

To effectively address many public health crises, clinicians and researchers will need to develop dynamic and nimble interdisciplinary collaborations. However, many researchers find it challenging to identify potential collaborators in specialties outside of their own to develop interdisciplinary collaborations. The Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) Program hubs are uniquely suited to facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations across universities and academic medical centers. The CTSA at Columbia University Irving Medical Center, the Irving Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, is committed to developing and disseminating evidence-based strategies for addressing the opioid crisis and promoting collaboration across disciplines.

The Irving Institute currently focuses on four targeted areas: Improving prescribing and pain management, improving addiction treatment, improving engagement of community resources and academic-community partnerships, and facilitating bench to bedside discoveries and translation.

The Irving Institute has led a three-phase approach to facilitating interdisciplinary collaborations: 1) a university-wide planning and brainstorming phase to identify key leaders across many domains who are influential in addressing the opioid epidemic, 2) a campus-wide and public outreach, to publicize efforts to all parties who would potentially be interested in joining this effort, and 3) ongoing support for collaboration development.

To date, the Irving Institute has developed a university-wide Steering Committee, comprised of specialists committed to opioid research, which meets quarterly to share ideas and identify areas for collaboration. Additionally, we have developed four working groups, comprised of researchers working on the four focus areas described above. To foster collaboration, we routinely assess publications and funded grants and have developed a database of interested researchers. This enables a researcher seeking, for example, a pharmacist, to contact us asking for referrals.

The CTSA hubs nationwide can help disparate organizations and specialties work together to address a significant public health crisis. The methods developed by the Irving Institute are now being used to support interdisciplinary approaches for other translational research challenges and public health crises.