

Advancing Together: New Leadership, Groundbreaking Research, and Community Voices



January 2026

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A. Pettifor (left) and A. Kashuba (right)

PI's Corner

*By CFAR Associate
Directors Angela
Kashuba and
Audrey Pettifor*

As we begin the new year, we wanted to introduce ourselves as the new co-Principal Investigators of UNC CFAR with David Margolis. Our roles will start with the renewal of the UNC CFAR later this year. We are honored to step into them and are deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve our exceptional community.

Together, we bring complementary perspectives shaped by decades of engagement with CFAR and with HIV research locally and globally. Angela's work spans pre-clinical and clinical pharmacology and translational science, with a strong focus on accelerating discovery and optimizing efficacy and safety of drug therapy. Audrey's research centers on HIV prevention, implementation science, and global and domestic health equity, with long-standing partnerships that ground our work in real-world impact. What unites us is a shared commitment to collaboration, mentorship, and using science to advance HIV prevention, treatment and eradication.

As we optimistically await the renewal of our CFAR, we do so with confidence in the strength of this community. The breadth of scientific excellence, the dedication of our investigators and staff, and the meaningful engagement of our trainees and community partners position the UNC CFAR well for our next chapter. This moment also offers a chance to reflect on how far we have come, and to imagine how we can continue to evolve, innovate, and lead together.

Thank you for the work you do every day to make our UNC CFAR vibrant and impactful. We look forward to working with you in the months ahead and to sharing updates as we move forward together.

~Angela and Audrey

Dr. Myron Cohen & CFAR: Save Your Good-Byes

By Ron Swanstrom, Co-Director (for a little while longer) UNC CFAR

Our good friend and colleague Dr. Myron "Mike" Cohen recently sent out an email announcing that he will be stepping down from his leadership role in the Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases (IGHID) in June 2026. IGHID has been an important organizing entity for the work of many UNC faculty around the world. We are all indebted to Mike and his tireless efforts to build IGHID, and for all of the lives it has touched both in the research setting and for the knowledge gained in support of public health. But don't be fooled - the CFAR is not done with Mike and vice versa.



Mike came to UNC in 1980 as an Assistant Professor in Medicine and in Micro. At that time UNC was an important center for the development of innovative treatments of hemophilia. Sadly, the isolation of clotting factors from pooled human sera became an unintended vector for the spread of HIV, and UNC found itself with a disproportionate number of people showing symptoms of AIDS. By 1990 Mike had become Division Chief of Infectious Diseases with a growing understanding that the HIV epidemic was going to be the major challenge to the ID community for a long time. From this earliest time Mike displayed one of his most significant contributions to UNC, his ability to identify and recruit the next generation of faculty/scientists to ever expand the capacity and impact of our campus research enterprise. Our current campus leaders in HIV research are a who's who of scientists Mike either identified and recruited or played an outsized role in convincing them UNC was a place where they would thrive. Let's just say he has an eye for talent and the capacity to allow others to grow and thrive under his leadership.

While early on UNC faced a special challenge dealing with HIV, Mike could see the coming impact of the epidemic on the global scale. Remarkably, Mike led our southern public university into the future as a globally relevant institution. There is a book-worth of stories of how Mike, with his own amazing fixer Irving Hoffman, brick by brick (literally) grew the UNC Project Malawi in Lilongwe. The success in creating this site became a model for setting up UNC research capacity at other sites that have enriched research opportunities for our faculty and enhanced our impact.

Mike has had his own research career that has had a major impact on our understanding of the HIV epidemic and how to control it. His leadership, guided by deep insights, remarkable vision and charismatic tenacity, has allowed him to head large research groups, complete clinical and public health changing research and ultimately to co-lead the HPTN for many of its formative and most productive years. He has worked closely with NIH administrators and leaders to help craft the NIH research response to HIV. No one at NIAID ever put a call from Mike on hold.

The Center for AIDS Research program started in 1988, but UNC was not organized as a community to compete. Eventually we knew we were becoming a coherent group that could meld basic and clinical researchers so that when the CFAR program expanded in 1998 we were ready to compete nationally. All I remember about our first organizing meeting is that when the question was posed as to who would be the PI of the application, and thus Director of the UNC CFAR, the room was silent. I guess I was the one who was most uncomfortable with the silence and spoke up. I suspect Mike knew his own contributions would span far beyond our campus and he was happy to have a trusted colleague take on this role. Mike's role has been to serve as Associate Director to the CFAR since its inception. There will be no "good-byes" or "I'm stepping down," Mike will continue to serve in that role far into the future. There is a truth to Mike's leadership and contribution that those of us who have had a chance to work closely with him have seen over and over. Mike knows he can't do everything himself and knows much of his impact has to be through delegating. Part of his genius (literally) is in maximizing his impact by inspiring people to think bigger than they would have on

their own, expressing trust in their ability to make important contributions, giving them the “space” needed to succeed and continually bringing new opportunities back to his colleagues to enrich everyone's research environment. Once when Mike was heard complaining about too much travel, the response he received was “every time your plane takes off it creates wind that blows into the sails of the UNC research enterprise.”

So congratulations Mike from everyone in the CFAR for realizing a vision with IGHID that has been a cornerstone both for the CFAR and for how UNC sees itself in the world setting. While it is never the wrong time to say thank you, I'll save my good-byes for later, I don't think we are done.

UNC Chapel Hill Site Awarded Five-Year U19 to Advance Women's Health Research

By Catalina Ramirez, Research Director School of Medicine, and Lynn Tillery, Clinical Research Manager

We are thrilled to announce that the UNC Chapel Hill site has been awarded a five-year U19 program project grant to continue STAR (Study of Treatment and Reproductive Outcomes), focused on the health of reproductive-age women living with HIV in the Southern United States. The Southern US remains the epicenter of the nation's HIV epidemic, and women (particularly young women and women of color) often experience unique challenges in care engagement, treatment adherence, and health outcomes. By following women longitudinally across critical transition points in their reproductive lives, STAR generates the evidence needed to develop tailored intervention strategies that truly meet women where they are.



C. Ramirez (top left), D. Westreich (top right),
M. Floris-Moore (bottom left), A. Diggs (bottom right)

Since 2019, STAR has enrolled over 1,000 women across six Southern sites. This renewed funding will allow us to continue following this diverse cohort of reproductive-age women with and without HIV to investigate critical questions about cardiovascular health, sexual and reproductive health outcomes, and the intersecting effects of HIV, health disparities, and reproductive transitions.

Dr. Daniel Westreich serves as the UNC site Principal Investigator and co-leads the Data Management and Analysis Core, bringing his expertise in epidemiology and causal inference to this multi-institutional collaboration spanning Atlanta, Birmingham, Chapel Hill, Jackson, Miami, and Washington, DC. Dr. Michelle Floris-Moore, lead principal investigator of the MACS/WIHS Combined Cohort Study, serves as the clinical lead at the UNC site. Alicia Diggs will be leading the newly created Community Engagement Core (CEC). As many of you

know, Alicia has been a transformative force in bridging research and community since joining the CFAR as Office of Community Engagement Manager. Her deep connections across North Carolina, combined with her lived experience and passionate advocacy work, make her the perfect leader for ensuring that community voices remain at the center of this important research. As Alicia often reminds us, “people most impacted by HIV guide what questions matter and how research should be done.”

We're grateful to all our community partners, collaborators, and CFAR members who make this work possible and look forward to the meaningful impact this research will have for



women, their families, and their communities over the next five years. The STAR initiative represents the kind of collaborative, community-informed science that UNC CFAR values.

At the heart of STAR's success is our clinical research team—Lynn Tillery, Isidra Sabio, Jackie Gibson, Francesca Prince, Ebony Brown, and Gabi Fernandes Pereira—who's compassionate, participant-centered care keeps women engaged in the study year after year.

World AIDS Day 2025

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

On December 6, I had the honor of serving as a speaker for the Union County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. in observance of WAD 2025. This engagement marked my first formal speaking appearance in over 10 years—a moment that was both deeply nerve-wracking and incredibly exciting.

Standing before the audience as a 36-year-old woman was vastly different from the last time I delivered a meaningful speech at around age 17. In the years between, I have grown, evolved, and gained a deeper understanding of myself, my journey, and my purpose. Sharing my story at this stage of life allowed me to speak not only from survival, but from lived experience, resilience, and hope. It was especially powerful to reflect on how living with HIV is not a death sentence, but a life that can be full, meaningful, and impactful.



The experience was deeply rewarding and reaffirmed the importance of telling our stories. It was an honor to connect with the audience, touch lives once again, and contribute to ongoing conversations around HIV awareness, stigma, and empowerment. I was also incredibly grateful to be supported in the room by my village—my husband, my biological cousin and her husband, two of my adopted cousins, my mother-in-law, as well as a bonus mom (my first real boyfriend's mother)—whose presence made the moment even more meaningful.

This return to the stage was not just a speech, but a full-circle moment that reminded me of the power of testimony, growth, and showing up authentically.

This moment marked far more than a return to the stage—it marked a new beginning. Standing in my truth once again affirmed that my voice still matters and that the work is far from over. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share my story again, and I am excited about what lies ahead. My hope is that this is only the beginning of continued conversations, continued impact, and a future rooted in purpose, advocacy, and hope.



Thera Community Champion - November 2025

By Alicia Diggs, UNC CFAR OCE Manager

I was selected as the **Thera Community Champion for November 2025**, a recognition that celebrates non-medical leaders whose work uplifts, educates, and strengthens the HIV community. This honor is especially meaningful because it reflects the collective impact of community-driven engagement and partnership.

As part of this recognition, my photo and community work was highlighted on the TheraThursdays website for four weeks, starting on the third Thursday of November. In addition, I was awarded a **\$1,000 sponsorship** from Theratechnologies to support ongoing community engagement efforts for the UNC CFAR's Office of Community Engagement.

In my role as the UNC CFAR Office of Community Engagement Manager, I have the privilege of working alongside people with lived experience, advocates, researchers, and community-based organizations to ensure that community voices are not only heard but meaningfully integrated into HIV research, education, and policy. This work is rooted in trust, shared leadership, and a commitment to equity, particularly for communities that have historically been marginalized in HIV spaces.

Being named a Thera Community Champion affirms the importance of investing in community leadership and reminds us that sustainable HIV responses are built through collaboration. I am grateful to my colleagues, partners, and community members whose dedication and resilience make this work possible. Together, we continue to move toward a more inclusive, informed, and compassionate HIV response.



Conferences and Awareness Days

Upcoming Conferences

February 22-25: Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Denver, CO

March 16-18: AIDSWatch in Washington, DC

April 8-10: 10th Biomedical HIV Prevention Summit (BHPS) in Chicago, IL

July 26-31: 26th International AIDS Conference in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil and virtually

Awareness Days

February 7: National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day #NBHAAD

February 28: HIV Is Not A Crime Awareness Day #HIVIsNotACrime

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