted precious Police (and other law enforcement) resources from activities that would serve their purpose: improving public order and safety.

**Alternative Georgia provided the following recommendations based on research results:**

Remove article 273 from Criminal code, which will prevent sending some 1,600 people to prisons and saves more than 8 mil GEL in imprisonment costs. Fear of punishment and imprisonment do not (significantly) influence person's decision to take drugs. According to UNODC, 70-98% of those imprisoned for drug related crimes come back to using drugs within one year after release, if no effective treatment is provided (UNODC, 2003).

Shift police priorities from hunting drug users to criminal activities that have either real impact on criminal situation, or on public safety.

Allocate saved amount (8 mil GEL) to definition and enforcement of modern, structured National Drug Strategy and Action Plans of the EU style, that would introduce and /or expand effective demand reduction programs (treatment, harm reduction, rehabilitation, prevention) that are highly cost effective from the perspective of both society and state budget. Research has shown that inclusion in drug dependence treatment significantly reduces criminal behaviour and economic benefits of treatment several-fold outweigh its costs (Stevens et al, 2005).

## 2009 – 2011 Humanity at First

*Sponsor* - MATRA projects, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

*Collaborators* – Mainline Foundation (Amsterdam, Netherlands), Tanadgoma (Tbilisi, Georgia)

The project *Humanity First* seeks to improve the human rights of people using drugs in Georgia and to reduce repression attached to drug use.

Georgian prison authorities are provided with a toolkit to develop basic medical care, harm reduction programmes and HIV prevention services (including VCCT, diagnostics, treatment and care) in the penal system.

- Conduct research in three Georgian prisons on health of prisoners using drugs, patterns of drug use, related health risks and HIV prevention, treatment and care;
- Conference for prison administration and other NGOs working in the penal system;
- Developing guidelines for comprehensive harm reduction programmes and HIV prevention, treatment and care in prisons.

Judicial and law enforcement personnel understand, acknowledge and support treatment, rather than incarceration for drug use offences.



- Seminars for judges, prosecutors, police and prison administration on national legislation, international treaties and international practices concerning rights of people using drugs;
- Skills building workshops for judges, prosecutors, police and prison administration;
- Study visit to Netherlands for judges, prosecutors and police officers and to Spain for prison administration.

Legislative personnel acknowledge the importance of the rights and health of people using drugs in prioritising effective public health strategies aimed at HIV prevention and reduction of drug related harm.

- Seminars for parliamentarians and policy makers on the applicability of national drug laws and international human rights treaties;
- Skills building workshops for parliamentarians and policy makers;
- Study visit to the Netherlands / Spain for parliamentarians and policy makers.

All stakeholders have an increased understanding of the rights of people using drugs and the threat of an HIV epidemic transmitted through injecting drug use.

- Project planning and strategy meetings with partners and stakeholders;
- Dissemination conference for all partners and stakeholders;
- Press conferences following project planning, strategy meeting and each study visit;
- Articles and interviews on project activities and results on Georgian radio, TV, newspapers and Internet media.

## 2010 Annual Balance Sheet in Gel

ASSETS	Beginning of year	By the end of accounting period
<b>working assets</b>		
cash in the cash desk _____ (1100)		
money in the bank _____ (1200)	111 390	60 253
short-term investments _____ (1300)		
claims to suppliers and service _____ (1410)		
claims to partner organizations _____ (1420)		
correction of suspect claims _____ (1415)		
claims to personnel of the organization _____ (1430)	424	542
claims to refill of capital _____ (1460)		
claims to the budget _____ (3340)		
prepayment to suppliers _____ (1480)		
other short-term claims _____ (1490)	1 031	
<b><u>total working assets</u></b>	<b>12 845</b>	<b>60 795</b>
<b>commodity capital</b>		

commodity_____ (1610)		
raw and other materials _____ (1620)		
unfinished products _____ (1630)		
finished commodity_____ (1640)		
other commodity capital _____ (1690)		
initial expenses _____ (1700)		
other working assets _____ (1900)		
<b>total commodity capital</b>		
<b>Long-term assets</b>		
land plots _____ (2110)		
unfinished construction _____ (2120)		
Buildings _____ (2130)		
machinery and equipment _____ (2150)		
office equipment _____ (2160)	24 192	39 330
transportation means _____ (2180)		
other basic assets _____ (2170)		
long-term claims _____ (2300)		
overdue tax assets _____ (2340)		
long-term investments _____ (2400)		
fictitious assets _____ (2500)		
<b>total long-term assets</b>	<b>24 192</b>	<b>39 330</b>
<b>total assets</b>	<b>37 037</b>	<b>100 125</b>

<b>Liabilities</b>	<b>Beginning of year</b>	<b>By end of accounting period</b>
<b>working liabilities</b>		
liabilities to suppliers and services (3110)	26	
prepayments received _____ (3120)	112 814	50 281
due salaries _____ (3170)	5	10 079
liabilities to personnel of the enterprise _____ (3160)		
short-term loans _____ (3210)		
current part of long-term loans _____ (3230)		
due profit tax _____ (3310)		
due income tax _____ (3320)		435
due VAT _____ (3330)		
due excise-duty _____ (3350)		
social taxes _____ (3370)		
other tax liabilities _____ (3390)		
due interests _____ (3410)		
due dividends _____ (3420)		

other short-term liabilities _____ (3190)		
<b><u>total working liabilities</u></b>	<b>112 845</b>	<b>60 795</b>
<b>long-term liabilities</b>		
long-term loan liabilities _____ (4100)		
overdue profit tax _____ (4210)		
assignments _____ (4300)		
overdue income _____ (4410)		
other long-term liabilities _____ (4220)		
<b><u>total long-term liabilities</u></b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>equity capital</b>		
authorized capital stock _____ (5100)		
capital reserves _____ (5410)		
other reserves and targeted financing _____ (5490)	24 192	39 330
surplus earnings _____ (5310)		
outstanding deficit* _____ (5320)		
<b><u>total equity capital</u></b>	<b>24 192</b>	<b>39 330</b>
<b>total liabilities and equity capital</b>	<b>137 037</b>	<b>100 125</b>