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Wistar investing \$24M to establish new campus and launch HIV Cure and Viral Disease Center

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The Wistar Institute is creating a new north campus for its \$24M HIV Cure and Viral Disease Center. DANIEL BURKE

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By John George - Senior Reporter, Philadelphia Business Journal
Jul 17, 2024

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The Wistar Institute is investing \$24 million on a campus expansion project that will create an HIV Cure and Viral Disease Center.

The center will be housed on a new Wistar North campus at 3675 Market St. in University City and feature more than 25,000 square feet of laboratory and office space.

The goal of the HIV Cure and Viral Disease Center will be to move beyond current lifelong treatments to eradicate the virus. Wistar said its plan is to "marshal world-class scientific talent, research expertise, and community support to bring together the very best in foundational bench to bedside biomedical research to discover a cure for HIV – and possibly a host of viral threats."

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Institute officials noted researchers have long been challenged by HIV's capacity to mutate and evade immune responses, and that same challenge exists for many other viruses such as hepatitis C.

"This new center, in combination with efforts already underway in our vaccine and immunotherapy center, positions Wistar with a unique opportunity to accelerate innovative ideas for both an HIV cure and a vaccine – both major global health priorities," said Wistar CEO Dr. Dario Altieri, speaking Tuesday night at the institute's Jonathan Lax Memorial Lecture.

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Dr. Dario Altieri, CEO of The Wistar Institute.
DANIEL BURKE PHOTOGRAPHY

The World Health Organization estimates more than 39 million people around the world live with HIV. Without a cure, they must depend on lifelong medications – which are not accessible in all parts of the globe.

In addition to its researchers already working on viral cures, Wistar intends to recruit four to six additional principal investigators for the new HIV Cure and Viral Disease Center.

Specific aims of the center will be to:

- Integrate multi-pronged clinical, virus-fighting methods that mimic and enhance the natural strengths of the human immune system;
- Advance successes in personalized medicine to create tailored cure strategies for individual patients and patient groups;
- Expand international collaborations and capacity building to ensure cure-directed efforts include diverse researchers and persons living with HIV around the world.

The move to establish a new campus on Market Street marks the first time Wistar will expand beyond its headquarters at 3601 Spruce St. in its more than 130-year history.

The 14-story life sciences building at 3675 Market St., built in 2018, already houses the Cambridge Innovation Center, classroom space for Drexel University and offices for drug developers including Amicus Therapeutics and Carisma Therapeutics. The site was developed by the University City Science Center, Wexford Science+Technology, and Ventas.



Dr. Luis Montaner will lead the new center.
WISTAR INSTITUTE

Dr. Luis Montaner, one of the institute's longest-serving faculty members, will lead the HIV Cure and Viral Diseases Center as founding director and as a newly appointed executive vice president of The Wistar Institute.

"I am confident we will advance towards an HIV cure in my lifetime," Montaner said in a statement. "With the launch of this Center, Wistar makes a clear and bold statement to the world that the time to get us to an HIV cure is now."

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