

NIH Awards \$2M to Whitman-Walker to Develop State-of-the-Art HIV Research Space at the New Max Robinson Center

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of AIDS Research grant funds will be used to build a new state-of-the-art HIV-focused biomedical research space.



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[Whitman-Walker](#), a leader in LGBTQ health, research, education and policy with special expertise in HIV care, today announces a \$2 million dollar construction award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of AIDS Research to build a new state-of-the-art HIV-focused biomedical research space. This will be a part of the organization's new Max Robinson Center, Whitman-Walker's future flagship building, which will be located on the St. Elizabeths East Campus redevelopment project in DC's Ward 8. The construction grant will enable Whitman-Walker to build a community-centered clinical and translational HIV research facility to bring cutting-edge advancements in HIV treatment and prevention science directly to DC's Wards 7 and 8, which face the District's highest burden of HIV.

"Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, DC are home to some of the nation's most stark racial inequities in health and socioeconomic indicators, with residents of these wards being underserved in health care and underrepresented in health research," said Naseema Shafi, Esq., Chief Executive Officer of Whitman-Walker Health, and Dr. Ryan Moran, Chief Executive Officer of Whitman-Walker Health System. "Among these health inequities is a significantly higher burden of HIV, yet no major HIV-related research facilities in DC are located in these wards. This grant will help address the lack of representation in under-resourced communities and optimize the impact of our work in DC neighborhoods that are hardest hit by HIV and other health inequities."

The grant is a rare accomplishment for a non-academic research institution and represents a historic investment by NIH to strengthen the infrastructure among institutions with a demonstrated mission to serve communities underrepresented in research. The location of the research facility will be on the 2nd floor of Whitman-Walker's new 7-story health care home currently under construction at 1200 Sycamore St. SE in the Congress Heights neighborhood. The new and expanded research facilities will be jointly used by HIV investigators at both Whitman-Walker and George Washington University, with a long-term goal to expand its capacity

to include other researchers from the DC Center for AIDS Research.

The award will fund the addition of nearly 10,000 square feet of biomedical HIV research space to the approximately 8,000 square feet of research space already under development by Whitman-Walker. This research facility will support clinical and translational research with the addition of a state-of-the-art lab and dedicated research pharmacy. Overall, the added facility will more than double the available research space in the new building and serve as the primary collaborative hub for community-centered HIV research in Southeast DC.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dramatically expand our capacity to conduct cutting-edge HIV research in a space that centers and fosters cross-institutional collaboration,” said Dr. Jonathon Rendina, Senior Director of Research at Whitman-Walker Institute, Associate Research Professor of Epidemiology at George Washington University’s Milken Institute School of Public Health, and Principal Investigator on the new award. “The research space in the new Max Robinson Center will not only link researchers across institutions but also across research methodologies, which we hope will lead to the scientific breakthroughs necessary to end the HIV epidemic and eradicate the intersectional inequities that have become a hallmark of HIV and more recently emerging pandemics, such as COVID-19. What is discovered in this new space will have implications broader than just HIV, and the next generation of scientists trained there will influence public health for decades to come.”

“The HIV epidemic in the United States is not over,” said Dr. Kellan Baker, Executive Director and Chief Learning Officer of the Whitman-Walker Institute. “At the Whitman-Walker Institute, we conduct research, policy, and education activities to accelerate breakthroughs in the prevention and treatment of HIV, with a particular focus on closing HIV disparities that are driven by structural racism, anti-LGBTQ bias, and other forms of structural oppression. We are excited to be part of national and global efforts to end the HIV epidemic by helping connect communities across Washington, DC with state-of-the-art research and care.”

Currently, there are more than 200 new HIV diagnoses annually in DC, and 1.8% of DC residents are living with HIV. Whitman-Walker Health diagnoses more than one-third of new HIV infections in the DC area and serves more than one-quarter of people living with HIV across the city of DC.

Whitman-Walker is the latest groundbreaking at the Saint Elizabeths East Campus, already home to the Entertainment & Sports Arena and the future site of mixed income for-sale and rental housing, a new full-service hospital, new office and retail, and other neighborhood-serving amenities. The new 118,000-square-foot center will build on the services currently provided at Whitman-Walker’s Max Robinson Center on Martin Luther King Jr Avenue SE by providing primary, behavioral, and dental care; a pharmacy; public benefits and insurance navigation services; and research, policy advocacy, education, and training around LGBTQ health, HIV care, and other areas of Whitman-Walker’s experience and expertise. The project will allow the organization to serve an additional 10,000 patients per year beginning in 2023; the new research

space will open in 2024 and triple Whitman-Walker's current capacity for research .

About Whitman-Walker

For over fifty years, Whitman-Walker has been part of the fabric of the local DC and national community as first responder and care-provider for those living with HIV; a leader in LGBTQ care and advocacy; a research center working to discover breakthroughs in HIV treatment and prevention science; and one of the DC's most trusted partners during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Whitman-Walker envisions a society where all people are seen for who they are, treated with dignity and respect, and afforded equal opportunity to health and wellbeing.

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