

# Integrating PrEP Into Primary Care for Adolescents

## Statement of Problem

In May 2018, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for use among adolescents. An essential tool in ending the HIV epidemic, PrEP is a daily pill that is more than 90% effective in preventing HIV infection in users with high adherence. Despite disproportionately high rates of HIV infection among adolescents and young adults and the U.S. Preventative Service Task Force's "Grade A" recommendation for PrEP in primary care, PrEP uptake in youth has been poor.

Guidelines recommend delivering PrEP within a package of preventive services including sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening and risk reduction counseling. Key barriers to expanding PrEP uptake for youth are the lack of evidence-based behavioral interventions to promote its use and strategies for how to best implement PrEP in pediatric health care systems. Most adolescents receive their sexual health services in pediatric primary care, including testing and treatment of STIs. These sexual health care encounters provide a window of opportunity for delivering effective HIV prevention interventions when youth are more motivated for behavior change.

Unfortunately, delivery of sexual health services in primary care is hampered by limited time and clinical knowledge. Within busy primary care practices, pediatricians often need to address a wide range of issues including mental health. Given the demands placed on primary care providers, there is a critical need to develop theory-based, PrEP-inclusive, HIV prevention interventions for youth that we can effectively and efficiently integrate into primary care.

## Description

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By convening both teens and health care system experts, we hope to understand how to best address the sexual preventative health needs of teens.

Since evidence shows that STI and HIV prevention aren't "one size fits all," our goal is to allow youth to identify their own prevention goals at the beginning of the intervention, such as starting PrEP or using condoms consistently, and then measure their progress toward meeting that goal throughout the intervention. By using health coaches—individuals who are trained in motivational interviewing and sexual and reproductive health—we can move the heavy lift of safer sex counseling off of over-burdened primary care providers.

Through this project, we are conducting interviews with surveys with adolescent patients with recent STIs, and working with primary care providers to innovate the primary care workflow to best meet their needs. By convening both teens and health care system experts, we hope to understand how to best address the sexual preventative health needs of teens while making an efficient workflow for primary care providers.

We will test the effectiveness of our intervention in improving PrEP uptake and reducing STI infections in adolescents by conducting a randomized controlled trial of a health coaching intervention in adolescents attending primary care. At the end of the six-month intervention, we will measure STI re-infection rates, HIV and STI testing rates, and PrEP uptake to see if youth have achieved their safer sex goals.

## **Next Steps**

Our ultimate goal of this five-year program is to develop a behavioral intervention to improve PrEP use in adolescents and understand from providers the best way to integrate the intervention into our busy primary care practices. By tailoring STI and HIV prevention interventions to fit the needs of both youth and primary care providers, we hope to build an intervention that can move beyond our own clinics at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and into the broader world of adolescent primary care.

*This project page was last updated in April 2021.*

## **Suggested Citation**

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## **PolicyLab Leads**

**Sarah Wood**  
**MD, MSHP**

**Faculty Scholar**

Sarah Wood (she/her) is a faculty scholar at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and the division chief of Adolescent Medicine and director of the Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center. Prior to assuming her role at Sinai, Dr. Wood was an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of

Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine and served as the assistant director of Adolescent HIV Services in CHOP's Craig Dalsimer Division of Adolescent Medicine.

Dr. Wood is an early-stage clinician investigator, implementation scientist, and adolescent medicine and HIV specialist with a career focused on reducing the incidence of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adolescents and young adults (AYA). Over almost two decades, she has led clinical research exploring the structural and health care-associated determinants of HIV prevention behavior in AYA, and in the clinicians and health systems that serve them. Her secondary research focus uses implementation science to improve the integration of sexual health preventative services into primary care for adolescents.

Dr. Wood's funding success includes grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, the Penn Center for AIDS Research, the Penn Mental Health AIDS Research Center and PolicyLab. Her scholarly work blends implementation science and quality improvement methodology based on experience as project leader of an American Board of Pediatrics-endorsed 31-clinic quality improvement initiative to improve STI screening among adolescents. Dr. Wood oversees research efforts at Sinai's Adolescent Health Center, a comprehensive free clinic for AYA. She leads a robust computational science laboratory that uses clinic-derived STI testing data from over 100,000 adolescent STI testing encounters to develop interventions to address gaps in high quality and equitable service delivery.

Dr. Wood received her medical degree from the Drexel University College of Medicine and a Master of Science in Health Policy Research from the University of Pennsylvania.



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## Team

### **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.



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## **Alexander Fiks MD, MSCE**

### **Faculty Member**

Alex Fiks is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), an urban primary care pediatrician at CHOP, director of Clinical Futures at CHOP and an associate professor of pediatrics at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the director of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Pediatric Research in Office Settings (PROS), a national research network, medical director for the Pediatric Research Consortium (PeRC), CHOP's practice-based research network and co-director of the Possibilities Project, an initiative to innovate primary care delivery. Additionally, Dr. Fiks is a founding member of the hospital's Department of Biomedical and Health Informatics.

Board certified in clinical informatics, Dr. Fiks' research is aimed at improving outcomes for ambulatory pediatric patients through practice-based research with a focus on improving health and health care decision-making through health information technology. To achieve these goals, much of Dr. Fiks' research is focused on fostering shared decision making between clinicians and families, especially in the setting of behavioral health conditions. He is also especially interested in how electronic health record data may best be used to improve primary care, medication use and child health more broadly. As Director of AAP PROS, Dr. Fiks has been involved in building the Collaborative Electronic Reporting for Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER<sup>2</sup>), an electronic health record database designed to support pharmacoepidemiologic and other comparative effectiveness studies that currently includes >2 million U.S. children from across multiple health systems.

Dr. Fiks received his medical degree from Harvard University, and received a Master's of Science in Clinical Epidemiology (MSCE) degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He has received additional training in clinical informatics.



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## Haley Richardson

### Clinical Research Coordinator

Haley Richardson (she/her) is a clinical research coordinator at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). Ms. Richardson supports Dr. Sarah Wood on research efforts focused on improving delivery of sexual health services and reducing racial and socioeconomic disparities in sexual health care delivery. She also supports the Title X Family Planning Services at CHOP Karabots Pediatric Primary Care site under Andrea Bailer.

Ms. Richardson previously completed an AmeriCorps VISTA year of service with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health Division of Maternal, Child, and Family Health where she created an online training platform for frontline staff and case workers in Philadelphia. Prior to her work with the Health Department, she was a research assistant at the University of Michigan Center for Value-Based Insurance Design where she supported research on health insurance and access to care. Ms. Richardson graduated from the University of Michigan in 2019 with a Bachelor of Science in Biology, Health, and Society and Southeast Asian Studies.



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## Funders of Project

## Project Contact

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## Related Tools & Publications

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

Jan 2017

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[Addressing Sexually Transmitted Infections in Pediatrics Research at a Glance](#)

Apr 2019

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[Barriers and Facilitators of PrEP Adherence for Young Men and Transgender Women of Color Article](#)

Apr 2019

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[USPSTF Request for Public Comment: Behavioral Counseling Interventions to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)

[Tools and Memos](#)

Feb 2020

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[Social Support Networks Among Young Men and Transgender Women of Color Receiving HIV Pre-exposure Prophylaxis](#)

[Article](#)

Mar 2020

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[Changing the Course on Rising Teen STI Rates](#)

[Webinars](#)

Apr 2020

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[Family Characteristics in Sex Communication and Social Support: Implications for Emerging Adult Men Who Have Sex with Men's PrEP Engagement](#)

[Article](#)

Mar 2020

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[Identifying Opportunities to Discuss Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis During Contraceptive Coaching Discussions With Urban Adolescent Women](#)

[Article](#)

Nov 2021

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[Adolescent Preferences for a Pediatric Primary Care-based Sexually Transmitted Infection and HIV Prevention Intervention](#)

[Article](#)

Mar 2024

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[Advancing the Community Plan to End the HIV Epidemic in Philadelphia: A Qualitative Descriptive Evaluation of Low-threshold PrEP Services in Sexual Health Clinics](#)

[Article](#)

Jan 2024

#### Related Projects

[Improving Sexually Transmitted Infection Screening in Primary Care Adolescent Health & Well-Being](#)