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RESEARCH GRANT AWARDED TO HUNTER COLLEGE TO STUDY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE HIV SEROCONVERSION AMONG MSM

[Hunter College](#)'s Center for HIV/AIDS Educational Studies and Training ([CHEST](#); [@CHESTNYC](#)) has been awarded a two-year milestone-based award (UG3-AI133674) for more than \$2.9 million from the National Institute on Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to address the sustained HIV epidemic among gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men (MSM). If agreed upon milestones for the first two years are achieved, an additional three years and more than \$3.9 million have been committed. The joint Principal Investigators (PIs) on the award are [Dr. Jeffrey Parsons](#) ([@DrJeffParsons](#)), Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Director of CHEST, and [Dr. Jonathon Rendina](#) ([@ProfRendina](#)), Assistant Professor of Psychology and Director of Quantitative Methods at CHEST.

Rates of HIV infection have stabilized and even declined among the majority of the U.S. population. Meanwhile, MSM—particularly young MSM (YMSM) under 25, along with MSM of color—continue to be disproportionately affected, and these subgroups of MSM remain the only groups for whom rates of infection continue to rise, especially those who fall under both groups (i.e., YMSM of color). The two Hunter College faculty will establish a cohort of approximately 8,000 HIV-negative MSM across the U.S. and Puerto Rico and follow them over time to better understand factors that influence HIV seroconversion that could help guide future interventions. Because they are the group most impacted by the domestic HIV epidemic, recruitment efforts will be focused on enrolling large numbers of Black, Latino, and Multiracial YMSM into the study. Importantly, the study will also be conducted in both English and Spanish.

“One of the biggest challenges to understanding HIV infection is that we typically rely on self-reported behaviors as a proxy for HIV infection risk, which has limitations,” noted Dr. Parsons. Dr. Rendina echoed this and added, “The benefit of this large cohort is that we will have a sample size large enough to examine HIV seroconversion itself, which will enhance our ability to subsequently develop interventions

to prevent infection.” The study, which has been named UNITE (Understanding New Infections through Targeted Epidemiology), will involve two phases. In the first phase, the researchers will determine what factors appear to be most associated with HIV seroconversion; they will then use this information in the second phase to identify those at the highest risk and continue to follow them for an additional two years to further refine their model. “The end goal is to have a clear picture of what factors we can target through interventions to reverse the course of the HIV epidemic for MSM,” noted Dr. Parsons.

Collaborators on this award include [Dr. Steven John](#) of Hunter College/CHEST, [Dr. Brian Mustanski](#) of Northwestern University, [Dr. Eli Rosenberg](#) of Emory University, and [Dr. Carlos Rodríguez-Díaz](#) of the University of Puerto Rico. The project will involve many undergraduate and master’s students and interns who volunteer their time at Hunter College/CHEST, doctoral students from [CUNY’s Health Psychology and Clinical Science](#) PhD program, and postdoctoral fellows from Hunter College/CHEST.

CHEST’s mission is to conduct research to identify and promote strategies that prevent the spread of HIV and improve the lives of people living with HIV. We have been advocating for and working with the LGBT community since 1996. www.chestnyc.org

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