

From Vision to Impact: Training, Teamwork, and Transformation

PI's Corner



October 2025

What's New

PI's Corner

Dr. Carol Golin speaks about her retirement

Celebrating the RESPOND Team

Sebastian Cespedes discusses Building a Resilient Community

CTU at the Vision for Change Event

Alicia Diggs U=U Training of Trainers

“Aging With Power” at 2025 USCHA



By Dr. David Margolis | UNC CFAR Co-Director

Welcome to fall! Our CFAR continues to move forward in many ways, some highlighted below. Now in its 28th year, with the help of many of you, we recently applied for another five years of support. We are optimistic that we will get good news early next year. We are grateful to the members of the CFAR for putting us in a strong position. The next UNC CFAR will be directed by me and Angela Kashuba from the School of Pharmacy, and Audrey Pettifor from the School of Public Health. You will hear from them later, but by way of introduction I have been at UNC for the last 20 years as an Infectious Diseases clinician with a focus on HIV and studied persistent latent HIV infection. Our research group, the UNC HIV Cure center, seeks exactly that: treatments to eradicate HIV infection. We continue to seek ways to bring insights from research into the clinic towards this goal, and we soon begin two pilot clinical trials. One will test a new approach to an old strategy, that of latency reversal and reservoir clearance, and the other will test a new molecule to reverse latency and expose the viral reservoir to attack. We look forward to continuing to work with many of you towards the many advances needed to end the HIV epidemic.

A Legacy of Equity and Engagement: A Conversation With Dr. Golin on Retirement

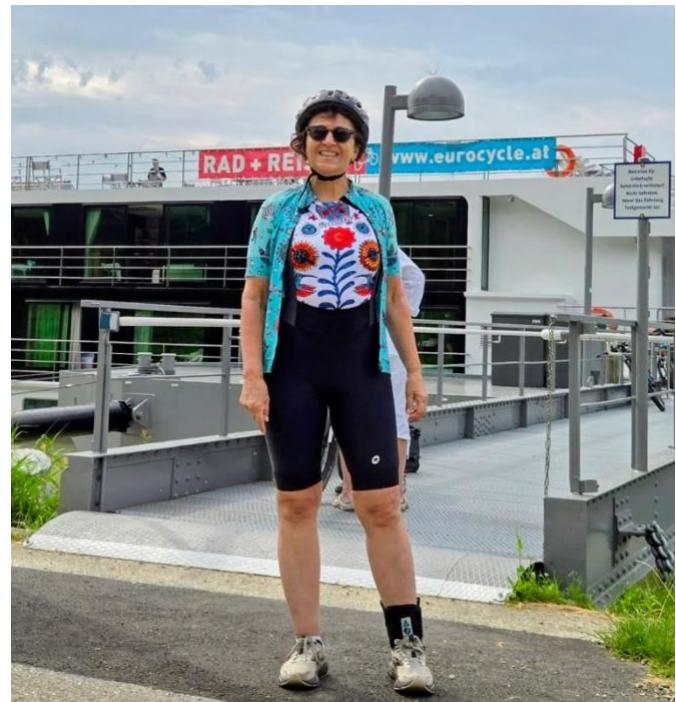
By Alicia Diggs | UNC CFAR OCE Manager

You've held leadership roles as Director of the Social and Behavioral Research Core at the UNC Center for AIDS Research, and as a professor in both the Gillings School of Global Public Health and the Department of Medicine. When you reflect on your career, what accomplishments or moments stand out as most meaningful to you?

In about 2013 or 2014, UNC CFAR and Duke CFAR co-hosted the National Social and Behavioral

Sciences Research Network Conference, focused on social and structural determinants of HIV. This marked a shift toward recognizing larger forces shaping the epidemic and the need for structural interventions. A session on implementation science, led by NIH officers, underscored the push for real-world adoption of innovations. The conference also highlighted UNC's prison working group on criminal justice and HIV. With over 120 attendees from all 19 CFARs, it was a major success.

Today, UNC's Vivian Go and Suzanne Maman along with the SBS Core will be our leaders in guiding the SBSRN's future.



Your work has always bridged clinical medicine and public health. How has working across these disciplines shaped the way you approached HIV/AIDS research and patient care?

One of the things I love about UNC and the UNC CFAR is that the walls are very low, allowing crossover between the medical school, public health, and other disciplines. Though I'm no longer clinically active, my clinical work still drives research questions. It's not just individual behaviors or medications that matter; it's the structures of our society that drive a lot of the health, and clinicians have to keep that in mind too. I enjoy bridging these perspectives, which strengthens both research and clinical care in meaningful ways.

The Social and Behavioral Research Core has been such an important part of community-centered HIV research. What impact do you feel this work has had on advancing equity, improving outcomes, and amplifying community voices?

Our core has hosted HIV networking events to educate clinicians, epidemiologists, and researchers on the importance of community voices. At UNC, these efforts help build strong appreciation for community contributions, ensuring research is both relevant and high quality. People most impacted by HIV guide what questions matter and how research should be done. We've developed resources and partnerships, to amplify voices often unheard in power structures. I think it's vital that patients and community members have input into programs, or they very likely will not work.

As you prepare for retirement, what advice would you give to early-career researchers, clinicians, and public health leaders who want to follow in your footsteps?

Well, I think that one of the most important things for new researchers to keep in mind is to never give up on your values. The values that motivate you are the ones that motivate you from the

beginning to do the work that you're doing. If you're here doing this work, it means you care. And never forget that. The other thing I would say is don't expect your career to just go in a straight line. You need to be prepared to embrace the unexpected, but if we can embrace them and see them as opportunities, there's always a way through and along those lines. Keeping that in mind can help us have the courage, the hope and the faith that we can respond to the uncertainty of these times and succeed as well.

Although you are retiring from your formal roles, many people see retirement as the beginning of a new chapter. What do you hope to continue doing whether in mentorship, advocacy, writing, or personal passions after stepping away from your faculty and leadership positions?

Retirement can be a very exciting time that opens a new chapter in one's life. I am continuing to work on 3 NIH studies in a very small role, as a senior consultant. I'm continuing to teach the K-to-R grant-writing course, in terms of mentorship, which I absolutely love. I am planning to continue with some of the political work that I have been doing as a private citizen while I was a faculty member. I'm also looking forward to having more time for some of my personal passions like doing Yoga and meditation, hiking and biking, traveling, doing some non-academic writing, and volunteering in hospice. Perhaps my strongest personal passion, is not only spending time with family, but traveling to southern California to spend time with my 3-month-old granddaughter, babysitting her and being a Grandma.



Celebrating New Beginnings & Honoring Transitions in the RESPOND Team

By Alicia Diggs, CAG Lead Liaison | UNC Chapel Hill

We are thrilled to announce some exciting updates within our RESPOND family!

Please join us in welcoming **Marielle (she/her)** as RESPOND's new Project Coordinator. With her strong background in public health, Marielle will support coordination, communication, and

community engagement—we're excited for the fresh insight she brings.

We're also glad to have **Keenan Phillips**, RESPOND's Research Assistant and a doctoral student at UNC Charlotte, joining us. His expertise and commitment to HIV prevention among Black men and impacted communities strengthen our mission.

Finally, we celebrate **Sebastian**, who will transition out of his roles this fall as he prepares to graduate in December 2025. His leadership has been instrumental, and we are grateful for the lasting impact he's made on RESPOND.

Bridging Research and Community

By Sebastian Marin Cespedes MPH Candidate, Epidemiology | UNC Charlotte

My time with the RESPOND Project has been one of the most formative experiences of my graduate training. Working closely with our Community Advisory Group and local partners has shown me the power of collaboration in advancing HIV prevention and care. I've seen how research is most impactful when it is shaped by the voices and needs of the community it intends to serve.

As a queer immigrant and a public health researcher, this work has reaffirmed my commitment to health equity and to creating spaces where historically marginalized communities are centered. Leading community engagement efforts and contributing to dissemination activities has given me the tools to balance rigorous research with meaningful, grassroots involvement.



Looking ahead, I plan to continue bridging the gap between research and practice, whether through implementation science, program planning, or evaluation of community-based initiatives. My goal is to remain grounded in the belief that inclusive, community-driven approaches are essential to ending the HIV epidemic and strengthening public health systems.

From Research to Community: CTU at Vision for Change

By Tia Morgan-Revere, MSc Global HIV Prevention and Treatment Clinical Trials Unit



The UNC IGHID Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) participated in the Vision for Change: Empowering Communities in NC through Community Engagement event on Saturday, August 30th at the Community Family Life & Recreation Center at Lyon Park. Our team (Miriam, Ann, and Tia) joined alongside Alicia Diggs of the UNC CFAR, CARE CAB, and a variety of community partners to help create a meaningful day of learning, connection, and empowerment. At the CTU table, attendees engaged with educational materials about our ongoing clinical studies, participated in a fun quiz-style game, and received giveaways designed to spark awareness and conversation. Visitors



asked thoughtful questions about the types of studies we offer, showing genuine interest in research and community health.

The event also featured impactful presentations and interactive sessions led by partners including the NC AIDS Action Network and ViiV. Topics included HIV criminalization where we've been, where we are, and where we are going and the importance of identity, language, and presentation in how people experience care and community. Through group discussions like *"How do you identify?"*, participants highlighted the need to focus on people's whole identities, not just their diagnosis or sexuality.

Overall, the event was a great success bringing together vendors, community members, and advocates to exchange knowledge, uplift one another, and reinforce the collective commitment to equity in health and beyond."

U=U Training of Trainers - Washington, DC

By Alicia Diggs- UNC CFAR Office of Community Engagement Manager



From September 2-4, I had the privilege of participating in the U=U Training of Trainers (TOT), held at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Headquarters in Washington, DC. This three-day session brought together advocates, educators, clinicians, and community leaders from across the country to strengthen our capacity to champion the life-changing message of *Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)*.

The purpose of U=U University is to equip participants with evidence-based knowledge and

practical tools to communicate the powerful truth: people living with HIV who are on treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load cannot pass HIV to their sexual partners. This message is more than science—it is liberation. It reduces fear, dismantles bias, and affirms the dignity of people living with HIV.

Throughout the training, we explored the science behind U=U, practiced delivering clear and empowering messages, and shared strategies to integrate U=U across clinical care, community spaces, and advocacy platforms. The curriculum was designed to be participatory and practical, ensuring that we left not only with knowledge, but also with the confidence and skills to train others.

By centering real-world application, U=U University empowers individuals and organizations to play a critical role in transforming lives—reducing harmful stereotypes, improving access to treatment and prevention, and accelerating the end of AIDS as a public health threat.

I left this training energized, equipped, and committed to spreading U=U in my community and beyond. Together, we can change the conversation and ensure everyone living with HIV knows their power.

Reflections from USCHA 2025

By Alicia Diggs- UNC CFAR Office of Community Engagement Manager

This year's U.S. Conference on HIV/AIDS in Washington, DC shined a spotlight on people Aging with HIV. The program honored their history, highlighted their challenges, and uplifted their lived experiences through plenaries, workshops, and community conversations.

Together, we explored the unique realities of aging with HIV from the pre-protease inhibitor generation to Longterm survivors and Lifetime survivors and beyond, while creating space to share stories, build solutions, and celebrate resilience.

Aging With Power



integrated. More than 50 attendees joined us and left with tools, language, and inspiration to better support women in their communities.



I had the privilege of attending the 2025 U.S. Conference on HIV/AIDS in Washington, DC. One highlight was co-presenting with Lepena Reid on *Aging with Power: Addressing Menopause, Weight, HIV, and Bone Health*. This session centered the real experiences of women aging with HIV—experiences that are too often ignored. Menopause, body changes, and long-term health challenges can feel overwhelming, especially when layered with racism, bias, and disparities in care. For Black and Brown women in particular, these realities shape not only physical health but also emotional well-being, self-image, and quality of life.

We shared stories and strategies that affirmed the strength and resilience of women living with HIV while also calling for care that is woman-centered and

Getting older can mean juggling many doctors such as our primary care provider, a gynecologist, specialists, and our HIV doctor. Sometimes it feels like no one is looking at the whole picture. On top of that, our experiences as women, and especially as women of color, shape how we're treated and the care we receive. That's why it's so important to create a model of care that sees *all* of us; our bodies, our stories, our needs, and supports us in a way that's truly connected.

This workshop reminded me that our voices matter and why we must continue building a movement for dignity, equity, and health justice for women aging with HIV. By sharing our journeys, we shine a light on the unique needs of women aging with HIV and push forward the movement for dignity, equity, and health justice.

Events and Awareness Days



Encuentro

Oct 14-16 in Atlanta Georgia hosted by Latinos in the Deep South. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Awareness Days

October 15 - National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day

December 1 - World AIDS Day

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