As a ‘virtual’ centre in the School of Public Health (SOPH), the Centre for Research in HIV and AIDS (CRHA) catalyses and co-ordinates engaged, multidisciplinary HIV-related research across the university and beyond. It does this through hosting research projects, convening symposia and seminars, promoting writing and publication, and supporting graduate students and post-doctoral and other fellows.

The CRHA is concerned with HIV and AIDS, systems and society. The projects and people who work in association with the Centre develop, conduct, and apply research and teaching, engaging communities, schools, gender and social equity advocates, as well as the formal health system. Building on the founding thematic ‘pillars’ – of health policies and systems, education and learning, gender and gender-based violence, and research and organisational capacity strengthening – our work increasingly focuses on social determinants of HIV and other chronic diseases.

Projects

This has been a productive and dynamic biennium for the CRHA. In 2011 and 2012 we continued to implement the projects realised through the two founding multi-year large grants based at the SOPH: ‘Transforming health and education policies and systems for improved HIV prevention and care’ funded by VLIR-UOS and ‘Human capacity development to address HIV and AIDS in South Africa’ funded by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) South Africa (CoAG U2GPS001083-05). (See page 42 and 43 for details of these projects.)

These have been complemented by funding for scholarship, writing, and work on research capacity strengthening from the IDRC, while support from WOTRO and the WHO, among others, has enabled the Centre to convene and/or participate in a range of other projects with colleagues within and beyond the University. These include:

- Resilience, social networks and HIV among migrants and local communities (see page 42)
- Increasing access to TB case finding and treatment in Sisonke district, South Africa (see page 44)
- Mainstreaming a health systems approach to delivery of maternal health services: Transdisciplinary research in Rwanda and South Africa (see page 40)

We are increasingly anchoring the Centre’s research around the HARICCI Collaboration – HIV and AIDS Research in Complex Contexts of Inequality (see page 41). This was launched in 2011 with an exploratory ethnographic project on resilience and vulnerability to HIV among cross-border migrants in Cape Town.

Symposia and seminars

The annual research symposia: Bridging disciplines, sectors and perspectives

The annual UWC HIV-in-Context Research Symposium is the flagship event of the Centre. Comprising a highly interactive two- to three-day meeting, the symposia are attended by about a hundred scholars, practitioners, activists, policy makers and students with a view to engaging across disciplines and sectors. The aim is to initiate or deepen cross-disciplinary research and responses to the drivers and impacts of HIV through high-level discussion and debate which seek to engage students and new partners and to re-energize those who have been at the coalface for years. Students and emerging scholars also strengthen research, writing and communication skills through participating in linked workshops or writing retreats.


How do gender (in)equality and identity link with violence and HIV infection? How do health, political, social, and justice systems and institutions view and address the interconnections among gender, violence and HIV? Are current interventions informed by evidence? This symposium, developed by an international steering committee on the basis of peer-reviewed abstracts, addressed these questions. Plenary and poster sessions, workshops, a lunchtime film series, and an evening celebration of art and performance challenged and inspired participants. This symposium examined violence against women in a broader context of the gendered experience and dynamics of violence – including political, sexual, criminal, interpersonal and structural violence in Africa. After the symposium, 35 delegates participated in a mentored writing retreat to bring concrete scholarly and advocacy communication projects closer to fruition.


Co-hosted by the CRHA and UWC’s HIV and AIDS Programme, this symposium sought to create a reflective, collegial, scholarly ‘space’ to address the tension between education imperatives and health and HIV imperatives in South Africa’s school system. Anchored in the Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) ‘Draft Integrated Strategy on HIV and AIDS 2012-2016’ this by-invitation symposium emphasized ideas that would practically support the DBE’s commitment to improving the HIV response in schools nationally.
One of the outcomes has been the revitalization of the Health Promoting Schools Network in the Western Cape, which is providing opportunities for on-going policy engagement regarding school health with the departments of Health and Education at provincial and national levels.


**Seminar series**

Our HIV-in-Context Seminar series brought over a dozen local and international speakers to UWC. They addressed a wide variety of topics, ranging from whether HIV experts are paying too much attention to sex and too little to survival (David Harrison) - to HIV stigma in the workplace in the Parliament of South Africa (SOPH Masters graduate Buyile Bashe). The experiences of African migrants in the UK was addressed by Lesley Doyal, while Allan Peterkin offered a workshop on narrative therapy in HIV. Alan Whiteside presented new evidence on HIV and economics and the Treatment Action Campaign’s Catherine Tomlinson addressed the need to fix the patent laws of South Africa.

Details of the seminars, workshops, roundtables and symposia can be found on our website, http://www.hivaids-uwc.org.za/index.php/seminars.

**Graduates, fellows and colleagues**

The SOPH’s Masters students continue to focus significantly on HIV, with over half of the Master of Public Health (MPH) theses completed in the past four years having addressed HIV/AIDS (see page 13). The work of all three SOPH doctoral graduates was also related to HIV/AIDS – and we are particularly delighted to celebrate the graduation in 2012 of Jeannine Uwimana and Simukai Shamu, the first two Centre-affiliated doctoral fellows to complete their PhDs (see page 19).

The CRHA has helped to organize and implement graduates’ research and networking days to share this work and to begin to build alumni and peer-mentorship networks across Africa.

SOPH and CRHA partner Marleen Temmerman was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by UWC in September 2011 (see page 48) in recognition of her long-standing efforts relating to gender equality and reproductive rights. While here, she gave a passionate and challenging seminar on ‘Gender equality, reproductive rights and public health: Reflections on research, politics and practice’.

Over this period we hosted two post-doctoral fellows. Until mid-2011, Thomas Achia continued his work on spatial analysis and modelling of inequality and variability in HIV. He was followed by Joshua Aransiola in October 2011 who worked on a baseline situational analysis of irregular migration, human trafficking and HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

Our first sabbaticant joined us from New York University in 2012. Extraordinary professor Sally Guttmacher – who launched our seminar series in December 2010 with a presentation on ‘Interrupted education: A public health risk for migrant youth’ - is working with the Centre’s director on an ethnographic exploration of migration, health and social support in the Cape Metropole.

**HIV at UWC**

Through updating the audit of HIV/AIDS-related activities at UWC during 2011, we found that research on HIV and its structural drivers continues to increase at UWC – with the SOPH being responsible for over half of this work.

Three writing retreats and several seminars and workshops on writing and presentation skills helped to transform some of this research into peer-reviewed publications – with emerging African scholars, including the School’s postgraduate students, increasingly being first authors.

**Looking ahead: HIV and the social determinants of health**

Recognizing the deeply cross-disciplinary efforts needed to address HIV, and the impossibility of ‘doing it all’, the next phase of our work will be framed by a more modest, grounded, and strategic approach. This will entail building programmes of research and communities of practice organically, through collaborating on specific projects and engaging in policy dialogue as opportunities arise. Our home base in the SOPH is ideal for such an approach, given the multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral nature of public health itself.