



CHAGAS COALITION

Conversations about NTDs from the Chagas Disease Community

ChagasChat with Claudia Herrera

March 2026.

Claudia Herrera is a microbiologist and associate professor in the Department of Tropical Medicine at the Tulane University School of Public Health. With over 15 years of experience in the study of parasitic diseases, her academic and scientific work focuses on the molecular epidemiology and population genetics of protozoan parasites, highlighting her pioneering research on *Trypanosoma cruzi*. At Tulane, she has established a world-class reference laboratory for the early detection and genotyping of this parasite, leading projects centered on congenital transmission and the development of next-generation diagnostics. She is the co-chair of the U.S. Chagas Disease Research Consortium.

- **Tell us about yourself. How did you start working at Tulane University and become involved with Chagas disease?**

My name is Claudia Herrera. I am a professor and researcher at Tulane University, in the department of tropical medicine and infectious diseases. How did you get to work at Tulane University and become involved with Chagas disease? I initially arrived at Tulane as part of the support team for Dr. Pierre Buekens' R01 project, focused on the study of congenital Chagas disease in Mexico, Honduras, and Argentina. My main role was to lead the genotyping analysis of the parasite. Once here, that work expanded naturally to the study of triatomines, and natural reservoirs and animals in Louisiana. From those studies, we began to generate local evidence on the genetic diversity of *Trypanosoma cruzi* in the southern United States.

- **How do you expect Chagas disease control strategies to evolve in the coming years?**

Based on this, my realistic dream is that this knowledge that began in the laboratory will translate into timely diagnosis, active surveillance, and public policies that recognize Chagas as a real and present health problem in this country. Tell us about the research on Chagas disease at Tulane University. At Tulane, we work on Chagas from a comprehensive perspective. We conduct diagnostic, transmission, and molecular epidemiological research on *Trypanosoma cruzi*, always with a public health focus. Our group combines laboratory work, genomic analysis, studies in humans and animal reservoirs, as well as screening programs and community education. We think science shouldn't stay confined to the laboratory, but rather have a real impact on people.



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- **How did a university in New Orleans become interested in Chagas disease?**

New Orleans and the southern United States share several conditions that make the study of Chagas disease relevant, such as the presence of the vector and animal hosts within an ecological context favorable for transmission. Furthermore, Tulane has a long tradition in tropical medicine and public health, and, from this perspective, Chagas disease is understood not as an imported disease, but as a local reality that requires greater scientific and public health attention.

- **¿ What is the situation regarding the transmission of Chagas disease in the U.S.?**

From our experience, the transmission of Chagas disease in the United States is real and more diverse than initially thought. Although Tulane already documented the first human case of Chagas disease in Louisiana, and there was solid work in entomology, particularly on *Triatoma sanguisuga*, the establishment of a molecular epidemiology laboratory allowed for a deeper understanding of the genetic diversity of the parasite in the region. From this location we began to study triatomines and reservoirs, and wild hosts in Louisiana using increasingly refined genotyping techniques. Since then we have identified different DTUs in the state and have strengthened collaborations with colleagues in Texas, where different DTUs of the parasite have also been identified in autochthonous human cases. All of this indicates the existence of complex transmission cycles, active and probably underestimated in the south of the country.

- **How is the current situation in the United States affecting financial support for research?**

As in any area of biomedical research, funding is competitive and requires ongoing collaboration. In the case of Chagas disease, which is a neglected disease historically, this leads us to be very strategic in the design of studies and in building collaborations. Fortunately, we have support from federal agencies such as the NH and national and international academic partnerships, which allows us to maintain robust and sustainable research programs. However, greater recognition and sustained support would facilitate more rapid progress in diagnostic solutions and better care for affected populations.

- **Any news or events for 2026 that you can tell us about?**


From March 26 to 27, here at Tulane, we are organizing the first national meeting on Chagas disease, in the United States, with international participation. The goal is to hold this meeting annually or every two years. 0:04:57.520,0:05:00.686 A permanent



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meeting where the different groups working on Chagas disease in the country can share research advances and strengthen collaborations. This first meeting will focus on Chagasic cardiomyopathy integrating the clinical perspective with health prevention approaches, specially, from the perspective of maternal and child health. Researchers with extensive experience in Chagas disease will be participating. This will foster a solid and formative exchange between groups with different backgrounds.

 Watch on [Youtube](#)

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