

Leveraging Mixed Methods to Promote HIV Prevention Services for Adolescents and Young Adults with Substance Use

Statement of Problem

Adolescents and young adults (AYA) who frequently use substances are more [vulnerable](#) to contracting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), [especially](#) if drugs are injected and/or used to enhance sexual experiences. [Substance use](#) during these experiences [may result](#) in condomless sex, more than one sexual partner, and trading sex for drugs, all of which are [risk factors](#) for [contracting HIV](#). The co-occurring issues of substance use and high risk of HIV—which taken together can be defined as a syndemic—create challenges to adolescents and young adults' health and well-being.

Further research into this syndemic is vital to better understand the lived experience of adolescents and young adults and their unmet mental and sexual health needs to reduce the heightened risk of contracting HIV due to substance use.

Description

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a daily medication that helps reduce HIV infection and is an important HIV prevention tool.

Our team will conduct a mixed-methods study to learn more about facilitators and barriers to PrEP usage with the goal of optimizing HIV prevention services among adolescents and young adults.

To better understand adolescents and young adults and their lived experiences, we will utilize surveys and interviews of individuals ages 16-24 years who report substance use to learn more about their awareness of PrEP for HIV prevention, previous experiences using PrEP, and barriers to access and/or use. The surveys used in the study are designed to ask adolescents and young adults about their HIV risk behavior, awareness, knowledge, and attitudes related to HIV prevention services. A subset of survey participants will be selected to participate in an hour-long audio-recorded semi-structured freelist interview, a qualitative interview technique, to explore factors that youth identify as influencing HIV prevention.

Next Steps

Using the study results, we aim to contribute to the development of multi-level, patient-centered interventions to increase HIV prevention uptake among adolescents and young adults who report frequent and consistent substance use as well as to inform improvement of existing HIV prevention strategies.

This project page was last updated in January 2025.

Suggested Citation

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, PolicyLab. *Leveraging Mixed Methods to Promote HIV Prevention Services for Adolescents and Young Adults with Substance Use* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.policylab.chop.edu> [Accessed: plug in date accessed here].

PolicyLab Leads

Maria Christina Herrera MD, MSHP

Faculty Scholar

Maria Christina Herrera is a faculty scholar at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and an assistant professor of pediatrics in the Section of General Pediatrics at Yale School of Medicine. Prior to her appointment at Yale, she was a faculty member at PolicyLab and an attending physician in the Division of Adolescent Medicine at CHOP. Dr. Herrera completed her adolescent medicine fellowship at CHOP while pursuing a Master of Science in Health Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently funded by a National Institute on Drug Abuse K12 through Yale titled, Drug Use, Addiction and HIV prevention Research Scholars (DAHRS). Her present research focus addresses the intersection of the HIV and substance use epidemics for adolescents and young adults. She is particularly interested in optimizing access to HIV prevention initiatives for historically marginalized and disenfranchised young people with substance use.

Dr. Herrera contributed to health care provision and public health efforts during her domestic training in New York City, San Francisco and with the Indian Health Service on the White Mountain Apache Reservation in Whiteriver, Ariz. She has also worked both clinically and in a research capacity globally in the Dominican Republic, Peru and Mexico, all of which served to deepen her commitment to health equity and poverty alleviation.

Originally from a small rural town in upstate New York, Dr. Herrera completed her undergraduate education with a Bachelor of Arts out of the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Columbia University. She received her medical degree from Columbia University prior to completing her residency in the pediatrics PLUS program at the University of California, San Francisco, which trains pediatricians to advance health equity through community engagement and legislative advocacy.



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Faculty Member

Nadia Dowshen (she/her) is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and serves as Director of Adolescent HIV Services in the Craig Dalsimer Division of Adolescent Medicine at CHOP. She is also an associate professor of pediatrics and the Associate Director of the Masters of Health Policy Research at the Perelman School of Medicine at University of Pennsylvania and a Stoneleigh fellow.

In addition to specialized care for youth living with HIV/AIDS, Dr. Dowshen also provides general adolescent medical care at CHOP and Covenant House, PA, a youth shelter located in Philadelphia. She recently co-founded the CHOP Sexuality and Gender Development Clinic which now provides medical and psychosocial support to more than 2,000 gender variant children and adolescents. Dr. Dowshen's research focuses on using youth-friendly technology to improve adherence to antiretroviral therapy and improve other health outcomes for adolescents living with HIV/AIDS. She is also interested more broadly in research around issues of STD and HIV prevention and treatment as well as achieving health equity for other marginalized youth including LGBT and homeless adolescents.

Dr. Dowshen received the 2010 Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine New Investigator Award for her research identifying protective factors against HIV infection among transgender youth. She was recently named an NIH Adolescent Trials Network (ATN) Scholar and a Best Young Investigator by the National Centers for AIDS Research (CFAR). Dr. Dowshen also serves on the Board of Directors of the Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), a national non-profit which promotes comprehensive education about sexuality, and advocates for the right of individuals to make responsible sexual choices. Dr. Dowshen received both her M.D. and Masters of Science in Health Policy Research from the University of Pennsylvania.



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Funders of Project

National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) Research Career K12, National Institutes of Health (NIH)

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