

Collaborative Initiative for Paediatric HIV Education and Research (CIPHER)

2025 Annual Report

Contents

- 3** 1. Introducing CIPHER
- 4** 2. Activities and progress
 - 4** 2.1. Empowering people
 - 8** 2.2. Promoting science
 - 9** 2.3. Supporting action
- 13** 3. Cumulative impact
- 22** 4. Conclusion

1. Introducing CIPHER

IAS – **the International AIDS Society** – unites science, policy and activism to drive the **global HIV response towards a world in which HIV no longer presents a threat to public health and individual well-being**. It accelerates an evidence- and human rights-based HIV response to ensure equity, reduce new HIV acquisitions, prevent HIV-related deaths and sustain efforts until everyone living with HIV or vulnerable to HIV acquisition achieves optimal quality of life ¹.

CIPHER
Paediatric HIV
Matters


The IAS **Collaborative Initiative for Paediatric HIV Education and Research (CIPHER)** aims to accelerate an evidence-informed, human rights-based and integrated HIV response for infants, children, adolescents and young people living with and affected by HIV.

In 2025, the activities of CIPHER were made possible by the generous support and contribution of CIPHER's Founding Sponsor, ViiV Healthcare, through the following overlapping grants:

- ViiV Grant – 2022 CIPHER Grant Programme
- ViiV Grant – 2023 CIPHER Grant Programme
- ViiV Grant – 2024 CIPHER Grant Programme
- ViiV Grant – 2025 CIPHER Grant Programme
- ViiV Healthcare – Growing the Leaders of Tomorrow Fellowship

In addition, CIPHER secured the following sponsorships:

- Penta – Child Health Research, Mass General Brigham, Paediatric-Adolescent Treatment Africa (PATA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), CHOP Global Health Center and Penn Center for AIDS Research (CFAR) to support the 11th Symposium on Children and Adolescents with Perinatal HIV Exposure, held as a pre-conference at IAS 2025, [the 13th IAS Conference on HIV Science](#)
- ViiV Healthcare sponsorship to support the ICASA 2025 satellite series, ["Rising to the challenge: Enhancing efforts to eliminate vertical transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B"](#)

CIPHER received tremendous input and in-kind support from an extensive network of experts and stakeholders through project-specific working groups and the [CIPHER Advisory Committee](#).

¹ For more information, visit www.iasociety.org.

2. Activities and progress

The following are key activities and deliverables completed during the reporting period.

2.1. Empowering people

Goal: Next generation of scientists and leaders advancing paediatric and adolescent HIV research and programming in resource-limited settings is empowered

CIPHER Research Grant Programme

In 2025, CIPHER awarded two research grants of USD 140,000 (USD 70,000 per year) each to support early-career researchers from low- and middle-income countries. This enabled them to become principal investigators for the first time and to generate high-quality, context-specific evidence addressing priority questions in paediatric and adolescent HIV. The grants are designed to support career development and build the experience required to compete for larger funding opportunities. The awards were presented on 15 July during IAS 2025.

The CIPHER Grantees selected in 2025 are:



Adam Abdullahi

Institute of Human Virology, Nigeria

Research title: "Integrase inhibitor resistance in HIV-1 subtypes: Mapping a West African population"

"Too many children and adolescents are left behind in HIV care. Receiving this CIPHER award helps us generate critical empirical evidence to guide treatment policy and strengthen HIV care for vulnerable populations across West Africa."

Adam Abdullahi, Nigeria, 2025 CIPHER Research Grant recipient



Abayneh Tunje

Arba Minch University, Ethiopia

Research title: "Adaptive text messaging reminders combined with non-monetary incentives to improve adherence to antiretroviral treatment among adolescents in Ethiopia: a hybrid effectiveness-implementation trial"

"I am truly honoured to receive the CIPHER Grant. This award not only strengthens our efforts to improve HIV care for adolescents in Ethiopia, but also reinforces the value of context-driven, youth-centred research in global health. With this support, we hope to generate lasting impact and contribute to shaping the future of digital adherence interventions for young people living with HIV."

Abanyneh Tunje, Ethiopia, 2025 CIPHER Research Grant recipient

CIPHER launched the 2025/2026 grant cycle, focused on HIV cure research in children and on strategies to strengthen the paediatric HIV cascade, including case identification, continuity of care and re-engagement in care. A total of 223 applications were received in English and French during September 2025; of these, 22 applicants were invited to submit full proposals.

The award ceremony for the new grant recipients will take place at AIDS 2026, [the 26th International AIDS Conference](#), to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and virtually from 26 to 31 July 2026.

Overall, in 2025, CIPHER supported 11 grantees who are completing their research activities and successfully closed out one grant (Annex 1).

Growing the Leaders of Tomorrow Fellowship Programme

In 2025, one fellow was awarded the two-year [Growing the Leaders of Tomorrow Fellowship](#) of USD 70,000 (USD 35,000 per year). This award is designed to build the next generation of leaders in paediatric and adolescent HIV research by pairing emerging investigators with internationally recognized mentors to develop their technical expertise, strengthen academic skills and prepare them for research leadership and independent funding.

This round was awarded in collaboration with the Global Accelerator for Paediatric formulations ([GAP-f](#)) Network. The fellow will conduct research using real-world data to inform the uptake, safety and effectiveness of current paediatric HIV medicines and address the need for novel paediatric HIV medicines. The award ceremony took place on 15 July, during IAS 2025, as part of the plenary session, "[Better meeting the needs of people living with HIV](#)".



Punnathorn Auaboonkanok

Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Research title: "Treatment Outcomes of Children Living with HIV in an era of Dolutegravir-Based Treatment: Insight from Thailand and the Asia Pacific Region"

"Being awarded the CIPHER Fellowship is a meaningful milestone. It not only validates my dedication to paediatric HIV research but also inspires me to deepen my commitment to advancing research and collaborating with international colleagues. This fellowship will empower me to translate data into practical solutions and ultimately contribute to better outcomes for children."

Punnathorn Auaboonkanok, Thailand, 2025 CIPHER Growing the Leaders of Tomorrow Fellowship recipient

CIPHER continued to support Awa Kane and Aba Yacouba Coulibaly (Annex 2), who were awarded fellowships in 2022 and placed at francophone sites of the UNIVERSAL 2 trial to contribute to research on paediatric formulations of darunavir/ritonavir (DRV/r).

Evidence to Action Forum

In collaboration with the [Mark Wainberg Fellowship Programme](#), CIPHER organized an in-person Evidence to Action Forum on 15 July at IAS 2025. The aim was to support the translation of research evidence into concrete action and facilitate knowledge exchange, networking and mentorship between early-career researchers and established professionals.

The forum brought together more than 40 grantees and fellows from CIPHER and the Mark Wainberg Fellowship Programme with funders, government representatives, researchers and implementers, creating a space for direct dialogue and collaboration. Discussions highlighted the importance of community-led and inclusive research, early stakeholder engagement, context-specific research and clear communication

of findings. Case studies demonstrated how research evidence can directly inform national policy and strengthen HIV programme implementation.

Participant feedback confirmed the forum's relevance and impact. Attendees valued cross-programme networking and peer learning, the practical insights into funding and implementation challenges, and the strong focus on translating research into policy and practice. Participants reported identifying new collaboration opportunities and approaches they plan to apply in their own work and expressed strong interest in the continuation and expansion of the forum.

"This forum reinforced my belief in involving all programmatic and community stakeholders from the outset."

Participant, 2025 Evidence to Action Forum



2.2. Promoting science

Goal: Evidence on the optimal, feasible and acceptable strategies, interventions and programming for paediatric and adolescent HIV is strengthened and disseminated

Scientific engagements and publications

To support dissemination of scientific outputs on new and emerging issues in the care and treatment of children and young people with perinatal HIV, CIPHER co-moderated a session at the [2025 Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections](#) (CROI 2025, 9-12 March 2025, San Francisco, California). The session, titled "Filling the gaps: Challenges and opportunities in the care of children and youth with perinatal HIV", discussed advanced HIV disease in children, the paediatric HIV care continuum, and sexual, reproductive and pregnancy health among people with perinatal HIV.

Following the co-moderation of this session, CIPHER amplified critical issues affecting children, adolescents and young people in the HIV response by delivering a series of video commentaries for [The American Journal of Managed Care \(AJMC\)](#).

These commentaries were:

- [Addressing and Improving Gaps in HIV Care for Children and Adolescents](#)
- [Priorities for Optimizing HIV Care in Children and Adolescents](#)
- [Community, Connection, and Sharing the Science at CROI 2025](#)

To advocate for adolescents to have agency over their health decisions and to provide them with access to treatment options that align with their lifestyles and individual needs, CIPHER authored the commentary, "[Redefining care: injectable HIV treatment for adolescents](#)", published in the March edition of [The Lancet HIV](#).

On 11 April, to commemorate the International Day for Maternal Health and Rights and join the global movement calling for every person's right to respectful, quality, safe and comprehensive maternal healthcare, CIPHER put a special spotlight on two CIPHER Grantees whose research is transforming the health and futures of women, children and families living with and affected by HIV. The blog, featuring Christina Laurenzi and Dorina Onoya, is available [here](#).

2.3. Supporting action

Goal: Translation of evidence into policies, programmes and care practices at the global, national and sub-national levels is accelerated

11th Symposium on Children and Adolescents with Perinatal HIV Exposure

The [11th Symposium on Children and Adolescents with Perinatal HIV Exposure](#) was held on 13 July as a pre-conference to IAS 2025 in Kigali, Rwanda, with the theme, Taking action to ensure that children and adolescents with perinatal exposure thrive. The event brought together leading stakeholders to advance evidence-informed action in this critical area. It was organized by CIPHER in collaboration with Penta – Child Health Research, Mass General Brigham, PATA, UNICEF and members of the Symposium Organizing Committee.

The symposium gathered more than 130 participants and highlighted current research, effective interventions and policy priorities to improve health and well-being among children and adolescents with perinatal HIV exposure. It also addressed key challenges, such as mental health and parental HIV disclosure through strategic dialogue among researchers, clinicians, implementers and policy makers. To strengthen the pipeline of research in this field, two scholarships were awarded to early-career investigators to attend the symposium and present their work.

Recordings of the event are available on [IAS+](#).



Informing the agenda: A dialogue with mothers and caregivers on the priorities for children and adolescents with perinatal HIV exposure



On 13 July, CIPHER convened a roundtable, titled "[Informing the agenda: A dialogue with mothers and caregivers on the priorities for children with perinatal HIV exposure](#)", at IAS 2025 in collaboration with the Rwanda Network of People Living with HIV (RRP+), Rwanda Biomedical Center, UNICEF, International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA) and members of the Organizing Committee for the 11th Symposium on Children and Adolescents with Perinatal HIV Exposure. The roundtable provided a platform for mothers and caregivers to share lived experiences and articulate support needs for children and adolescents with perinatal HIV exposure.

Discussions underscored the importance of holistic family- and community-centred approaches that integrate health, education, nutrition and psychosocial support to ensure that children and adolescents with perinatal HIV exposure not only survive but thrive. Key insights from the roundtable will inform, and be presented at, the 12th Symposium on Children and Adolescents with Perinatal HIV Exposure in 2026.

Rising to the challenge: Enhancing efforts to eliminate vertical transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B

At the 23rd International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA 2025), CIPHER organized three sessions in the series, "[Rising to the challenge: Enhancing efforts to eliminate vertical transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B](#)". The sessions focused on accelerating progress towards the elimination of vertical transmission through health system strengthening and action on persistent social and structural barriers.

Session 1-2, titled "The triple elimination agenda: Optimizing systems for the elimination of paediatric HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B", drew on country experiences, policy updates and forward-looking discussions, examining progress to date and identifying opportunities to strengthen health systems in support of triple elimination goals. The third session, "Addressing social and structural barriers that hinder access to vertical transmission prevention services", highlighted the social and structural challenges that continue to impede access to prevention services.

To promote cross-country learning and collaboration, CIPHER awarded collaborative learning visit grants to country teams from Nigeria and Mozambique. These grants support South-to-South learning exchanges to an African country that has demonstrated successful vertical transmission prevention strategies, enabling teams to exchange practical insights and implementation lessons across different settings.

Session materials and resources are available on [IAS+](#).



IAS Educational Fund meeting in Mozambique

The [IAS Educational Fund](#) brings the latest HIV science, including science presented at IAS conferences, to local researchers, policymakers, implementers and communities for translation into local contexts.

On 19-20 June, the IAS Educational Fund, in partnership with [Comité para a Saúde de Moçambique](#) (CSM) and the National AIDS Council, convened a scientific symposium and workshop titled, "[A new landscape for the HIV response in Mozambique](#)." The meeting brought together over 176 key national stakeholders to reflect on bridging the gap between science, policy and implementation in the context of a shifting funding environment.

CIPHER played an active and strategic role in shaping the scientific and programmatic content of the meeting. Specifically, CIPHER contributed to the development of the symposium session on reaching adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), ensuring that the discussion was grounded in the latest paediatric and adolescent HIV data, as well as implementation experience from high-burden settings. In addition, CIPHER supported the design and facilitation of the workshop on sustainable, cross-sectoral strategies to reach adolescent girls and young women with HIV prevention and care services, helping to frame the dialogue around practical, scalable approaches.

Through its engagement, CIPHER helped to:

- Elevate the specific vulnerabilities and service gaps affecting AGYW
- Support the formulation of actionable recommendations emerging from the workshop discussions.

The workshop generated concrete recommendations aimed at strengthening integrated prevention, treatment and social support interventions for AGYW, reinforcing the importance of coordinated, multi-sectoral action to improve health and long-term outcomes.

Global collaborative engagements

In 2025, CIPHER actively contributed to key meetings and technical committees focusing on paediatric and adolescent HIV:

- To strengthen the global ecosystem of paediatric medicines, CIPHER co-organized a side event at the [78th World Health Assembly](#) in collaboration with Temasek Foundation, Medicines for Malaria Venture, Medicines Patent Pool, Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi), Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation and Global Antibiotic R&D Partnership (GARDP) on behalf of the [GAP-f Network](#).

Titled "Strengthening the Global Ecosystem for Paediatric Medicines: Leadership, Collaboration & Impact", the event took place in Geneva, Switzerland, on 20 May. CIPHER contributed to the planning and delivery of the event through active participation in the organizing committee.

CIPHER actively contributed to GAP-f's Clinical Research Working Group and Product Access and Treatment Delivery Working Group, including participating in structured discussions on the operationalization of the Paediatric Data Hub.

- In addition, CIPHER actively contributed to the 17th International Workshop on HIV & Pediatrics, held in Kigali on 10-11 July, through its role on the Scientific Committee. This included providing input on priority topics for inclusion in the meeting programme and participation in abstract reviews.

3. Cumulative impact

Key figures

Since its launch in 2012, CIPHER has supported 63 early-career investigators through grants and fellowships aimed at strengthening local research capacity and leadership. CIPHER enables researchers to address gaps in paediatric and adolescent HIV within their own contexts and strengthens research leadership and capacity in high-burden settings. By doing so, CIPHER contributes to a sustainable pipeline of researchers advancing improved HIV prevention, treatment and care for children and adolescents.

Overview of the geographical footprint of research conducted by CIPHER Grantees and Fellows



Information on CIPHER Grantees and Fellow whose fellowships and grants were active² in 2025 is [available here](#) and provided in Annexes 1 and 2.

By 2025, during their engagement in CIPHER, grantees and fellows had produced a substantial body of research and policy-relevant outputs, including 221 peer-reviewed publications and 383 presentations at scientific and policy forums. Their work also contributed to 28 policy documents and guidelines and informed decision making through 90 instances of participation in advisory committees, expert panels and policy events. Collectively, CIPHER-supported researchers have leveraged USD 30.8 million in additional external funding to further advance their research and impact.

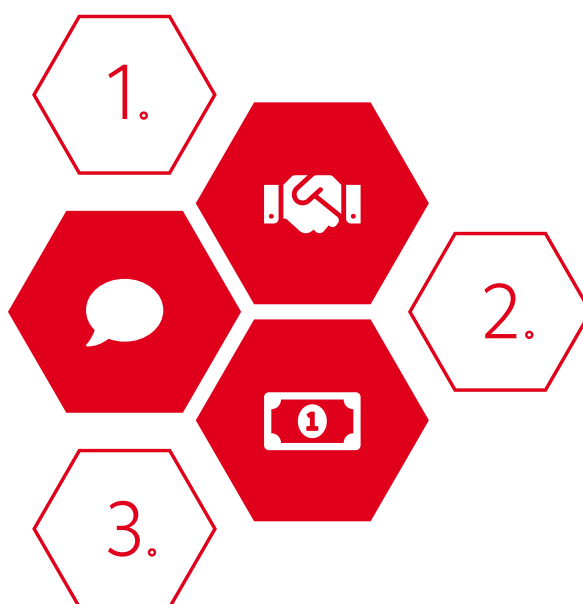
Cumulative highlights from active grantees and fellows since 2012:

1. Dissemination of research

221 papers published in peer-reviewed journals

383 presentations

109 news articles and video



2. Influencing policy and practice

90 instances of participation in advisory committees, expert panels, policy events

28 policy documents/ guidelines informed

3. Funding leveraged

USD 30.8M additional funding for external sources to support CIPHER grantees and fellows research

3.2. Highlights from active CIPHER Grantees and Fellows

CIPHER maintains regular engagement with all active grantees through biannual progress reports, in which grantees detail their achievements and updates. These reports cover three key areas: a) dissemination of research findings; b) influence on policy and practice; and c) additional funding secured.

CIPHER Grantees and Fellows' research findings are being widely disseminated

CIPHER Grantees contributed to 11 peer-reviewed publications in 2025, including global technical guidance, original clinical research, methodology articles and policy-relevant commentary to address priority gaps in paediatric and adolescent HIV. Full publication details are presented in Annex 3.

- **Christina Laurenzi** authored a World Health Organization (WHO) Technical Brief on [supporting HIV status disclosure among children and adolescents](#), synthesizing evidence on effective interventions, emerging considerations and implementation gaps. This work contributes to global normative guidance and supports countries in strengthening developmentally appropriate disclosure practices. Additional publications by Christina examined [ethical research engagement with young mothers living with HIV](#), provided [healthcare providers' perspectives on HIV status disclosure for children and adolescents](#) and identified [determinants of treatment adherence during early motherhood](#).
- Research led by **Yagai Bouba** addressed critical treatment and resistance-related questions for children and adolescents in resource-limited settings. Studies examined [virological failure following enhanced adherence counselling](#), patterns of [HIV drug resistance](#) and [its implications in the use of long-acting treatment regimens](#) and the [prevalence of cytopenias among adolescents taking antiretroviral drugs](#).
- Research by **Anne Njoroge** analysed [viral load monitoring practices and factors associated with non-suppression](#) among children and young adolescents.
- **Minh Nguyen's** work on the [cultural adaptation of a status-neutral mHealth intervention to improve HIV prevention and care for adolescent and young men who have sex with men in Vietnam](#) is contributing to the development of inclusive, contextually appropriate digital approaches to HIV prevention and care.
- Finally, a [policy-focused commentary](#) by **Tariro Chawana** in The Lancet Global Health highlighted the urgency of adolescent-centred strategies to end the HIV epidemic in southern Africa, amplifying the need for sustained investment in adolescent-responsive services within global HIV policy discourse.

In addition, CIPHER Grantees and Fellows delivered more than 19 presentations at international, regional and national conferences and policy forums, sharing research findings with diverse audiences. Presentations addressed priority issues across the paediatric and adolescent HIV continuum, including prevention and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) safety in maternal-infant settings, adolescent service delivery, treatment adherence and resistance, disclosure, mental health and innovative community-engagement approaches. A detailed list of presentations is provided in Annex 4.

Evidence generated by CIPHER Grantees and Fellows is informing policy and practice

In 2025, evidence generated by CIPHER Grantees and Fellows directly informed policy documents and guidelines and contributed to clinical, programmatic and institutional decision making across multiple countries.

Global policy and normative guidance

- As mentioned in the previous section, **Christina Laurenzi** led a review of HIV disclosure interventions for children and adolescents for the WHO Adolescent Service Delivery Working Group and authored the WHO Technical document, "[Supporting disclosure among children and adolescents living with HIV: interventions, emerging considerations, key gaps and key actions](#)". Drawing on a scoping review of published interventions, the work identified effective disclosure strategies and clarified what works, for whom and in which contexts.

National research, policy and programme influence

- In Malawi, **Clifford Banda's** CIPHER Research Grant supported the establishment of a Therapeutics Research Group at the Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Research Programme, co-led by Clifford. The group's initial focus is infection pharmacology, with planned expansion into non-communicable disease pharmacology by 2027, strengthening national research capacity relevant to treatment policy and practice.
- Through the CIPHER-ADOLA project, **Yagai Bouba** generated evidence that is actively informing adolescent HIV care in Cameroon. Findings highlighted gaps in the implementation of national transition guidelines to dolutegravir-based regimens, reinforced the importance of enhanced adherence counselling for adolescents with low-level viremia and contributed to national discussions on the potential introduction of long-acting antiretroviral regimens. This evidence was shared with clinicians, programme managers, the Ministry of Health and the National AIDS Control Committee, supporting improvements in both clinical practice and programme planning.
- In Zimbabwe, **Tariro Chawana** was appointed as a board member of the Harare Institute of Public Health and as a member of the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe, the national research ethics committee. These roles position CIPHER-supported expertise within national research governance and policy oversight structures.
- **Anne Njoroge** contributed to deliberations of Kenya's National Vaccine and Immunization Programme technical working group, which culminated in a national policy change in October 2025 that adopted a single-dose HPV vaccine schedule.
- In Thailand, following recognition at IAS 2025, **Punnathorn Auaboonkanok** was invited to join the writing committee for the Thailand National Guidelines on HIV/AIDS Treatment and Prevention, directly contributing to national guideline development.

CIPHER Grantees and Fellows are leveraging their CIPHER investment to mobilize additional funding

CIPHER Grantees and Fellows are leveraging their CIPHER-funded research to secure additional resources for paediatric and adolescent HIV research, demonstrating the programme's catalytic role in strengthening research leadership and sustainability. In 2025 alone, active CIPHER Grantees and Fellows secured over USD 923,000 in additional funding through six grants and awards. These funds support the continuation and expansion of CIPHER-related research activities, including advanced training, community engagement, travel and further research.

- **Clifford Banda** was awarded the prestigious NIH-Emerging Global Leader Award, worth USD 539,380, to further strengthen research capacity for infection pharmacology in people living with HIV in Malawi.
- **Yagai Boubai** secured two additional grants for expanding research and community engagement linked to the CIPHER-ADOLA study. He received a one-year grant worth USD 200,000 from the Center for AIDS Research at Johns Hopkins University to extend the study, as well as a capacity-building grant, worth USD 17,613, from the HIV Research Trust to support advanced training for a student working on HIV reservoir research among adolescents with low-level viremia.
- **Christina Laurenzi** secured two additional grants to advance research on adolescent mental health and HIV. She received USD 70,000 from the Brain & Behavior Research Foundation to adapt a WHO interpersonal therapy intervention for adolescent mothers to reduce depression and suicidality in Buffalo City Municipality, South Africa, and USD 30,000 from UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Regional Office to examine drivers, risk and protective factors for adolescent suicidality across the region and develop a package of resources to support country-level suicide prevention efforts among adolescents and youth.
- **Minh Nguyen** received USD 66,427 in additional funding to conduct an 18-month implementation study focused on strengthening U=U counselling in Vietnam, building directly on CIPHER-supported work to improve adolescent and young key population-centred HIV services.

3.3. Building capacity: The impact of CIPHER on grantees' and fellows' professional lives

CIPHER is having a profound impact on the professional development of its grantees and fellows. By investing in early-career investigators, CIPHER supports the development of research leadership, academic advancement and global scientific recognition. The following examples illustrate how CIPHER Grants have contributed to career progression and professional influence.

- **Christina Laurenzi** was promoted from Senior Researcher to Associate Professor at the Institute for Life Course Health Research, Stellenbosch University, reflecting her growing leadership in adolescent HIV and mental health research.
- **Tariro Chawana** was appointed Adjunct Lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, where she teaches undergraduate and postgraduate clinical pharmacology, contributing to the training of the next generation of health professionals and researchers.
- **Yagai Boubia** was appointed to the editorial boards of the peer-reviewed journals, *Advances in Virology* (Wiley) and *Germs* (MDPI), and joined The Lancet reviewer community, including for The Lancet HIV and The Lancet Regional Health. These roles reflect increased scientific visibility and recognition associated with his research leadership under the CIPHER-ADOLA project.

CIPHER alumni continue to contribute to advances in paediatric and adolescent HIV research and programming beyond their period of direct support, demonstrating the programme's long-term impact on research leadership and excellence.

In 2025, **Pauline Amuge**, a CIPHER alumna, was awarded the Best Oral Abstract Award at the International Pediatric Workshop on Pediatric & HIV 2025 for her presentation, titled "Efficacy of second-line dolutegravir- versus boosted protease inhibitor-based ART in children and adolescents living with HIV at 96 and 144 weeks: Pooled analysis of the ODYSSEY and CHAPAS-4 trials".

Spotlight on two CIPHER alumni



Elona Toska

Elona Toska, a CIPHER alumna, is a Principal Research Officer at the Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Elona's CIPHER research, titled "Improving retention in PMTCT and ART care for HIV-infected adolescent mothers and their children in Southern Africa, and Helping Empower Youth Brought up Living in Adversity and their Babies and Young Children (HEY BABY)", concluded in 2022.

"The CIPHER Research Grant programme offered an incredible combination of research inspiration and real-world impact. When my grant started, research and programming for adolescent mothers living with and affected by HIV was very limited. Through CIPHER's mentored model, our research could be rigorous and feasible, while networking and the Evidence to Action forums opened critical doors, helping us connect our findings to tangible policy change and strategic funding opportunities to improve the HIV and well-being outcomes of adolescent mothers and their children."

Individual impact:

The CIPHER Research Grant marked Elona's first independent award of significant scale. It provided two years of protected research time, something that can be difficult to secure in many institutions, and enabled her transition from supporting senior investigators as a postdoctoral researcher to leading her own research. Through CIPHER, she expanded her professional network, gained visibility at international platforms, and built relationships with other grantees and senior researchers, strengthening her confidence and competitiveness for larger awards, including multi-country grants and an NIH K43.

Since receiving the CIPHER Grant, her research portfolio has expanded substantially, attracting new collaborations and funding, while supporting the training of the next generation of researchers through supervision of doctoral and master's students. She has further amplified the impact of the award by mentoring early-career researchers applying for CIPHER Grants, contributing to a growing network of early-career researchers.

Elona's achievements have been recognized internationally as she was awarded a 2025 JIAS Impact Award, which honors high-impact publications in the *Journal of the International AIDS Society (JIAS)*, at IAS 2025.

Policies and programmes impact:

Elona's CIPHER-funded research has informed national and global HIV policy and programme development. Working with partners such as PATA, she has contributed evidence to government reporting and progress tracking under the Global Alliance

to end vertical transmission. Her work has also strengthened youth-friendly services, efforts related to violence prevention for pregnant women and transition from paediatric to adult HIV care.

Through participation on scientific committees and working groups, including the WHO Adolescent HIV Service Delivery Working Group and Child Survival Working Group, and as Deputy Editor for JIAS, she provides technical input into guidance and policy documents. She emphasizes the importance of sharing data widely and making research accessible to practitioners. Her research has also informed WHO and UNICEF publications addressing the needs of adolescent and young mothers living with HIV, contributing to clearer guidance, stronger policies and more youth-



Adrie Bekker

Adrie Bekker, who was in the very first cohort of the CIPHER Growing the Leaders of Tomorrow Fellowship Programme, is a Professor of Paediatrics in the Division of Neonatology at Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Adrie's CIPHER research, titled "Pharmacokinetic and safety characteristics of nevirapine and lopinavir/ritonavir in HIV-exposed and infected low birth weight infants", concluded in 2020.

"CIPHER jump-started my career to help deliver better antiretroviral options for newborns".

Individual impact:

At the time Adrie was awarded the CIPHER fellowship, she was a neonatologist who had just completed her PhD and was balancing full-time clinical work with the challenge of establishing an international research career. The fellowship provided protected research time, enabling her to engage actively with the International Maternal Pediatric Adolescent AIDS Clinical Trials (IMPAACT) Network, working closely with senior mentors, and assume leadership roles.

Through IMPAACT and related collaborations, she contributed to landmark studies generating pharmacokinetic and safety data for antiretroviral drugs in neonates, with findings informing WHO dosing recommendations. Her work expanded into neonatal sepsis and antimicrobial resistance research, increasing her visibility to international research networks and pharmaceutical developers.

Since completing the fellowship, she has progressed to Professor of Paediatrics (Neonatology) at Stellenbosch University, and now holds multiple senior leadership

roles, including Vice-Chair (P1106 and P2050) and national PI (P2023) positions within IMPAACT, Co-Chair of the WHO Paediatric AIDS Working Group and Co-Lead of the PETITE Research Platform. She is a member of several Penta – Child Health Research working groups, including for clinical pharmacology, perinatal infections and severe bacterial infections. Her career trajectory illustrates the long-term impact of CIPHER investment in building global research leadership and generating evidence that shapes policy and clinical practice for newborns affected by HIV.

Policies and programmes impact:

Adrie's CIPHER-supported research has directly informed global and national neonatal HIV treatment guidelines. Her work established abacavir dosing for term neonates from birth, now incorporated into WHO and US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) paediatric HIV guidelines. Through the PETITE-DTG trial, her work generated the first dolutegravir dosing guidance for term neonates and informed the 2025 WHO guidelines to use dolutegravir from birth. She supported the first evaluation of a paediatric dolutegravir dispersible film in newborns.

Commissioned by WHO, she has developed pragmatic lamivudine dosing for preterm infants using pharmacokinetic modelling and simulation, with further work planned to establish safe dolutegravir use in this population.

Her research supports faster access to new antiretroviral formulations for neonates and includes socio-behavioural components, such as caregiver perspectives to inform acceptability and feasibility.

Adrie is collaborating with industry partners on long-acting options for neonates.

4. Conclusion

Since its inception, CIPHER has facilitated great achievements, with significant and demonstrated impact in the field of paediatric and adolescent HIV. In 2025, through a capacity-building approach, CIPHER continued to support the development of early-career investigators building evidence and translating research into action in low- and middle-income countries.

To find out more about CIPHER, please visit our [webpage](#).

For more information on partnership and sponsorship opportunities, please contact cipher@iasociety.org.

Annex 1

CIPHER Research Grant Programme Grantees active in 2025

Grantee name	Grant period	Project Title	Research country
Grants closed in 2025			
Maganizo Chagomerana	2023-2025	Feasibility pilot to characterize a differentiated service delivery model for HIV early infant diagnosis in high-risk mother-infant pairs	Malawi
Grants active in 2025			
Jerome Galea	2023-2026	Development and pilot testing of an optimized conversational agent or "chatbot" for Peruvian adolescents living with HIV to facilitate mental health screening, education, self-help, and linkage to care	Peru
Yagai Bouba	2023-2026	Évaluation de la réponse au traitement chez les adolescents infectés par le VIH-1 qui commencent- ou switchent au régime TDF/3TC/DTG dans la pratique clinique et évaluation de base pour l'introduction de régimes à action prolongée au Cameroun	Cameroon
Anne Njoroge	2024-2026	Optimizing HPV vaccination uptake among adolescents living with HIV in Kenya	Kenya
Christina Laurenzi	2024-2026	Responding to barriers in HIV and SRH care for young adolescent mothers living with HIV and their children in South Africa	South Africa
Yelamikan Frank Touré	2024-2026	Access to and use of HIV testing services by adolescents aged 10 to 19 living on the streets of Côte d'Ivoire (Accessibilité aux services de dépistage du VIH et leur utilisation par les adolescent.e.s de 10 à 19 ans vivant dans la rue en Côte d'Ivoire)	Cote d'Ivoire
Tariro Chawana	2024-2026	Promoting viral load suppression in peripartum adolescent girls and young women with HIV by integrating drug level-informed enhanced adherence counselling into routine treatment monitoring (P-PACT)	Zimbabwe
Minh Nguyen	2024-2026	Moving towards a status-neutral approach to improve HIV testing, prevention and care for adolescent and young men who have sex with men in Vietnam: adaptation of an evidence-based mobile health intervention	Vietnam
Clifford Banda	2024- 2026	Breastmilk transfer of cabotegravir and its association with infant growth, development and safety following intramuscular administration of long-acting cabotegravir for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis in lactating mothers: an observational pharmacokinetic cohort study	Malawi
Adam Abdullahi	2025-2027	Integrase inhibitor resistance in HIV-1 subtypes: Mapping a West African population	Nigeria
Abayneh Tunje	2025- 2027	Adaptive text messaging reminders combined with non-monetary incentives to improve adherence to antiretroviral treatment among adolescents in Ethiopia: a hybrid effectiveness-implementation trial	Ethiopia

Annex 2

CIPHER Growing the Leaders of Tomorrow Fellowship Programme Fellows active in 2025

Grantee name	Grant period	Project Title	Research country
Fellowship closed in 2025			
<u>Awa Kane</u>	2022-2025	Awa, based at the Albert Royer Children Hospital in Senegal, investigated the metabolic and haematological profiles of children living with HIV on antiretrovirals	Senegal
<u>Aba Yacouba Coulibaly</u>	2022-2025	Aba Yacouba Coulibaly from the Gabriel Toure Teaching Hospital in Mali explored early initiation of antiretroviral therapy in children living with HIV	Mali
Grants active in 2025			
<u>Punnathorn Auaboonkanok</u>	2025-2027	Treatment outcomes of children living with HIV in an era of dolutegravir-based treatment: Insight from Thailand and the Asia Pacific Region	Thailand

Annex 3

Publications by active CIPHER Grantees and Fellows (2025)

Grantee	Title	Type of article	Journal/publisher
Christina Laurenzi	Supporting disclosure among children and adolescents living with HIV: interventions, emerging considerations, key gaps and key actions	Technical brief	WHO
Christina Laurenzi (first author)	Conducting ethical research with young mothers: Key considerations for methodology and engagement	Manuscript	Ethics, Medicine and Public Health
Christina Laurenzi (joint first author)	Determinants of Antiretroviral Treatment Adherence Among Young Mothers Living with HIV: the Role of Early Motherhood	Manuscript	AIDS and Behavior
Christina Laurenzi (senior author)	"It's a very very thorny issue...": healthcare providers' experiences, challenges, and insights surrounding HIV status disclosure for children and adolescents living with HIV from across 12 African countries	Manuscript	AIDS Care
Yagai Bouba (first author)	Confirmed virological failure following enhanced adherence counseling among virally unsuppressed children and adolescents on dolutegravir-based versus other regimens: Evidence from a cohort analysis in Cameroon	Manuscript	Medicine
Yagai Bouba (co-author)	HIV-1 cross-resistance to second-generation non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors among individuals failing antiretroviral therapy in Cameroon: implications for the use of long-acting treatment regimens in low- and middle-income countries	Manuscript	JAC-Antimicrobial Resistance
Yagai Bouba (co-author)	HIV-1 Drug Resistance in Children and Implications for Pediatric Treatment Strategies: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis	Manuscript	Open Forum Infectious Diseases
Yagai Bouba (joint first author)	Low burden of clinically relevant anaemia and thrombocytopenia among adolescents living with HIV receiving tenofovir/lamivudine plus dolutegravir: the CIPHER-ADOLA study in Cameroon	Manuscript	AIDS Research and Therapy
Anne Njoroge (co-author)	Viral Load Monitoring Practices and Correlates of Viral Non-suppression Among Children and Young Adolescents Living With HIV in Kiambu County, Kenya	Manuscript	Sage Open Pediatrics
Minh Nguyen (first author)	Cultural Adaptation of Together+, a Status-Neutral mHealth Intervention to Improve HIV Prevention and Care for Adolescent and Young Men Who Have Sex With Men in Vietnam: Protocol for a Co-Design Study	Protocol	JMIR Research Protocol
Tariro Chawana (co-author)	Ending the HIV epidemic among adolescents in southern Africa	Commentary	The Lancet Global Health

Annex 4

Conference and meeting presentations by active CIPHER Grantees and Fellows (2025)

Grantee	Title	Conference/forum	Location	Date
Clifford Banda	Breastmilk transfer of cabotegravir and its association with infant safety outcomes in a sub population of Malawian lactating mothers on cabotegravir for HIV PrEP in Blantyre and Lilongwe	PrEP Guideline Development Meeting of the Department of HIV, Ministry of Health	Lilongwe, Malawi	8 May 2025
	Understanding the safety of new HIV drug delivery systems in mother-infant pairs – a protocol for the CABMILK Study	National Community Engagement Day for the University of North Carolina (UNC) Project	Lilongwe, Malawi	21 May 2025
	Are you at risk of serious side effects from HIV preventive medicines? A discussion on HIV preventive medicines misconceptions and the CABMILK Study	Ministry of Health/ UNC Project Community Engagement Day	Lilongwe, Malawi	2 December 2025
Frank Touré	Risky Sexual Behaviours and the Prevalence of HIV and STIs Among Street-Connected Adolescents in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire	19th INTEREST Conference	Windhoek, Namibia	13-16 May 2025
	HIV self-testing among adolescents living on the street: a cross-sectional survey assessing utilization and associated factors in Cote d'Ivoire in 2024-2025	9th International Workshop on Adolescence, SRHR & HIV 2025	Windhoek, Namibia	1-3 October 2025
Minh Nguyen	Lessons learnt from a crowdsourcing contest to facilitate community engagement among adolescent and young men who have sex with men in Vietnam	Asia and Pacific AIDS and Co-infections Conference 2025	Tokyo, Japan	12-14 June 2025
Christina Laurenzi	Tenuous transitions: persistent challenges to retention in care for adolescent mothers living with HIV in the Eastern Cape, South Africa	Ukwanda 14th Annual Rural Health Research Day	Worcester, South Africa	16 May 2025
	<u>Interventions supporting disclosure among children and adolescents living with HIV: a scoping review and realist analysis</u>	IAS 2025	Kigali, Rwanda	13-17 July 2025
	<u>Tenuous transitions: exploring persistent challenges to retention in care for adolescent and young mothers living with HIV in rural South Africa</u>	IAS 2025	Kigali, Rwanda	13-17 July 2025
	Timely, relevant, actionable: Aligning research evidence with policy decisions in HIV programming	Evidence to Action Forum, IAS 2025	Kigali, Rwanda	15 July 2025
	Conducting ethical research with young mothers: Key considerations for methodology and engagement	7th Global Mental Health Summit tary	Cape Town, South Africa	10-12 November 2025

Yagai Bouba Frank Touré	<u>Effectiveness of enhanced adherence counselling among adolescents receiving TLD with detectable Viremia in Cameroon: optimizing virological outcomes in paediatric setting</u>	Conference on retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) 2025	San Francisco, USA	9-12 March 2025
	<u>Adolescents with Confirmed Virological Failure Stand At Risk Of Acquiring Resistance To Dolutegravir And Need Novel Treatment Options: Findings During The Early Stage Of TLD Transition In The CIPHER-ADOLA Study</u>	European meeting on HIV and viral hepatitis	Barcelona, Spain	4-6 June 2025
		17th International Workshop on Pediatric & HIV	Kigali, Rwanda	11-12 July 2025
		International Workshop on HIV Drug Resistance and Treatment Strategies program	Virtual	1-4 September 2025
		4th International Conference on Public Health in Africa	South Africa	22-25 October 2025
	<u>Diving into the life of Cameroonian adolescents with perinatal HIV infection and their hope for long-acting antiretroviral treatment: the CIPHER-ADOLA Study</u>	1st International Workshop on Long-Acting Anti-Infectives (LAAI)	New Orleans, USA	21-22 May 2025
		IAS 2025	Kigali, Rwanda	13-17 July 2025
	Optimizing Virological Outcomes among Adolescents Living with HIV in Developing Countries	International MIMIT Workshop, University of Rome Tor Vergata	Rome, Italy,	2 April 2025