

App prompts sexual health testing for young gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men

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José A. Bauermeister, Ph.D., M.P.H., Presidential Associate Professor of Nursing, and Director of the Program in Sexuality, Technology and Action Research (PSTAR) at Penn Nursing. Credit: Penn Nursing

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is funding a project to investigate a personalized web app that is designed to encourage young men at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), to get routine testing. The funding for "Get Connected" is supported by the new NIH Adolescent Trials Network. As part of the UNC/Emory Center for Innovative Technology (iTech), the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing) and the University of Michigan School of Nursing are leading the large scale implementation of the project to encourage young men who have sex with men to get tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, including chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis.

José A. Bauermeister, PhD, MPH, Presidential Associate Professor of Nursing, and Director of the Program in Sexuality, Technology and Action Research (PSTAR) at Penn Nursing, developed the web app. "This web app is distinct from existing online HIV/STI testing center locators in that our web-app provides young men with strategies to overcome barriers that keep them from getting tested. Using tailoring technology, we can customize the content based on users' risk profile, their values and needs, and other characteristics unique to each individual," said Bauermeister, co-principal investigator for the project.

Over the next four years, the trial will enroll more than 400 [young men](#) between the ages of 15 and 24 who live in Philadelphia, Atlanta and Houston. This initiative is part of a coordinated effort to encourage HIV testing and linkage to care among young people under the age of thirty, the age group that accounts for over forty percent of new HIV infections

in the United States. Young men who have sex with men, particularly racial/ethnic minority men between the ages of 15 and 24, account for the greatest proportion of new infections in this age group. This age group is also more likely than adults to own a smartphone and use this device to download apps and access health information.

"With high levels of technology use among young people, particularly smart phones and social media, online interventions offer an acceptable and efficient way to reach this highly vulnerable population," said Rob Stephenson, PhD, MSC, Director of the Center for Sexuality and Health Disparities at the University of Michigan School of Nursing, and co-principal investigator in the Get Connected project. "Continuing to examine the public health potential of our web app remains a priority for us,"

This project also involves co-investigators from the University of North Carolina, Emory University, and the University of Minnesota. The award for iTech is one of three U19 applications funded by the NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to support the new Adolescent Medicine Trials Network (ATN).

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

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