

Positively Connected for Health (PC4H): Use of eHealth/mHealth tools to Improve Health of HIV+ Youth

Statement of Problem

Each year, there are approximately 50,000 new HIV infections. Young people ages 13-29 make up almost 40 percent of these new infections despite only accounting for one-third of the total population. Additionally, compared with adults, youth are two-to-four times less likely to achieve an undetectable viral load (indicating optimal control of HIV infection). Individuals can only achieve and maintain viral suppression, the goal of HIV treatment, if they take antiretroviral therapy (ART) every day at the same time with very little room for missing doses. If youth are able to engage in regular medical care and adhere to their medication, it will improve their personal health and well-being, help prevent transmission to others and, ultimately, guide their transition into healthy, productive adults.

Description

Positively Connected for Health (PC4H) is a Philadelphia-based innovative project that aims to improve health outcomes for youth living with HIV who do not have a suppressed viral load by using the following three distinct eHealth/mHealth interventions:

1. Iknowshould2, a [CHOP social media campaign](#) that encourages youth in Philadelphia to get HIV and STI testing
2. APPIify Youth Health, a [Philadelphia FIGHT](#) workshop that teaches young people how to utilize digital health literacy tools
3. A mobile health (mHealth) application, a CHOP and Drexel University app that works to improve medication adherence and engagement in care for adolescents and young adults living with HIV

Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) [Special Projects of National Significance](#) (SPNS) funds this project and other similar programs across ten U.S. cities to determine how social media/technology interventions can help to improve the health of youth living with HIV.

PC4H will enroll youth ages 14-29 who are not virally suppressed and who are receiving care or services at CHOP and Philadelphia FIGHT. The project aims to:

1. Use the [iknowshould2](#) campaign to identify HIV+ youth who are unaware of their status.
2. Determine acceptability and feasibility of the *APPIify Your Health* workshop with the medication adherence application by measuring eHealth literacy, workshop satisfaction and the medication adherence app satisfaction through questionnaires.
3. Determine efficacy of the medication adherence and engagement in care application for youth living with HIV by measuring app self-reported data on medication adherence and clinical outcomes (viral load, CD4 count) captured through laboratory testing at medical visits over an 18-month period.

Next Steps

The study teams will work with the funder's national evaluators, UCLA's Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center (ETAC), to evaluate the various sites' innovative social media methods designed to identify, link and retain youth and young adults living with HIV who are underserved, underinsured and hard to reach. The evaluation of the effectiveness of this mHealth/eHealth HIV-focused intervention will provide a foundation for future culturally competent, youth-centered models designed to improve digital health literacy, medication adherence and retention in care for marginalized youth either living with or at risk for HIV infection.

This project page was last updated in July 2019.

Suggested Citation

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, PolicyLab. *Positively Connected for Health (PC4H): Use of eHealth/mHealth tools to Improve Health of HIV+ Youth* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.policylab.chop.edu> [Accessed: plug in date accessed here].

PolicyLab Leads

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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

Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Special Projects of National Significance (SPNS),
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Related Tools & Publications

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[Telehealth's Impact on Teen Care During COVID-19 in 200 Words
Blog Post](#)

Jul 16, 2020

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[Behavioral and Health Outcomes for HIV+ Young Transgender Women \(YTW\) Linked To and Engaged in Medical Care](#)
[Article](#)

Apr 2015

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[Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Gender Non-Conforming Children and Adolescents Evidence to Action Briefs](#)

Dec 2015

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[Policy Perspective: Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Gender Nonconforming Children and Adolescents](#)

[Article](#)

Apr 2016

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[Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Other Sexually Transmitted Infections, and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Youth](#)

[Article](#)

Dec 2016

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[Young Transgender Women's Attitudes Toward HIV Pre-exposure Prophylaxis](#)

[Article](#)

Jan 2017

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[Longitudinal Viral Suppression Among a Cohort of Adolescents and Young Adults with Behaviorally Acquired Human Immunodeficiency Virus](#)

[Article](#)

Sep 2017

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[Predictors of Internet Health Information Seeking Behaviors among Young Adults Living with HIV Across the United States](#)

[Article](#)

Nov 2020

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[Incidence of Syphilis Infection and Syphilis-related Care Utilization Among Adolescents and Young Adults Living with HIV](#)

[Article](#)

Feb 2022

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["I Think That I Have a Good Understanding of How to Protect Myself:" A Qualitative Study About HIV Risk Perceptions Among Men and Gender Diverse Individuals Who Have Sex With Men](#)

[Article](#)

Feb 2022

Related Projects

[Understanding the Policy, Legal and Practice Barriers to Treating the Partners of Adolescents with Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)
[Adolescent Health & Well-Being](#)

[IKnowUShould2: A Campaign to Raise Awareness about Sexually Transmitted Infections among Youth in Philadelphia](#)
[Adolescent Health & Well-Being](#)