

**HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH
ROUND 4**

Awards to 12 sites on 11-1-2009, totaling \$1.5 million
Program Director: Mary Story, Ph.D., R.D.

SUMMARY**Program Purpose:**

Healthy Eating Research is a national program that supports research on environmental and policy strategies to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity, especially among low-income and racial and ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity.

Planning for Food Access: A National Scan and Evaluation of Local Comprehensive Planning and Zoning

American Planning Association, Washington, DC
Principal Investigator: Kimberley Hodgson, M.U.R.P., M.S., R.D.

Low-income, underserved communities are often plagued with unhealthy food environments. A community's comprehensive plan directly influences urban design and land-use regulations, which affect neighborhood food availability. While some local governments are including food access goals and policies in their local plans, little is understood about the quality, specificity and comprehensiveness of these goals and policies. The primary aim of this study is to identify and evaluate the development, adoption and implementation of food access goals and policies of comprehensive and sustainability plans across the U.S. The secondary aim is to provide policy-makers and planners with case examples of innovative food access goal and policy development, adoption and implementation strategies to improve food environments.

Assessing Recommendations From a Study on Improving Nutrition in Licensed Child-Care Centers in California

California Food Policy Advocates, Oakland, CA
Principal Investigator: Kenneth Hecht, L.L.B.
Co-Principal Investigator: Lorrene Ritchie, Ph.D., R.D.

Approximately 50% of preschool-aged children in California are enrolled in licensed child-care settings, primarily in day care centers. These children consume a significant portion of their daily nutrition in child-care centers. Previous research has indicated that centers participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) served healthier foods than those not participating in CACFP. Therefore, the goal of this study is to identify and propose policy solutions to overcome the barriers preventing high-quality meals in non-CACFP licensed child-care centers. Study assessment methods will include semi-structured interviews and stakeholder convening. Given the significant federal and state role in child care licensing and CACFP policy, the policy

solutions arising from this research have immediate and direct relevance to early childhood obesity prevention.

Examining a Statewide Law Banning Junk Food and Beverage Marketing in Maine Schools

Maine Center for Public Health, Augusta, ME

Principal Investigator: Michele Polacsek, Ph.D., M.H.S.

Maine's Chapter 156, the first statewide law banning junk food and beverage marketing in schools, went into effect in September 2007. No statewide policies to restrict marketing in schools exist or have been studied, and little is known about how best to create and implement marketing policy change in schools. In this study, investigators will assess compliance with Chapter 156 using a cross-sectional survey to observe school food marketing practices and assess perceptions of policies and changes since the inception of Chapter 156. Recommendations will be developed to improve legislation and school policies.

Understanding the Role of Consumer Protection Law in Controlling Food Marketing to Children

Public Health Advocacy Institute, Boston, MA

Principal Investigator: Mark Gottlieb, J.D.

The consumer protection framework may permit a variety of interventions to help control food marketing of children's foods and beverages where such marketing may be considered unfair or deceptive. The study will consist of an overview of the consumer protection authority applicable to children's food marketing at the federal level through the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture; and a more detailed review of consumer protection authority at the state level through the variety of state consumer protection statutes. Legal and regulatory actions to date involving food and beverage marketing to children and their outcomes also will be reviewed.

Studying Food and Marketing Industry Research Behind Digital Media Marketing to Children and Adolescents

Public Health Institute, Berkeley, CA

Principal Investigator: Lori Dorfman, Dr.P.H., M.P.H.

Co-Principal Investigator: Jeffrey Chester, M.S.W.

As digital media become ever more present in children's lives, public health researchers and policy-makers need to understand how the new marketing ecosystem infiltrates and influences consumers. Yet specialized, commercially-sponsored digital marketing research remains obscured from public view because much of it occurs outside the academy. This study will make highly accessible and visible an important body of research literature that is playing a critical role in shaping contemporary food and beverage marketing to children and youth. The specific aim of this work is to collect, catalogue, analyze and make available industry research reports on the effects of the techniques that embody contemporary food marketing practices to children and youth. The study will map the research on digital marketing and create a searchable, annotated

database of industry research reports that are central to addressing concerns about digital advertising and childhood obesity.

Studying the Effect of Beverage Taxes on Children's Energy Intake and Tax Revenue

Research Triangle Institute, Research Triangle Park, NC

Principal Investigator: Chen Zhen, M.S., Ph.D.

Co-Principal Investigator: Eric Finkelstein, Ph.D., M.H.A.

Health advocates have increasingly argued for taxes on calorically sweetened beverages. However, there is little empirical research that evaluates the public health and fiscal impacts of such taxes while simultaneously accounting for consumers' and suppliers' likely changes in economic behavior in response to a targeted tax. The aim of this study is to use econometric models to examine the effectiveness of select targeted beverage taxes on calorically sweetened beverages in reducing energy intake and determine the best tax strategy for achieving the intended public health and fiscal goals in each of the 50 largest cities/markets across the U.S. A final product of this work will be an electronic toolkit that municipalities can use to calculate the reduction in energy intake and increase in tax revenue based on user-specified tax type and rate and a specific catchment area.

Examining the Influence of Mobile Food Vendors on Food and Beverage Choices of Low-Income Mexican-American Children in Texas Colonias

Texas A&M University System Health Science Center Research Foundation,
College Station, TX

Principal Investigator: Joseph Sharkey, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D.

The prevalence of overweight and obesity among Mexican-American children is exceedingly high. Understanding the role of mobile food vendors in low-income, limited-resource Mexican-American *colonia* neighborhoods is critical. With the involvement of community partners and building on prior food environment projects within the *colonias*, the aim of this study is to assess the neighborhood and household food environments, current food and beverage marketing and purchase strategies for after-school and weekend consumption, as well as seasonal patterns, and current family food behaviors, in a sample of Mexican-American mother-child dyads. Results of this study will enable the implementation of public policies targeted at the dietary intake of Mexican-American children in the *colonias* by determining the contribution of traditional snack foods supplied by mobile food vendors to the overall dietary intake of *colonia* children.

Examining Marketing Approaches to Increasing Sales of Healthy Kids' Menu Items in Quick-Service Restaurants

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, Olympia, WA

Principal Investigator: Deborah Allen, Ph.D.

Co-Principal Investigator: Donna Johnson, R.D., Ph.D.

Through cooperation between the food service industry and public health, this project aims to improve nutritional quality of kids' menus in fast food restaurants. This study will examine pooled sales data from 10 Taco Time restaurants showing items sold from the kids' menu over

three exposure periods: a 6-month baseline, a 3-month period following introduction of lower calorie-density side dishes and desserts, and a 3-month period following designation of the new and recommended kids' menu items on the menu board. Overall, investigators hypothesize that, when exposed to an appropriate marketing mix, families will change from higher to lower caloric-density foods selected from kids' menus. If so, restaurants will have an economic incentive to offer and promote less fattening foods for children.

Examining How Increases in Earned Income Tax Credits, Food Prices and Neighborhood Context Affect Children's BMI

University of California, San Francisco, San Francisco, CA

Principal Investigator: David Rehkopf, Sc.D., M.P.H.

Co-Principal Investigator: Kate Strully, Ph.D.

The goal of this project is to examine how increases in family income generated by geographic- and time-varying changes in earned income tax credits (EITC) impact children's body mass index, and how this effect may depend on their neighborhood food environment and regional food prices. Focusing on EITC-generated income changes amounts to a quasi-experimental research design that addresses many concerns about confounding bias. Exploiting this natural income experiment, investigators will examine how income effects vary based on regional food prices (fruits and vegetables and fast food) and local food environment (grocery stores and fast food outlets). The analysis of the effects of employment and income from the EITC will provide insight into how the largest anti-poverty program in the U.S. shapes children's risk of obesity.

Developing Planning and Policy Strategies to Improve Access to Healthy Foods Within North Carolina Tribal Communities

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC

Principal Investigator: Daniel Rodriguez, Ph.D.

Co-Principal Investigator: Sheila Fleischhacker, Ph.D., J.D.

American Indian children endure disproportionately high obesity rates, yet few academic institutions have cultivated sustainable relationships with American Indian communities committed to improving food access. This project will: (1) apply community-based participatory research methodologies to build partnerships with the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs and North Carolina tribal communities to gain an understanding of how environmental and policy factors influence access to healthy foods; (2) examine existing data sources to identify and map the type and location of food outlets within tribal communities; (3) assess agreement among the existing food outlet data sources and validate existing data using field-based observations; and (4) conduct legal and policy analyses of regulations and rules relating to healthy food access in order to guide solution-oriented strategies and develop a toolkit for improving access to healthy foods within each of the tribal communities.

Evaluating the Impact of WIC Voucher Changes on Low-Income Families and Neighborhoods

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Principal Investigator: Amy Hillier, M.S.W., Ph.D.

Co-Principal Investigator: Jacqueline McLaughlin, M.S., R.D.

Major policy changes in WIC voucher provision for a wide range of healthy foods has the potential to impact the more than eight million U.S. families that receive WIC benefits as well as the food environment in low-income neighborhoods. In December 2008, investigators began conducting baseline research about the food choices that WIC participants make, the availability of healthy foods in corner stores and supermarkets, and the challenges facing small store owners/managers with the voucher changes. With this study, investigators will repeat the survey of food stores after the voucher changes take effect in order to assess their impact on the availability of fruits and vegetables, whole-grain foods and other foods included in the new WIC package. Research methods will include surveys of food stores and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with store managers and owners.

Testing Modifications in Child-Care Settings to Promote Nutritional Quality in the Context of Food Insecurity

Yale University, New Haven, CT

Principal Investigator: Marlene Schwartz, Ph.D., M.S., M.Phil

Co-Principal Investigator: Kathryn Henderson, Ph.D.

The combination of obesity amidst food insecurity presents unique challenges to improving nutrition and feeding policies in institutions serving children. The aim of this study is to evaluate child care nutrition and feeding policies designed to decrease excess caloric consumption in the context of food insecurity and obesity. In this project, three intervention strategies will be evaluated among preschoolers in CACFP participating centers, including: (a) serving vegetables/fruits to children before the rest of the meal, (b) keeping low-energy dense foods on the table during the meal so children can serve themselves, while high-energy dense foods remain nearby but not visible, and (c) simultaneously applying strategies (a) and (b). This work also seeks to develop and disseminate a conceptual paper examining feeding strategies from both childhood obesity and food insecurity perspectives to facilitate communication and understanding between stakeholder groups; assess caregiver concerns about eating to further effective communication with caregivers; analyze the costs of three tested intervention strategies compared to traditional family style service; and host a Webinar and conduct stakeholder interviews with food security advocates and child care experts.