

# **PUSH: Providing Unique Support for Health for Young Black and Latino Men**

## **Statement of Problem**

There are approximately 37,600 new human immunodeficiency (HIV) infections each year in the United States, with adolescents and young adults ages 13-24 making up 21 percent of new diagnoses. Urban cities such as Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia are especially burdened by high and increasing rates of new HIV infections. In addition, youth of color, young transgender women and men who have sex with men (MSM) are disproportionately affected by HIV.

One of the most challenging aspects of HIV prevention and treatment is medication adherence to prevent HIV infection or, for those living with HIV, to achieve viral suppression and engage and retain youth in care. Other risky behaviors, such as substance use, can further complicate and hinder prevention and treatment plans. As a supplement to routine medical care, innovative digital solutions can provide real-time support and feedback for these young people—who are constant consumers of technology—to help them with HIV prevention and treatment as well as substance abuse treatment to improve their health outcomes.

## **Description**

To help these populations most at risk, a panel of researchers from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Johns Hopkins University, Children's National, Whitman Walker Health and the Treatment Research Institute are conducting a study called Providing Unique Support for Health (PUSH). PUSH is a multiphase study consisting of:

1. Formative research, with youth and community/provider stakeholder input via focus groups and interviews, to develop effective strategies for reaching youth and to help develop a mobile-enhanced engagement intervention (MEI) application with emocha Mobile Health Inc. for use throughout the study;
2. Identification, recruitment and rapid HIV testing of young (age 15-24) Black and Latino men who have sex with men, including gender-expansive and transgender women who are living with HIV or at high-risk for contracting HIV by using a research method called respondent-driven sampling and social media/networking sites in three urban cities (Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, D.C.);
3. Two randomized control trials (RCT) to:
  - Compare HIV and substance treatment MEI vs. standard of care over 18 months
  - Compare pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and substance treatment MEI vs. standard PrEP navigation referral over 12 months
4. Explore technology preferences, health experiences and recommendations to improve engagement and retention among select youth who participated in the RCTs by conducting qualitative interviews

The unique MEI app is coupled with a supportive health coach trained in motivational interviewing and has a variety of features, including medication and appointment reminders with optional pill camera function, calendar

tracker, place to store health insurance information, chat function to speak directly to trained health coaches, weekly substance use screening surveys and various health clinics' contact information for ease of access. The MEI's main focus is to bolster:

1. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) adherence and suppressed viral loads among youth living with HIV
2. PrEP uptake and adherence among high-risk HIV-uninfected youth
3. Engagement in substance abuse treatment

## Next Steps

PUSH may have broad implications for identifying, engaging, retaining and improving health outcomes for adolescents and young adults living with HIV and those at high risk for HIV infection who are underserved, underinsured and hard to reach. This type of mHealth intervention with direct health coach support and interaction provides an opportunity to diversify and improve health care using technology. Plans for mHealth/eHealth sustainability and MEI updates are in development.

*This project page was last updated in July 2019.*

## Suggested Citation

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## PolicyLab Leads

### **Nadia Dowshen MD, MSHP**

#### **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.



Nadia Dowshen  
MD, MSHP

## Team

### **Marné Castillo** **PhD, MEd**

#### **Faculty Scholar**

Marné Castillo (she/her) is a faculty scholar at PolicyLab and serves as the clinical and research director of the Adolescent Initiative, a multi-disciplinary program for HIV prevention, care, education and research at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).

Dr. Castillo is the principal investigator for CHOP's Adolescent Trials Unit, which is supported by the National Institutes of Health in addition to several other multi-site studies. From 2002 to 2017, she led the "Connect to Protect Project," the Adolescent Trials Network community-based prevention research study focusing on community mobilization and HIV primary prevention.

Dr. Castillo's work focuses on adolescent health promotion and community engagement in research, especially with the House and Ball and Kiki communities. She also has broader interests around social determinants of health, with a special interest in trauma and improving outcomes for marginalized adolescents. In 2015, Dr. Castillo received the Center for AIDS Research Red Ribbon Award recognizing her work on behalf of adolescents in the field HIV prevention research in Philadelphia. She has served on the Board of Directors of several organizations, including Philadelphia FIGHT and GALAEI. Dr. Castillo received her PhD in public health and her master's degree in education from Temple University.



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## **Funders of Project**

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## **Related Tools & Publications**

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[Providing Unique Support for Health Study Among Young Black and Latinx Men Who Have Sex With Men and Young Black and Latinx Transgender Women Living in 3 Urban Cities in the United States](#)

[Article](#)

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Related Projects

[IKnowUShould2: A Campaign to Raise Awareness about Sexually Transmitted Infections among Youth in Philadelphia](#)

[Adolescent Health & Well-Being](#)

Positively Connected for Health (PC4H): Use of eHealth/mHealth tools to Improve Health of HIV+ Youth Adolescent Health & Well-Being