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Ci3 launches novel research targeting economic stability to improve adolescent health and well-being and prevent HIV among urban youth of color

Funded through NIH, Ci3 will conduct studies aimed at preventing HIV infection among vulnerable youth.

(Chicago) The Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation (Ci3) in Sexual and Reproductive Health at the University of Chicago newest project aims to reduce HIV infection among young men who have sex with men (YMSM) and young transgender women. This project will provide job readiness and employment skills to increase employment.

Funded by the National Institutes of Health [Adolescent Medicine Trials Network \(the ATN\) for HIV/AIDS Interventions](#), this project explores how employment and job readiness skills can prevent adolescent homelessness, drug use, and migration to other “street economies” associated with increased risk for HIV infection.

“Recognizing economic hardship as a critical factor contributing to HIV risk, our goal is to help gear young people toward economic stability through job placement and training, identifying career trajectories for young people that embrace and support gender and sexual diversity,” said Dr. Brandon Hill, Ci3’s executive director. “This research intends not only to decrease the number of adolescent HIV infections among youth ages 16-24, but also highlight the significant role economics play in the spread of disease, as well as, overall health and well-being among marginalized youth.”

In 2015, Chicago youth ages 30 and younger represented nearly 50% of all new HIV infections, with nearly 30% occurring among those ages 13-24. Individuals who identified as Black/African American comprised 54% of all new infections and were more likely to be diagnosed at a younger age. Sexual and gender minority, including LGBTQ youth, are disproportionately impacted by HIV. Additionally, LGBTQ youth face social harassment and even violence, contributing to employment disparities including hiring bias, job discrimination, and unequal pay and benefits. As a result, studies suggest that a fair majority of LGBTQ youth, particularly LGBTQ youth of color, live in poverty, experiencing high rates of homelessness, limited access to healthcare and HIV services, few economic opportunities, and increased reliance on survival sex work.

This project, entitled Work2Prevent, will work with collaborators from the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, Boston’s Children Hospital, Illinois University of Chicago (UIC), Department of Psychiatry, Chicago House TransLife Center, and Thresholds: Home-Health-Hope to develop, tailor, and test this new employment intervention program.

“Given shifting federal and state policies, including employment discrimination protections, restroom use laws, and access to legal name change on identification documents, understanding the potential impact such changes may have on LGBTQ health and well-being, including adolescent HIV infection, is crucial to the development of efficacious structural level interventions,” said Hill.

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Founded in 2012, Ci3 is an award-winning research center at the University of Chicago. Ci3 envisions a world in which all youth emerge into adulthood with agency over their bodies and futures. As such, we are committed to empowering young people, conducting innovative research, and uncovering opportunities for policy and systemic change. Ci3 houses three labs: the Game Changer Chicago Design Lab, the Transmedia Story Lab, and the Design Thinking Lab. Through these labs, Ci3's interdisciplinary team of medical providers, public health scholars, policy researchers, designers, and artists create games, digital narratives, and interventions with and for youth. Developed with an eye towards scaling, each of our interventions can be implemented in settings across the Chicagoland area and beyond.

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