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**Contact:** NIDA Press Office  
301-443-6245  
[media@nida.nih.gov](mailto:media@nida.nih.gov)

**NIDA announces new awards for early stage investigators**  
*The new Avenir awards focus on HIV/AIDS and epigenetics research*

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) today announced the first six recipients of its two newly developed Avenir Award programs for HIV/AIDS and genetics or epigenetics research. The Avenir (meaning “future” in French) Awards support early stage investigators who propose highly innovative studies. The six scientists will each receive up to \$300,000 per year for five years to support their research. NIDA is part of the National Institutes of Health.



NIDA's Dr. Joni Rutter describes the  
2015 NIDA Avenir Awards

The Avenir Award Program for Research on Substance Abuse and HIV/AIDS will support creative individuals who wish to pursue research approaches for improved prevention and treatment, long term retention in care, and ultimately, eradication of HIV within substance using populations infected with, or at risk for, HIV/AIDS. The Avenir Award Program for Genetics or Epigenetics of Substance Abuse supports early stage investigators who show promise of being tomorrow's leaders in the field of genetics or epigenetics of substance abuse. Epigenetics is an emerging field that studies how environmental factors influence changes in gene expression without altering the DNA sequence.

The four HIV/AIDS projects include a wide range of approaches, including: exploring prevention interventions to reduce HIV risk among people who inject drugs; using high-resolution microsimulations to inform community-specific responses to HIV transmission among people who inject drugs; examining the potential for a new antibody therapy to suppress viral replication with a single administration in HIV-infected people, simplifying treatment which would be highly beneficial to substance users who have difficulty adhering to current HIV treatments; and integrating multi-disciplinary techniques to advance understanding of HIV-related decision-making in drug users. The epigenetic research awardees propose to explore two areas: examine how drug-related behaviors alter epigenetic modifications in the brain to develop more effective epigenetic-based addiction treatment and prevention strategies; and insight into epigenetic mechanisms underlying nicotine dependence to provide a foundation for development of novel therapeutics for nicotine/smoking cessation in humans.

“The innovative proposals by these young scientists in the fields of HIV/AIDS and epigenetics are very exciting,” said NIDA Director Nora D. Volkow, M.D. “We’re pleased to support these creative approaches and are looking forward to seeing the results of their research.”

Awardees are listed below:

### **HIV/AIDS Research**

**Alejandro B. Balazs, Ph.D.**, Harvard Medical School

**Project:** Engineering Humoral Immunity to Functionally Cure HIV Infection

**Brandon D.L. Marshall, Ph.D.**, Brown University School of Public Health

**Project:** Highly Adaptive Epidemic Control Strategies for HIV Prevention in Drug Users

**Christina S. Meade, Ph.D.**, Duke University School of Medicine

**Project:** Decision Making and HIV Risk: New Approaches to NeuroAIDS Research in Drug Users

**Daniel Werb, Ph.D., M.Sc.**, University of California, San Diego School of Medicine

**Project:** Preventing HIV by Modifying the Context for Injecting Initiation

### **Genetics or Epigenetics Research**

**Jeremy J. Day, Ph.D.**, University of Alabama at Birmingham

**Project:** Epigenetic Control of Brain Reward Systems

**Christie D. Fowler, Ph.D.**, University of California, Irvine

**Project:** Circulating miRNAs and Epigenetic Regulation in Nicotine Addiction

Read more about the [Avenir Award Program](#). For information about NIDA's AIDS Research Program, go to [www.drugabuse.gov/AIDS](http://www.drugabuse.gov/AIDS). Read more about NIDA's [Genetics and Molecular Neurobiology Research Branch](#).

Balazs, Day, Fowler, Marshall, Meade, and Werb are funded under grant numbers DA040254-01, DA039650-01, DA039658-01, DA040236-01, DA040226-01, and DA040256-01, respectively.

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The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy and improve practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found at <http://www.drugabuse.gov>, which is now compatible with your smartphone, iPad or tablet. To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA's DrugPubs research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or email requests to [drugpubs@nida.nih.gov](mailto:drugpubs@nida.nih.gov). Online ordering is available at <http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov>. NIDA's media guide can be found at <http://drugabuse.gov/mediaguide/>, and its easy-to-read website can be found at <http://www.easyread.drugabuse.gov>.

**About the National Institutes of Health (NIH):** NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).

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