Research Education Program on Microbes, Infections and Cancer (REPMIC)

Information Packet

Application Deadline: June 12, 2026, at 11:59 pm (AST)
(We recommend requesting reference letters well in advance of the deadline, as incomplete applications will not be considered.)

The Research Education Program on Microbes, Infections, and Cancer (REPMIC) is led by Dr. Ana Patricia Ortiz and Dr. Marievelisse Soto-Salgado, at the University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center (UPRCCC), San Juan, Puerto Rico. This program is funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)grant (5R25AI183304-02).

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The burden of infectious diseases and infection-related malignancies is high among U.S. Hispanics and in Puerto Rico (PR). Thus, research conducted in PR offers a unique opportunity to advance cancer research throughout the cancer control continuum, with a particular focus on the roles of microbes and infections in this field.

The Research Education Program on Microbes, Infections and Cancer (REPMIC) at the Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences of the University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center (UPRCCC) aims to recruit and train recent college graduates to pursue advanced research careers focused on the links between microbes, infections, and cancer. The program seeks to help expand the biomedical research workforce and strengthen the portfolio of training programs within both the UPRCCC and Puerto Rico. The long-term goal is to contribute to the development of the next generation of cancer and infectious disease researchers and to continue to strengthen the biomedical and public health research workforce.

The program will recruit postbaccalaureate (postbacs) trainees from Puerto Rico to participate in a hands-on research experience, along with educational activities designed to prepare participants to successfully pursue advanced research careers (e.g., Ph.D. or health professions degree programs) with a focus on the links between microbes, infections, and cancer. Trainees will be assigned a mentor based on their research interest in basic, clinical or population-based research.

In general, 10 postbac students will be recruited every year to participate in the program. This full-time (37.5 hours per week), in-person research experience will last for 9 months (37 weeks), **scheduled from September 2, 2026, to June 4, 2027**. Educational activities will include seminars and workshops to strengthen the academic and research skills of trainees and foster their interest in research careers in the fields of infectious diseases, microbes, and cancer. The official languages of the program will be English and Spanish, although most seminars and workshops will be conducted in Spanish.

What can the REPMIC offer to its trainees?

This training program will provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and conduct research on the relationships between microbes, infections and cancer in Puerto Rico, across the continuum of cancer control. In addition to increasing their knowledge in these areas, trainees will gain valuable research experience working with Hispanic populations. Furthermore, REPMIC will also enhance participants' research skills and competitiveness for admission to graduate of professional schools.

TIMELINE

April 22, 2026	Application period starts
June 12, 2026 (11:59 pm AST)	**Application period ends (final due date)**
June 15- July 17, 2026	Class of 2026-2027 evaluation, interview, and selection process
August 3, 2026	Deadline for selected trainees to confirm their space within REPMIC
August 14, 2026	Deadline for selected trainees to submit required documentation
September 2, 2026- June 4, 2027*	**REPMIC Training Experience**
December 24, 2026 - January 7, 2027**	**Christmas Recess**

*Standard working hours are Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.
**Vacations are not permitted during the regular working hours of the REPMIC Program; however, trainees will have a Christmas recess from December 24, 2026, to January 7, 2027.

REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICANTS (POST BACS)

Applicants must meet the following requirements:

- Must have graduated within the past 24 months with a bachelor's degree in Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, or Engineering (Biomedical and Chemical).*
- Must have earned their degree from an academic institution in Puerto Rico.
- Must have a grade point average (GPA) of ≥ 2.80.
- Must submit two letters of recommendation from a previous faculty or research mentor.
- Must have excellent written and verbal communication skills in both English and Spanish.
- Must be a U.S. citizen or U.S. permanent resident living in Puerto Rico.

***Bachelor's degree graduates who completed their degree more than two years ago, or who have already applied to and been accepted into a graduate or professional degree program (i.e. medicine, pharmacy, etc.), or a master's or doctoral program, will not be eligible.**

No Discrimination

The UPRCCC does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of sex, race, color, age, national origin, political or religious beliefs, gender, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, or for being or being perceived as a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, or stalking. This policy complies with the federal statutes under Title IX, as amended, and aligns with the institutional policies of the UPRCCC.

LEADERSHIP

REPMIC is directed by Dr. Ana Patricia Ortiz (Program Director) and Dr. Marievelisse Soto-Salgado (Associate Director), both investigators in the Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences at the UPRCCC. A team of faculty from participating academic institutions is actively involved in all phases of planning and implementation of the program.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Trainees will be matched with researchers in Puerto Rico based on their research interests. These researchers, who perform scientific work relevant to infections, microbes, and cancer, will serve as mentors and oversee the trainees' hands-on research experience.

Mentorship sites include the UPRCCC (research buildings and its hospital), the UPR Medical Sciences Campus (UPR-MSC), and the University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras Campus (UPR-RP). All located in San Juan. The *Tren Urbano* (Puerto Rico's train system) connects all these sites, facilitating transportation for trainees participating in program activities.

MENTORS

Below is a list of REPMIC mentors conducting basic, clinical, and population science research related to the relationship among microbes, infections, and cancer.

Mentor	Institution	Research focus	Email
Ana Patricia Ortiz, Ph.D., MPH	Lead Investigator, Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center & Ad-Honorem Professor of Epidemiology, Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Graduate School of Public Health, Medical Sciences Campus, University of Puerto Rico.	Human papillomavirus (HPV), HPV-related cancers, HIV, women's health, the human microbiome, and environmental hazards.	ana.ortiz7@upr.edu
Marievelisse Soto-Salgado, DrPH, MS	Assistant Investigator, Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Cancer health disparities; intersection of infectious diseases and cancer; cancer prevention and control in persons living with HIV; social determinants of health;	marievelisse.soto1@upr.edu

		disruptions in cancer care due to extreme weather events; and population-based and behavioral intervention studies.	
Josue Pérez-Santiago, PhD	Associate Investigator, Division of Clinical and Translational Cancer Research, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Identifying microbiome targets for cancer prevention and personalized treatments for chronic viral infections such as HPV and HIV, as well as their role in aging and comorbidities.	josue.perez22@upr.edu
Abel Baerga, PhD	Associate Professor, Department of Biochemistry, School of Medicine, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Bacterial toxins that cause DNA damage and elevate cancer risk, and pro-inflammatory bacterial genes associated with colorectal cancer.	abel.baerga@upr.edu
Magaly Martínez, PhD	Associate Professor, School of Pharmacy, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus & Associate Investigator, Division of Clinical and Translational Cancer Research, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Urological and HPV-associated cancers, particularly the association between HPV and penile cancer in Puerto Rico, as well as inflammation and phytochemicals in prostate cancer.	magaly.martinez1@upr.edu
Yisel M. Cantres, PhD	Assistant Professor, Department of Microbiology and Medical Zoology, School of Medicine, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Neuroimmune interactions in aging, infectious diseases, neurodegeneration, and the role of infection-induced immune disturbances in cancer and cognitive decline.	yisel.m.cantres@upr.edu
Elba V. Caraballo, PhD	Associate Investigator, Division of Clinical and Translational Cancer Research, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Microbial pathogenesis, the effects of West Nile Virus and HIV-1 treatment, and the link between viral infections (such as EBV and HPV) and colorectal cancer.	ecaraballo@cccupr.org
Esther A. Peterson, PhD	Assistant Professor, Department of Biology, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus.	Microbial signatures in inflammatory breast cancer to identify biomarkers for prevention and early detection, and to explore microbiome-based treatments, and the effects	esther.peterson@upr.edu

		of propionate, butyrate, and acetate on Triple-Negative and HER2-positive Inflammatory Breast Cancer, including their impact on cell behavior and gene expression.	
Cynthia M. Pérez-Cardona, PhD	Professor of Epidemiology, Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Epidemiology and prevention of hepatitis C, link between periodontal disease and HPV infection, and HPV infection and oral microbiota.	cynthia.perez1@upr.edu
Josefina Romaguera, MD, MPH	Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, School of Medicine, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Gynecologic cancers, HPV and its related conditions, HPV vaccination, and the role of microbiota in HPV cervical pathology.	josefina.romaguera@upr.edu
María Del Mar González-Pons, PhD	Associate Investigator, Division of Clinical and Translational Cancer Research, Comprehensive Cancer Center of the University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Early-onset colorectal cancer, gut microbiota-driven carcinogenesis, and gene-environment interactions.	maria.gonzalez9@upr.edu
Stephanie M. Dorta, PhD	Assistant Professor, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus, Microbiology and Medical Zoology Department, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico	Immunological mechanisms, treatment resistance on diverse cancers, HPV-related cancers, microbial biomarkers.	stephanie.dorta@upr.edu
Filipa Godoy-Vitorino, PhD	Professor, Department of Microbiology, School of Medicine, University of Puerto Rico, Medical Sciences Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Microbiome, Microbial Community Ecology, Metagenomics, women's health, chronic diseases, cancer; conservation of biodiversity.	filipa.godoy@upr.edu
Carlos J. Díaz Osterman	Assistant Investigator and Co-Leader, Organoid Core, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, Department of Cancer Genetics & Therapeutics, Division of Cancer Biology, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Microbes in genitourinary cancers, Cancer metabolism, Cardio-oncology, Immuno-oncology, Mechanotransduction and 3D culture models.	cdiaz@cccupr.org
Rocío K. Rivera, MD, PhD	Clinical Research Assistant, Pediatric Hematology Oncology, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, Division of Clinical and	Development and metastasis of solid tumors in the Hispanic pediatric population, design of targeted immunotherapies,	rorivera@cccupr.edu

	Translational Cancer Research, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	microbes in pediatric cancer.	
Nancy R. Cardona	Assistant Investigator, Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center, San Juan, Puerto Rico.	Examine environmental compartments to identify conditions that facilitate exposure to opportunistic microbial agents and pathogens, and investigate environmental determinants that contribute to the persistence and transmission of infectious agents linked to cancer development	ncardona@cccupr.org

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS AND CHECKLIST

The REPMIC application will be submitted via the following REDCap link.
https://redcap.link/repmic2024-uprccc

Before submitting the application, please verify the materials against the checklist.

Documents:	**Label as follows:**
Official **undergraduate academic transcripts**	**Must be send by your institution, see more details instructions below.* Transcripts must be received NO LATER THAN June 12, 2026. Note: Unofficial transcript may be sent in advance by email. Transcript_ Name of the trainee
Resume or Curriculum vitae that include information about your research experience, health-related employment, scientific publications (if any), and scientific presentations (oral and/or poster presentations, if any). Also, include academic awards and honors received (e.g., award/honor title, award institution, and date of issue).	Resume_Name of Trainee
A **one-page essay in English**, written in narrative form, single-spaced, using 11-point Arial font and 1-inch margins. In the essay, applicants should describe the following: 1) research and professional interests, 2) long-term career goals, 3) how these interests and goals relate to the fields of microbes, infection, and cancer research, and 4) how participation	Label the document as follows: Essay_Name of trainee **Important**: Participants are allowed to use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly, language translators) to support the writing process, particularly for grammar correction, clarity, and organization. However, all content, ideas, and reflections must

in the REPMIC program will support the achievement of their academic and/or professional goals.	represent the individual's original work. The use of AI tools should never replace critical thinking, authorship, or personal voice, and must align with ethical guidelines for academic and professional integrity.
Letter of recommendation (LOR) and REPMIC Recommendation Form from two faculty members and/or research mentor	Once you submit your application form through the link provided on the REPMIC website, an automatic email will be sent to your recommenders. The recommenders must submit a recommendation letter and the REPMIC Recommendation Form NO LATER THAN June 12, 2026, at 11:59 pm (AST).

An application cannot be evaluated unless ALL the required documents are received. To be eligible for selection, all application materials must be submitted **NO LATER THAN June 12, 2026, at 11:59 pm (AST).**

You may include a copy of your academic transcript with your REPMIC application form at the time of application. However, your institution must send official academic transcripts either by email to repmic@cccupr.org or by mail to the following address:

Centro Comprensivo de Cáncer de la UPR
División de Control de Cáncer y Ciencias Poblacionales
Attention: Dr. Ana Patricia Ortiz / Dr. Marievelisse Soto
REPMIC Training Experience
P.O. Box 363027, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936-3027

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The program will consist of the following mandatory activities:

- **Meet and Greet session**
  The Program will offer a virtual meet and greet session (1 hour) for accepted trainees. The purpose of this session is to present an overview of the REPMIC program and to have a Q&A & session to clarify any doubts before the program's initiation.

- **Orientation day**
  The Program will start with a one-day orientation for trainees, during which baseline evaluation surveys will be administered.

- **Hands-on research experience (37.5 hours per week, in-person)**
  Trainees will be matched to a mentor based on their research interest in the fields of infectious diseases, microbes and cancer research. Standard working hours will be Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. **Vacations are not permitted during regular work hours** of the REPMIC Program; however, trainees will have a Christmas recess from December 24, 2026, to January 7, 2027.

- **Educational activities**
  Trainees will participate in a series of seminars and workshops designed to strengthen their professional and research skills in the areas of microbes, infections, and cancer. Trainees will participate in two educational activities per month, held on Fridays throughout the duration of the program. These events will be held in person at the auditorium of the UPRCCC. Additionally, three (3) field activities will be scheduled during the program.

- **Scientific Day**
  At the end of the program, trainees will present their research in poster format during a Scientific Day. This event offers an opportunity to network with faculty, researchers, residents, clinical and research fellows, and students from participating institutions.

- **Tracking and follow-up:**
  Trainees will be required to complete an exit evaluation survey and commit to participating in follow-up surveys to monitor and document their progress, including scientific productivity and academic or career development.

TRAINEE SUPPORT COSTS

Master Level Course.
Up to **$1,000 per trainee** will be available to enroll in a master's level course for one semester or quarter term at the Biomedical Sciences program, School of Medicine or Graduate School of Public Health at the Medical Sciences Campus, University of Puerto Rico. This opportunity is intent to help trainees strengthen and enhance their competitiveness for graduate admission programs.

Travel.
Up to **$1,000** will be available to cover travel expenses for participants attending a scientific conference to present their REPMIC research work or to participate in relevant training. Covered expenses may include conference registration, airfare, transportation, per diem, and hotel costs. A formal request for travel funds must be submitted to both the trainee and their mentor.

Subsistence.
Trainees will receive an **incentive of $12.50 per hour** (based on 37.5 hours per week) for their participation over the 37-week program period. Subsistence payment will be disbursed monthly, contingent on the trainee's continued participation in the program. It is imperative that trainees work at their assigned institution, under the direct supervision of their mentor and the mentor's research staff.

Research and education.
Up to **$2,500 per trainee** will be available to cover research and education expenses for the 9 months research training program. These funds may be used for laboratory and other research materials, publication fees, conference-related costs, incentive for study participants, and study promotional materials related to the trainee's study. The research mentor must identify the required research materials prior to the start date of the program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT REPMIC STAFF MEMBERS:

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