

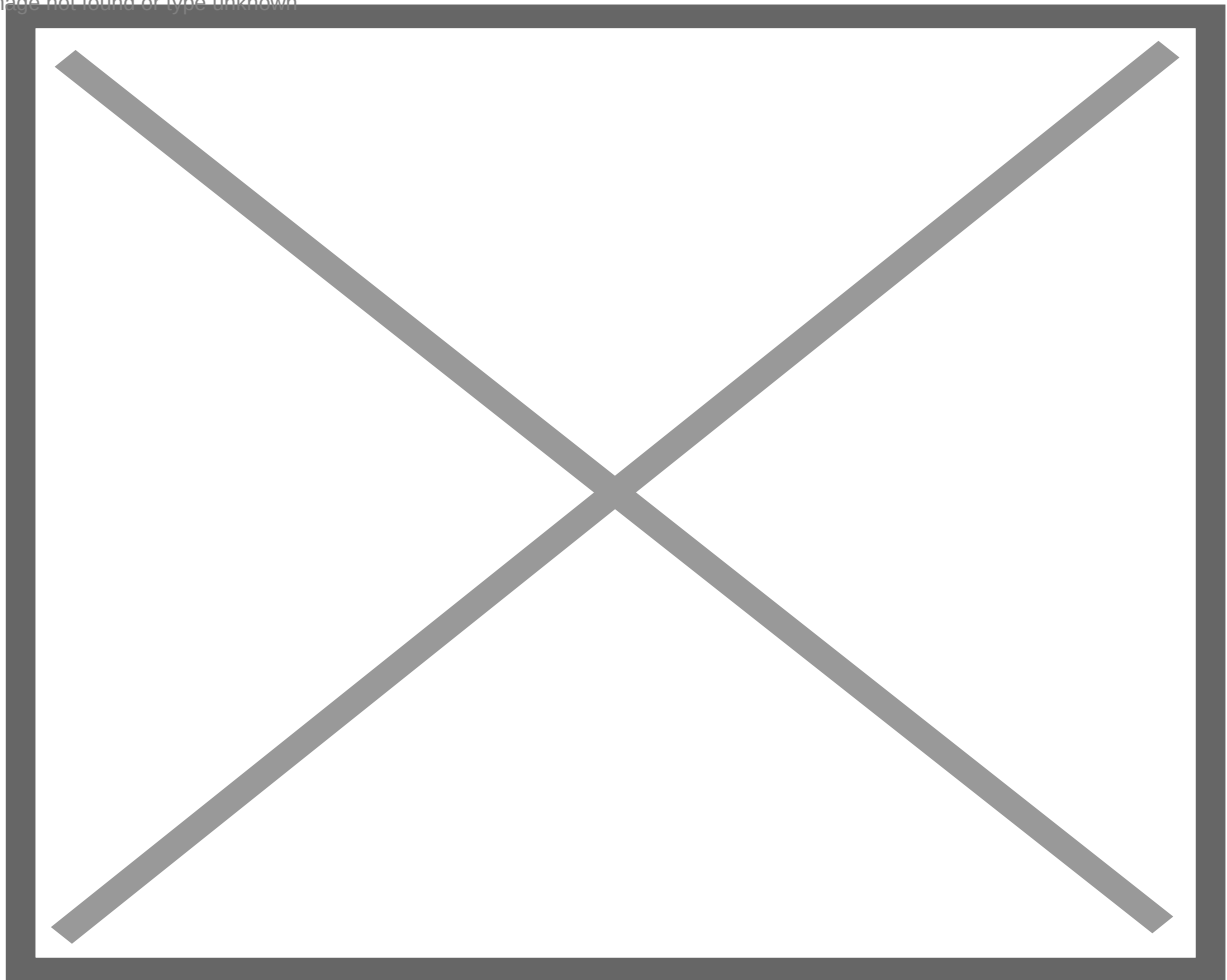
10 Virgin Islands Students Complete CREW Fellowship and Present Five Public Health Studies

Ten students completed CREW's third cohort, presenting five research projects on healthcare access, cardiovascular disease, intimate partner violence, workforce development and prevention while preparing for careers in medicine, nursing and public health.

Community Center / **Published On July 23, 2026 07:43 AM /**

Staff Consortium **July 23, 2026**

Image not found or type unknown



he 2026 CREW cohort, from left, front row: Josue Lima II, Jadine Davis, Kashish Chainani and Ayaela Elaine Louis-Riley; back row: Cy Taylor, Madelyn Avery, Franchel Rodriguez, Kali Mills, Mirza Baig and Nancy Philistin. By. VIDOH.

ST. THOMAS — Ten Virgin Islands undergraduate students completed the third cohort of the Cardiovascular Research Empowerment Workforce Program after eight weeks of hands-on

research into healthcare access, cardiovascular disease, stroke prevention, intimate partner violence and workforce challenges affecting the territory.

The students presented five original research projects Tuesday during the Third Annual CREW Research Symposium at Government House on St. Thomas.

The summer fellowship is a partnership among the V.I. Department of Health, the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and the University of the Virgin Islands. It is supported through the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

The program gives undergraduate students practical research experience while encouraging them to pursue careers in medicine, nursing, public health, biomedical research and other healthcare professions.

“The CREW Program is not only about research, but also about investing in the next generation of healthcare leaders for the Virgin Islands,” said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. “Each year, CREW demonstrates what is possible when talented young Virgin Islanders are given the opportunity to learn, ask meaningful questions, and apply their knowledge to improving the health of our communities. We are very proud of this remarkable third cohort and look forward to welcoming many of them home as future physicians, nurses, scientists, public health professionals, and healthcare leaders.”

Throughout the summer, participants worked with faculty members, researchers, healthcare professionals and community partners.

Their work examined healthcare access, stroke prevention, the relationship between intimate partner violence and cardiovascular disease, healthcare workforce development and community views of healthcare delivery.

The findings were presented to government officials, healthcare leaders, educators, relatives and community partners attending the symposium.

Dr. Sonjia Kenya, professor of medicine and public health sciences at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and CREW director, said the program is intended to strengthen the territory’s healthcare workforce over the long term.

“CREW is helping build a healthcare workforce that understands the unique needs of the Virgin Islands because these students know this community. They were raised here, care deeply about its future, and they want to make a difference,” said Dr. Kenya. “Watching our scholars grow into confident researchers while strengthening their commitment to returning home to serve has been one of the program’s greatest successes. Together with the Virgin Islands Department of Health and the University of the Virgin Islands, we are developing future healthcare leaders who will improve the health and well-being of these islands for generations to come.”

Five Research Projects Presented

The symposium featured five student research projects:

- Preparing the next generation of healthcare providers in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Cardiovascular disease and healthcare access in the U.S. Virgin Islands compared with the mainland United States.

- Preventing cardiovascular disease, including stroke, through dietary changes and early recognition of skin conditions.
- The relationship between intimate partner violence and cardiovascular health.
- Recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals in the Virgin Islands.

2026 CREW Cohort

The 2026 cohort includes students pursuing degrees in medicine-related fields, nursing, biomedical engineering, neuroscience, biology and computer science.

Ayaela Elaine Louis-Riley is studying biology at the University of the Virgin Islands.

Franchel Rodriguez and Jadine Davis are nursing students at UVI, while Kali Mills is pursuing computer science and Mirza Baig is studying biology at the university.

Nancy Philistin is also studying nursing at UVI.

Kashish Chainani is pursuing neuroscience at the University of Southern California, and Madelyn Avery is studying biomedical engineering at Columbia University.

Cy Taylor is studying biomedical sciences and nanotechnology at the University of Central Florida, while Josue Lima II is pursuing biology at Georgia State University.

Thirty Students Trained Since 2024

CREW has completed three cohorts since the program began in 2024 and has trained 30 Virgin Islands undergraduate students.

Ten students completed the 2026 program.

Four CREW alumni are currently enrolled in health professional schools, while five scholars have presented their research at academic health conferences.

Ms. Encarnacion also recognized the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, UVI, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, faculty mentors, healthcare professionals, community organizations and other partners supporting the program.

CREW combines mentorship, research and community-engaged learning to prepare Virgin Islands students for careers in healthcare, biomedical research and public health.

By connecting participants with physicians, researchers and local healthcare professionals, the program seeks to build a long-term pipeline of healthcare workers committed to serving the territory.