

“Your chance” Belarus National community-led NGO



[History of “Your chance” Belarus National community-led NGO - how community has been leading in national process to establish new rules in OST programs which meet people’s needs.](#)

Drug policy in Belarus:

- Belarus is an Eastern European country blessed with a rich cultural heritage and a scenic landscape, but its people are subject to some of [the most repressive drug policies on the continent](#). Belarus' drug war shows no sign of slowing down. In 2014, President Lukashenko spearheaded legislation that harshened criminal penalties for drug offences and lowered the criminal age of responsibility for manufacturing and selling drugs to 14 years old.
- All doctors must inform local police man about all people who asking help from medicine if doctors notice any sights that this people use drugs (Law # 1192 from 18.12.2014).
- Drug policy activists are under state pressure: not given the opportunity to rent place for educational harm reduction lectures: national television channels create propaganda reports about their work, and the Ministry of Information has blocked from the Legalize Belarus website. Recently, a special forces squad (SOBR) broke into their party to check visitors for the presence of prohibited substances.

Results of 1,5-year-old community NGO:

- ✓ Each member of the team increases the level of expertise about drug policy and best practice of how the progressive drug policy laws employed on practical level;
- ✓ new OST Guideline with take home dose and other services facing community needs is going to enter into power in 2019;
- ✓ new services for OST program were included in GF grants for Belarus for 2019-2020;
- ✓ fight publicly with media to change the language about OST and stop sharing the lie and myths;
- ✓ grant application for implementation of peer-to-peer service and monitoring of clients' satisfaction for 1,500 OST participants ([here is the full application and budget on Russian](#));
- ✓ direct contact with harm reduction experts in Europe with agreement for mentorship.

February 2017. Up to 50 people who take OST from different cities of Belarus have come together and make decision to **establish national community-led NGO “Your chance”** to have official voice in drug policy changing advocacy. First task for new board from constituencies was to stop kick-out people from OST programs for taking illegal drugs and organize take home doze and access methadone in hospitals. (*Your chance's article [here in Russian is here](#)*).

In 10 days after “Your chance” was established, Community leader Sergey Kryzhevich was stopped by traffic police. *“We have suspicions that you are under drugs. You must go to the state lab for drug intoxication test. I refused. They realize that I’m going to protect my rights and they showed me on the phone the orders of the administration of the drug control department of the city of Minsk. And there it is*

clearly stated that Sergey Kryzhevich is a client of the substitution therapy program, and order are given to bring me for drug intoxication test” (ENPUD article in Russian is [here](#)).

These discriminatory practices towards people who use drugs lead to the situation when if a driver gets tested for intoxication and there are traces of methadone or its metabolites in his or her biological samples, it is considered a violation of the labor code and driving regulations and can lead to employment termination, revoking a driving license and large fines (\$ 1000 which is 9 minimum wages).

Sergey Kryzhevich, Your chance *“I have received methadone treatment for more than 8 years. The substitution therapy has changed my life for the better – I have a job, got married and have a daughter. In 2017, I had to file a suit as I had been unlawfully accused of driving a car under the influence of drugs. In fact, I wasn't driving the car under the influence of drugs, as the results of the expertise showed traces of methadone which I used on prescription, as evidenced by a medical certificate. Moreover, the intoxication testing was carried out in a way that violated the legal procedure. I based my appeal to the court on video evidence and prepared the analysis of normative documents. **I lost the case in the Supreme Court and had to pay a fine of almost \$ 1000. I also lost my driving license, which had made it possible for me to come to work on time even though I had to visit the substitution therapy program site to get methadone every day for eight years. It also helped me to spend more time with my family”.***



December 2017. Your chance team was invited to study-visit to Portugal organized by EHRA with ENPUD, EuroPUD, APCASO, CASO on drug policy supporting. The main point for the study visit was to learn the Portuguese model of decriminalization and to understand on the practical level the approach of CDT (Dissuasion of Drug Abuse Commission) as basic practical knowledge for drug policy experts.



March 2018. Together with national medical experts “Your chance” **initiated a revision of OST Guideline and Clinical Protocol to improve the quality of OST.** According to the current legislation, being an OST patient on methadone treatment, is considered a violation of the labor code and driving regulations and can lead to employment termination, revoking a driving license and large fines. The guidelines passed the first stage of consultation with experts and civil society. In the second stage, after the Guidelines had been considered by security agencies and executive authorities, the following topics were excluded from the document: methadone take home services, substitution treatment in prisons, regulations on determining the state of drug intoxication for patients of substitution treatment programs, which were the key points that could improve the quality of life for patients and help to increase the number of OST clients in the country.

April 2018. Head of Drug control Department of Minsk M. Sazonov publicly said that If there is an organization of OST patients, then the cooperation will largely depend on what goals this group of people pursues. When asked whether it is possible to organize the **take home methadone doses**, Alexander Sazonov answered categorically: **“It's out of the question”** (on-line article in Russian [here](#)).

EHRA mentoring expert together with Your chance co-organized the training-practicum based on IDUIT with financial support of UNODC. As a result, the letter to the Minister of Health was prepared requesting a suspension of the approval of the OST Guideline and asking to **reinstate the chapter on dispensing medication for self-administration (take home dose)**. 47 signatures were collected and brought to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus. The letter was also sent to the UN agencies and to the Global Fund. EHRA and Your chance organized meetings and telephone consultations with relevant agencies: UNODC and UNAIDS. With the help of the Chairperson of the Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM) – Deputy Health Minister – a working meeting has been arranged involving all those who developed the Instruction, as well as addiction doctors, representatives of UN agencies, OST patients and drug control representatives. [Legalize Belarus](#) young team was at the meeting as well, and the partnership continues.



This was the inspiring moment when stakeholders understood that Belarus OST patients Network «Your chance» is leading the national advocacy process with the aim to have convenient and based on clients' needs and science OST program.

June 2018. [HIV and Laws International report 2018](#). **Sergey Kryzhevich filed in a complaint based on evidence that OST clients are vulnerable because of the bureaucratic system of medical care in his country.** The evidence is based on the strategic litigation case, a community-led field study and the results of advocacy actions of OST patients' community and their partners in the Republic of Belarus.

June 2018. Support Don't punish Day – Belarus community people who use drugs [prepared the video statement](#) and joined to Regional Campaign led by EHRA and other regional networks.



Speak out the Community Position. Leaders in Belarus work with media and quickly and professionally respond on articles with lie about current situation with OST program in Belarus. It helps to make public the community position and monitor and change the media language about people who use drugs and OST.

**Regional & National levels advocacy for progressive drug policy
 Within International Harm Reduction Consortium**

July. AIDS 2018

Team of Community led NGO “Your chance” Belarus and “Resetas” Lithuania got to AIDS2018 by car, thanks to small grants resource, to have direct communications with international experts. Community team invested part of small grants money to participation in AIDS2018. They had money only for gasoline, but it didn’t stop leaders to get knowledge and meet decision makers.



8 people with 4 passes – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan community of people who use drugs helped Belarus and Lithuanian community representatives to visit drug policy sessions during AIDS2018.

Key result of long travel From Belarus to AIDS 2018

- ✓ direct communication about repressive drug policy and human right abuse in Belarus with opinion leaders. On July 26, 2018 Commissioners Clark and Kazatchkine published [the analytic article](#) “Time for a change in drug policy in Belarus”;
- ✓ learning how the Mainline mobile harm reduction drop-in-center works;
- ✓ practical knowledge how easy to get OST in Amsterdam but the price was too high for EECA communities;
- ✓ feeling free anywhere as people who use drugs – life-changing moment for EECA activists.



September 2018.

Your chance team was invited to study-visit to the Czech Republic organized by EHRA together with SANANIME and Global communion on drug policy support. In Prague, “Your Chance” experts paid attention to a detailed review of the system of OST program from the point of view of legislation, budgets, decision-making and the attitude of doctors to program patients.

“Regarding controversial situations when examining OST patients on drug intoxication, as in my case - It is the physician who proves the absence of drug intoxication of OST patient in the court, which we were told about during our meeting with the doctor on the OST website in Prague”, - Sergey Kryzhevich, Your chance, Minsk-Prague, 2018, International Harm Reduction Consortium.

“Your chance” community members initiated a working meeting of all the drafters of the Guidelines, including narcologists, representatives of UN agencies, Global Fund Portfolio Manager in Belarus, OST patients and drug control representatives to review the full version, observe human rights for affordable and high-quality medical care.

In October 2018 the OST Guide was under review for agreement between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Interior. In November 2018 it was claimed that new OST Guideline was signed by the Ministry of Health. But till the end of January, 2019 even CCM members from the state haven’t yet responded to community about the status of new OST Guideline. CCM member, Sergey Kryzhevich from Your chance, put again the issue about the OST Guideline during the first CCM meeting in 2019 (26.01.2019). CCM state members didn’t give the response and CCM made decision to include this issue into the next CCM meeting’s agenda and relevant state members should prepare the reply in February 2019.



In December 2018 “Your chance”

- ✓ issued the grant proposal ([here the full proposal in Russian](#)) to establish the peer-to-peer in OST program and have resource for implementing in practice the services which were included in new Belarus OST Guideline.
- ✓ Brought leaders from all Belarus to annual [“Your chance” members meeting](#) for reporting to constituencies and review the next advocacy steps.
- ✓ Applied to ethic media committee because of the [article about OST](#) (Russian) in “Belarus today” with reflected lack of knowledge on the real situation with OST and flagrant misrepresentation of facts. Belarus today refused to publish correction. But other media agreed and community published reliable articles about [life of people who take OST](#) (Russian) and about harm reduction approach.



The activities have been implemented thanks to supportive leadership and friendly mentorship of the [International Drug Policy Consortium](#) team, partnership support of members of [the International Harm Reduction Consortium](#) and thanks to financial resources for community needs and approach for reflecting (MEL) by [the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund](#).



The EHRA [report about international activities](#) within the Consortium is here.