

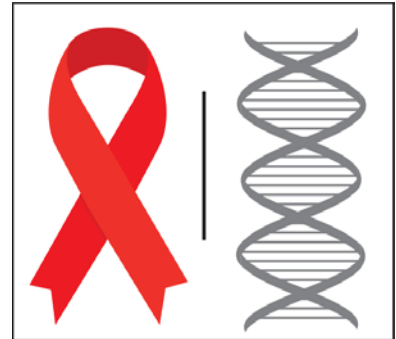
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**Pioneering early stage researchers selected for NIDA's 2016 Avenir awards**  
*Awards recognize cutting edge HIV/AIDS and epigenetics research*

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health, today announced seven recipients of its two Avenir Award programs for HIV/AIDS and genetics or epigenetics research. The awards will support exciting approaches with tools such as genome editing and smart phone technologies, as well as studies of epigenetic changes in brain cells and couples-based HIV prevention. The Avenir (the French word for “future”) Awards provide grants to early stage investigators who propose highly innovative studies. Each of the seven scientists will receive up to \$300,000 per year for five years to support their projects.



The five HIV/AIDS projects receiving awards propose to explore a wide range of approaches, including: using a novel immunization strategy to develop a HIV vaccine for individuals with substance use disorder; utilizing a new genome editing technique to identify genes required for HIV latency to support development of therapeutic targets; evaluating the cost-effectiveness of strategies aimed at improving awareness of HIV status and subsequent linkages to care; testing the effectiveness of smart-phone mobile health technology to collect patient information that may aid in HIV treatment adherence; and developing and evaluating a couples-based HIV prevention program for young substance-using males. The genetics and epigenetics research awardees are focused on two areas: identifying novel roles for the neurotransmitter dopamine in the regulation of patterns of neuronal gene expression to allow for development of more effective therapeutics; and examining epigenetic changes that occur in different types of brain cells to understand the interaction between cannabis abuse and other psychiatric disorders.

“NIDA is very pleased to support these pioneering approaches to advancing addiction science in the areas of epigenetics and HIV/AIDS,” said NIDA Director Nora D. Volkow, M.D. “It’s extremely gratifying to be able to support investigators in the early stages of their scientific careers.”

The Avenir Award Program for Research on Substance Abuse and HIV/AIDS supports scientists interested in pursuing pioneering 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 engaged in promising research in the field of genetics or epigenetics of substance abuse. Epigenetics studies how environmental factors influence changes in gene expression without altering the DNA sequence.

Awardees are listed below:

### **HIV/AIDS Research**

**Daniel Lingwood, Ph.D.**, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston

**Project:** Defining and Exploiting a Genetic Template for an HIV Vaccine

**Alexander Marson, Ph.D.**, University of California, San Francisco

**Project:** Functional Testing of Host Genes That Control HIV Latency in Primary Immune Cells

**Michael Newcomb, Ph.D.**, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

**Project:** A New Approach to Integrating Primary and Secondary HIV Prevention in Young Male Couples

**Sunil Solomon, Ph.D.**, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore

**Project:** Reaching the Hardest of the Hard-to-Reach

**Ryan Westergaard, Ph.D.**, University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Project:** Optimizing HIV Care for Patients with Substance Use Disorders using Predictive Analytics in a Mobile Health Application

### **Genetics or Epigenetics Research**

**Ian Maze, Ph.D.**, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York City

**Project:** Roles for Histone Monoamination in Cocaine-Induced Transcriptional and Behavioral Plasticity

**Francesca Telese, Ph.D.**, University of California, San Diego

**Project:** Epigenomic Approaches to Study the Gene Networks Underlying the Cannabis Effect on Genetic Vulnerability to Psychosis

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](#).

Lingwood, Marson, Newcomb, Solomon, Westergaard, Maze, and Telese are funded under grant numbers DA042422, DA042423-01, DA042417, DA040244-01, DA042424-01, DA042078-01, and DA042232-01, respectively.

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**About the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA):** 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 use and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy, improve practice, and advance addiction science. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found at [www.drugabuse.gov](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 [drugpubs.drugabuse.gov](http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov). NIDA's media guide can be found

at [www.drugabuse.gov/publications/media-guide/dear-journalist](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/media-guide/dear-journalist), and its easy-to-read website can be found at [www.easyread.drugabuse.gov](http://www.easyread.drugabuse.gov). You can follow NIDA on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

**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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