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## SNAPSHOT

# Afghan Government Fit to Fight HIV

**USAID strengthens coordination for an effective HIV response and increased engagement by policy makers**



Photo: USAID/COMPRI-A

*Religious leaders attend an HIV awareness workshop for the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs.*

**Key line ministries now have a better understanding of HIV and are engaged in a better response to HIV in Afghanistan.**

While HIV prevalence in Afghanistan is currently low with 1,250 reported cases to date, the country is at high risk for the spread of HIV due to factors such as low literacy rates, low awareness of HIV, war, poverty, and growing injecting drug use.

In 2007, the HIV and AIDS Coordination Committee of Afghanistan was established to coordinate the national HIV response and increase awareness. The committee brings together approximately 60 people from the government, donor organizations, HIV implementing partners, civil-society, and the private sector.

Over the last six months, with USAID support, the committee secretariat, in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health and the National AIDS Control Program, conducted workshops for key line ministries to increase understanding of HIV and AIDS and advocate for an immediate and effective response to HIV in Afghanistan. The line ministries include the Deputy Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Ministry of Refugees and Returnees, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Women's Affairs.

The results have been immediate. Following the workshops, the Ministry of Justice supported the removal of legal barriers for a comprehensive HIV and harm reduction package of services for most at-risk populations, particularly injecting drug users in the community and prisons. The Ministry of Refugees and Returnees committed to expand HIV prevention and harm reduction centers at all border areas and to establish referral systems between border checks and HIV centers for those travelers in need of further services. The Ministry of Interior and the police force now treat injecting drug users as patients instead of criminals. The Ministry of Interior will also conduct visits to detention centers and prisons to learn about the status of drug users and develop further interventions to HIV-related illnesses and deaths.

To commemorate World AIDS Day 2011, all participating line ministries formally signed memorandums of understanding with the Ministry of Public Health pledging their commitment and support to fighting HIV in Afghanistan.