PROJECT ABSTRACT

- **Project Title:** Infini-T Project
- **Applicant Name:** The Research Foundation of SUNY/SUNY Downstate Medical Center
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**Project Summary:** The **Health & Education Alternatives for Teens (HEAT) Program** of State University of New York (SUNY) Downstate Medical Center (DMC) proposes to conduct the Infini-T Project, a culturally competent, multidisciplinary care model. For Infini-T, HEAT will expand upon an existing partnership with the **Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI),** NYC’s largest agency serving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth. HEAT provides age- and developmentally-appropriate, culturally-competent HIV care for heterosexual, LGBT, and perinatally-infected youth (ages 13-24), primarily from communities of color in Brooklyn, NY. The **target population** is HIV+ transgender (TG) young women of color (TYWOC) in Brooklyn, an HIV epicenter for Black and Latino youth. **Needs:** TYWOC are at very high risk for HIV due to multiple unmet psychosocial and mental health needs and disproportionate levels of substance use, homelessness, commercial sex work, and histories of sexual abuse and incarceration. **Goals:** Utilizing HEAT’s multidisciplinary team of social work, case management, peer advocacy, mental health and medical providers, Infini-T will identify, engage and retain HIV+ & HIV- TYWOC in care by: 1) hiring a TG Peer Youth Advocate to provide linkage to HIV testing and care at HEAT and navigation to facilitate adherence to medical, mental health and psychosocial appointments; 2) adding supplemental social work services for screening assessments, referrals, and support groups; 3) enhancing TG-focused mental health services to assess unmet mental health needs (barriers to engagement and retention in care); 4) engaging an HMI staff member as a TG Youth Services Specialist to enhance outreach, engagement, referral and linkage of HMI youth outside of the clinical setting to HEAT services; and 5) engaging a TG health consultant to develop, administer, and train other project staff on the proposed intervention. **Summary of Intervention & Proposed Plan:** Infini-T will: 1) ensure early identification of new HIV cases among TYWOC; 2) ensure timely entry into co-located TG & HIV care; 3) provide early engagement in mental health services for HIV+ & HIV- TYWOC with unmet mental health needs; 4) increase the retention rates of TYWOC already receiving HIV medical care; 5) re-link to care HIV+ TYWOC who were previously in care, but lost to follow-up; and 6) retain HIV- TYWOC with significant risk factors for acquiring HIV in TG care at HEAT. Infini-T will also pilot a “grass roots,” group-level psycho-educational intervention, “**Just One Of The Girls**” (JOG), adapted from the evidence-based intervention for African-American women, “Sisters Informing Sisters about Topics on AIDS (SISTA).” JOG was adapted to meet the unique needs and address behaviors of TYWOC (e.g., injection hormone use, injection silicone use, validation of female identity through sex) while building community among participants. HEAT will evaluate the success of Infini-T’s multidisciplinary strategy to maximize the effectiveness of interventions aimed at HIV+ and HIV- TYWOC, and expects the outcomes to include improved self-assessed and clinically-derived quality of care for project clients. Longitudinal measures include utilization of services relative to retention in care, decrease in adverse mental health scores, and improved HAART adherence, CD4 counts and viral load. Self-efficacy scores for JOG participants will also be assessed.