

1. Project Title & Summary

Improving Equitable Access to Long-Acting Injectable HIV Treatment Among Latino Communities in the United States

Long-acting injectable antiretroviral therapy (LAI-ART) represents a major advancement in HIV treatment, offering an alternative to daily oral medications and improving adherence for many people living with HIV (PLWH). However, emerging evidence suggests that Latino communities may face barriers to accessing these therapies due to structural determinants of health, language barriers, and healthcare system factors. This project will examine disparities in access to LAI-ART using data from a large safety-net health system and translate findings into community-informed strategies to improve equitable access to long-acting HIV treatment among Latino communities across the United States.

2. Statement of Need / Problem Description

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) continues to disproportionately affect Latino communities in the United States. Latino individuals account for a substantial proportion of new HIV diagnoses nationwide and often experience disparities in access to healthcare services, including HIV treatment and prevention resources. Although advances in antiretroviral therapy (ART) have transformed HIV into a manageable chronic condition, inequities in treatment access and viral suppression remain persistent among racial and ethnic minority populations. For decades, HIV treatment has relied primarily on daily oral antiretroviral medications. While highly effective, maintaining daily adherence can be challenging for individuals experiencing structural barriers such as unstable housing, transportation limitations, mental health conditions, substance use, stigma, or limited healthcare access. These barriers disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including Latino populations.

Long-acting injectable antiretroviral therapy (LAI-ART), consisting of cabotegravir and rilpivirine administered monthly or every two months, represents one of the most important innovations in HIV treatment in recent years. Clinical trials have demonstrated that LAI-ART is highly effective and may improve patient satisfaction and adherence compared with daily oral therapy. In addition, some patients report reduced stigma associated with HIV treatment when using injectable therapies instead of daily medications. Despite these advantages, adoption of LAI-ART in the United States remains relatively limited. Early evidence suggests that disparities in access may exist, particularly among racial and ethnic minority populations receiving care in safety-net health systems. Latino communities may face unique barriers to accessing new treatment modalities, including language barriers, limited culturally tailored educational resources, and structural determinants of health.

Additionally, many early studies evaluating awareness or perceptions of LAI-ART have excluded Spanish-speaking populations due to lack of multilingual research resources. As a result, Latino patients remain underrepresented in the emerging literature on LAI-ART implementation. Improving equitable access to innovative HIV therapies is essential for addressing disparities in HIV outcomes among Latino communities. Understanding who receives LAI-ART, who remains eligible but untreated, and what structural barriers influence prescribing decisions represents an important step toward ensuring that advances in HIV treatment benefit all communities.

3. Target Audience / Community Served

The primary population served by this project is Latino people living with HIV in the United States, particularly individuals receiving care within safety-net healthcare systems that serve low-income and medically underserved populations. Many Latino patients receiving HIV care experience structural barriers that can affect treatment adherence and healthcare access. These may include language barriers, limited transportation, unstable housing, stigma related to HIV, and reduced access to culturally tailored healthcare information. Such barriers may influence both patient engagement in care and provider decisions regarding treatment options.

While the initial analysis will focus on patients receiving care within the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (LA-DHS), one of the largest public healthcare systems in the United States, the goal of this project is to generate insights that can inform strategies for improving equitable access to LAI-ART among Latino populations nationwide. The project will also engage healthcare providers, community organizations, and public health practitioners who serve Latino communities to ensure that findings translate into practical strategies for improving HIV care delivery.

4. Proposed Program / Activities

This project will combine health services research with community-informed strategies aimed at improving equitable access to long-acting injectable HIV treatment.

The first component of the project will involve analyzing HIV care data from a large safety-net healthcare system that serves a diverse patient population, including many Latino individuals living with HIV. This analysis will examine patterns of LAI-ART prescribing and identify demographic, clinical, and social determinants associated with access to long-acting HIV therapy. Specifically, the study will examine which patients receive LAI-ART, which patients meet eligibility criteria but do not receive this therapy, and whether differences exist based on race, ethnicity, language preference, or other structural determinants of health.

The second component of the project will focus on identifying structural barriers that may contribute to missed opportunities for prescribing LAI-ART. Factors such as housing instability, transportation challenges, mental health conditions, substance use, and language barriers may influence both patient eligibility and provider prescribing decisions.

The third component will translate these findings into community-informed strategies that can improve equitable access to LAI-ART. These strategies may include development of culturally appropriate educational materials for Latino patients, identification of system-level approaches to improve LAI implementation in safety-net clinics, and recommendations for healthcare providers on how to incorporate social determinants of health when evaluating patients for long-acting HIV treatment.

5. Evaluation & Impact

The primary goal of this project is to improve understanding of disparities in access to long-acting injectable HIV treatment among Latino people living with HIV. The evaluation of this project will focus on three areas:

1. Quantify the number of patients who meet eligibility criteria for LAI-ART and determine what proportion of these patients receive this therapy. This analysis will help identify potential missed opportunities for prescribing long-acting treatment options.

2. Examine whether demographic characteristics, including race, ethnicity, preferred language, or social determinants of health, are associated with differences in LAI-ART access.
3. Findings will be translated into recommendations aimed at improving equitable access to long-acting HIV treatment within safety-net healthcare systems.

The results of this project will contribute to the growing body of literature on LAI-ART implementation and help identify strategies to reduce disparities in access to innovative HIV therapies. Ultimately, this work aims to support more equitable delivery of HIV treatment and improve health outcomes among Latino communities.

6. Optional: Sustainability or Growth Plan

This project represents an initial step toward improving equitable access to long-acting HIV treatment among Latino communities. Findings from this study will inform future research and community-based initiatives focused on reducing disparities in HIV treatment outcomes. Partnerships with community organizations and HIV advocacy groups may also help translate findings into educational programs that increase awareness of long-acting HIV treatment options.

By integrating research, community engagement, and health equity principles, this project has the potential to inform broader national strategies aimed at improving access to innovative HIV therapies for Latino communities.