



HIV CARE CONNECT



New cases of HIV are on the decline in the United States, yet certain populations and geographic regions of the country continue to bear a disproportionate burden of new infections. According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), over half of all people newly diagnosed with HIV live in the U.S. South, and approximately three quarters of them are people of color.¹ In 2017, over two thirds of gay and bisexual men diagnosed with HIV were men of color, and approximately three quarters of women diagnosed with HIV were women of color.^{2,3}

Disparities in HIV are substantial and persist throughout the HIV care continuum, and frequently lead to poorer health outcomes. Social determinants of health – factors such as economic stability, neighborhood and physical environment, education, stigma, social context and trust in health care systems – contribute significantly to disparities among persons living with HIV in underserved U.S. communities.

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Connecting individuals living with HIV to high-quality care, treatment, and support is critical in helping them achieve and maintain viral suppression, which is a key goal of treatment. To help address persistent HIV disparities, the [MSD Foundation](#) (the Foundation) established [HIV Care Connect](#) with a \$7 million, five-year commitment. *HIV Care Connect* is a multi-site initiative that aims to reduce disparities in access to HIV care and improve health outcomes for people of color living with HIV in the Southeastern United States.

PROGRAM GOALS

- Improve linkage to and retention in high-quality HIV care for populations most affected by HIV
- Build sustainable collaborations between the health care sector and other sectors to address access barriers related to the social determinants of health
- Improve health outcomes for persons living with HIV, particularly in underserved communities
- Disseminate key findings and program results to advance best practices for improving HIV care

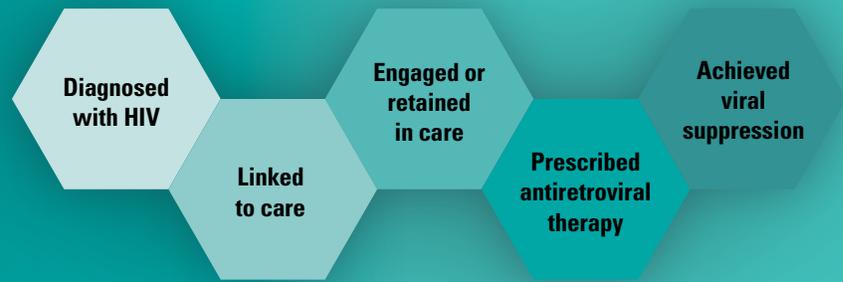
A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN APPROACH

Our approach and focus of this initiative aligns with the [National HIV/AIDS Strategy](#) (NHAS), a federal framework to guide the nation's response to the epidemic. The NHAS prioritizes increasing access to care, reducing disparities by addressing the social determinants of health, and focusing on the people and places with the highest burden of HIV.⁴ The initiative also helps support the [Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America](#), the national initiative aiming to reduce new infections to less than 3,000 a year by 2030.⁵

HIV Care Connect will support multifaceted programs that improve the delivery of HIV care and address health disparities by:

- Implementing evidence-based, multilevel strategies to improve the linkage to and long-term engagement in HIV care
- Establishing or expanding multisectoral collaborations to address factors inside and outside the health care system that affect access to HIV care and health outcomes
- Engaging the community in program development to ensure that interventions are effectively tailored to address local needs

HIV Care Continuum



PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

Care Resource

Miami, FL

Care Resource aims to reduce disparities in access to care and health outcomes for low-income persons of color living with HIV in Miami-Dade County including Liberty City, Little Haiti, North Miami and Miami Beach. Their program identifies access barriers to health care and provides a broad range of services to address these vulnerabilities. The organization partners with PrideLines to coordinate care and patient-centered interventions, strategies and support to enhance patients' self-management and motivation to access and stay in care.

University of Mississippi Medical Center

Jackson, MS

The University of Mississippi Medical Center works to improve the sustainability of care for persons of color living with HIV in Jackson and the adjacent rural communities. Their program is implementing a central point of contact for individuals with HIV to improve retention in care and

help them achieve viral suppression. The Medical Center works with the Mississippi State Department of Health and partner organizations to offer interventions that help address access barriers related to transportation, food and housing security, literacy and mental health support.

Medical Advocacy and Outreach

Montgomery, AL

Medical Advocacy and Outreach works to address barriers to care for women of color living with HIV in Montgomery and surrounding counties. Their program focuses on addressing barriers related to the social determinants of health (e.g., food insecurity, transportation, economic stability) and uses a Community Health Worker and Health

Coach model to assist participants with access to health care and at-home support. Additionally, participants will receive behavioral health and nutrition services. The organization will partner with the Heritage Training and Career Center to offer education training and job readiness for participants to help promote economic stability.

The Foundation has selected the University of Alabama at Birmingham to serve as the National Program Office for HIV Care Connect. UAB supports the program efforts of the grantee organizations and provides leadership in building a public-private partnership to help reduce disparities in HIV care.

ADVANCING BEST PRACTICES IN HIV CARE

Through an independent cross-site evaluation, the Foundation will assess the impact of the *HIV Care Connect* initiative and its programs. This effort is designed to identify and promote best practices for improving access to high-quality health care among populations disproportionately affected by HIV.

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