



BUILDING TRUST IN PUBLIC HEALTH: HOW SAFEMED HELPED REACH MILLIONS OF UKRAINIANS WITH ACCURATE HEALTH INFORMATION

The Safe, Affordable, and Effective Medicines for Ukrainians (SAFEMed) Activity, funded by the U.S. Government, helped Ukraine's Center for Public Health (CPH) to develop its first organizational communications strategy and launch a nationwide public awareness campaign featuring five real-life stories about HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and hepatitis C.

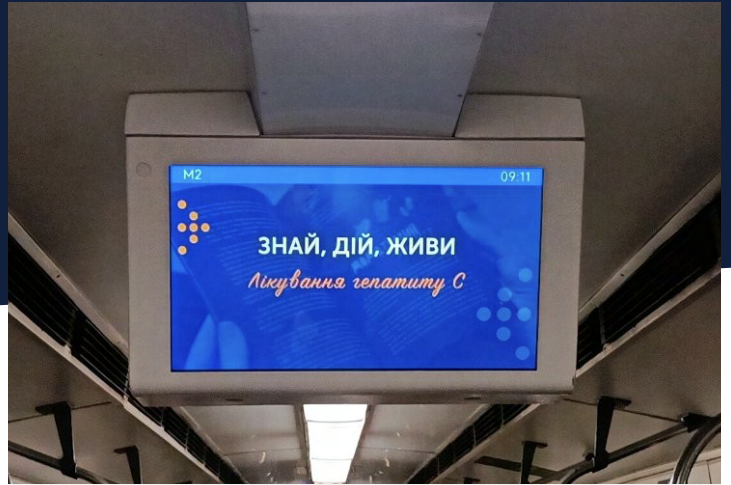
Broadcast in healthcare facilities, the Kyiv Metro, and Intercity trains, the campaign reached millions of Ukrainians with evidence-based information that encouraged testing, treatment, and reduced stigma. At a time when war has disrupted daily life and strained access to healthcare, the campaign reinforced an equally important message: testing, treatment, and support remain available.

FROM STRATEGY TO STORIES

The campaign grew out of an earlier effort to strengthen CPH's communications capacity. Before SAFEMed's support, CPH had no organization-wide communications strategy. Through organizational assessment, stakeholder consultations, audience research, and communications planning, SAFEMed helped CPH develop its first strategy, identifying priority audiences, key messages, and communication channels.

"We wanted to help create a stronger foundation for communication," said **Vira Horovenko**, Senior Technical Advisor at SAFEMed. "People cannot benefit from services and treatment if they do not know they exist or do not trust the information they receive."

The assessment highlighted an important challenge. Although CPH leads Ukraine's response



As part of a nationwide awareness campaign, public health videos were broadcast on 2,440 screens across Kyiv Metro trains

Every day, millions of Ukrainians travel by train, ride the metro, or wait for medical appointments. Along the way, they encounter stories of people living with HIV, recovering from TB, or completing treatment for hepatitis C.

Developed by CPH with support from SAFEMed, the campaign featured five short videos of real people sharing their experiences. By combining lived experience with guidance from Ukraine's national public health authority, the campaign helped normalize conversations about HIV, TB, and hepatitis C while encouraging people to seek testing and care.

to HIV, TB, viral hepatitis, and other public health priorities, many Ukrainians knew little about the organization or the services available. Fear, misconceptions, and stigma continued to discourage testing and treatment.

Rather than relying on statistics alone, CPH and SAFEMed chose to tell personal stories paired with expert guidance, showing that treatment is available and that a diagnosis does not define a person's future. "We wanted to show the experiences of people just like them," said **Mykola Hanich**, Head of Communications at CPH. "Teachers, drivers, office workers – ordinary people living ordinary lives."

One of them was **Mariia Khodos**.

MARIIA'S STORY

Mariia Khodos had been living with hepatitis C since the early 2000s, when treatment was lengthy, expensive, and out of reach for many Ukrainians.

"I never even dreamed that I would be able to pay \$500 to receive treatment," Mariia recalled. Like many people living with hepatitis C, Khodos gradually came to accept constant fatigue as part of everyday life, attributing it to work and daily responsibilities rather than the disease itself.

When newer treatment options became available through Ukraine's public health system, Khodos and her husband decided it was time to act. After just a few months of treatment, her energy returned.

"The energy that had always been part of me came back," she said.

As her health improved, everyday tasks required less effort. Long days no longer felt overwhelming. Plans no longer depended on how much strength she had left.

Today, Khodos works with a community-based organization supporting vulnerable groups and helps people navigate the healthcare system, access treatment, and connect with social services.



Mariia Khodos is one of five Ukrainians who shared their personal experiences in the campaign's video series

Her own experience allows her to reassure others that treatment works, support is available, and they do not have to face a diagnosis alone.

"I realized that I could do more, that I wanted to do more, and that I actually had the strength to do it," she said.

When asked why she agreed to participate in the campaign, her answer was simple.

"A real person's story works better than any charts or graphs."

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Mariia's story was one of five featured in the campaign, which brought trusted health information into places where people make everyday decisions about their health. Through a partnership with the U.S. Government-funded REACH 95 Activity, managed by PATH, the videos were shown in 175 healthcare facilities across Kyiv and 11 regions, reaching an estimated 7 million patient visits in their first four months. They also appeared on 2,440 screens across approximately 75 percent of Kyiv Metro trains, generating more than 1.5 million exposures, and on 534 screens aboard Intercity trains connecting major Ukrainian cities, adding another estimated 500,000 exposures nationwide.

One of those travelers was **Tetiana Bilotserkivets**, who saw Mariia's story while returning to Kyiv after visiting her parents.

"During a long train journey, you switch between your phone and the screens around you," Bilotserkivets said. "What stayed with me was Mariia Khodos's story of regaining the energy she thought she had lost. It reminded me how important it is for these conversations to exist in everyday spaces."



Patients wait for their appointments as Mariia Khodos's story is shown on a screen in a healthcare facility participating in the awareness campaign implemented in partnership with the U.S. Government-funded REACH 95 Activity

"We wanted these stories to become part of people's everyday lives," Hanich said. "If someone sees a video while waiting for an appointment or riding the train and later decides to get tested or seek care, then we've helped start a conversation that might not have happened otherwise."

BUILDING A STRONGER PUBLIC HEALTH VOICE

What began as support to develop CPH's first communications strategy evolved into a nationwide initiative reaching millions of Ukrainians.

Beyond the campaign itself, CPH strengthened its ability to plan, produce, and deliver coordinated public health communications using audience research, clear messaging, and trusted national channels. The campaign demonstrated that expanding services is only part of the solution —

people also need reliable information they understand and trust.

As war continues to reshape daily life across Ukraine, trusted communication remains essential. By helping CPH build lasting communications capacity while delivering a nationwide campaign, SAFEMed strengthened Ukraine's ability to connect people with testing, treatment, and accurate public health information.