Public Health Practice

Stories from the Field
The University of Texas School of Public Health
Student Practicum Experiences
Summer 2015 – Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences
The practicum experience is an integral part of the MPH and DrPH curricula. Public health students are provided with the opportunity to apply their classroom knowledge to real world settings through which they make a meaningful contribution to a public health organization.

Under the guidance of a community preceptor and faculty sponsor, students from all divisions gain a deeper understanding of public health practice, interact with professionals in the field, and expand their repertoire of professional skills.

This seventeenth-edition e-magazine showcases student practicum experiences throughout the Summer 2015 semester. (Prior semesters may be accessed through the e-book, a collection of student abstracts and e-magazines describing their experiences.)
## Practicum Topics

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### Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences

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Choose Healthier Mobile App offers 70,000 ways to be healthy

By: Kayla Albrecht

I completed my practicum at IT’S TIME TEXAS, a nonprofit offering programs that promote health and wellness in Austin. This summer, I created a two-phase evaluation plan for the new Choose Healthier Mobile App, launched in late June. I also attended several community events to promote the app and talk with community members.

From nutrition seminars to community exercise classes, the Choose Healthier Mobile App connects users with activities and opportunities to be healthy – and it’s totally free to download and use!

This app was created to combat obesity in Texas by increasing users’ awareness of and participation in activities that get them up and moving and eating well. Due to the delay of the app launch, I have not yet implemented either phase of my evaluation, which is finished, but I have agreed to stay on with IT’S TIME TEXAS and see the project through to the end.

Public Health Significance

The public health service provided to users by the Choose Healthier Mobile App most closely relates to the following essential services:

- Inform, educate and empower people about health issues
- Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems
- Link people to needed personal health services

My specific evaluation plan relates to the essential service of “Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.” After the first phase of my evaluation, I will be able to provide IT’S TIME TEXAS with demographic information on their users and usability feedback.

The second phase of my evaluation, a pilot study, will examine the effect of the mobile app on users’ awareness, intentions to be healthy and physical activity behavior. If proven effective, the app will become one of the first evidence-based health resource mobile apps on the market.

Lessons Learned

• If you choose to evaluate a program, I would recommend picking a program that has already launched. If not, prepare for delays and set-backs!
Improving Access Health Care for Texans

Practicum Highlights

- Sending and following up with county judges for the County Judge Survey
- Interpreting results and receiving feedback for the County Judge Survey
- Learned effective social media skills
- Learned new leadership skills and took on a leadership role

Advice for Future Practicum Students

- DFC as a practicum site would be extremely useful for someone who is interested in management and policies since the Access to Care committee deals mostly with how to become advocates for Texans through policies.
- Do not be afraid to speak out! Claire and the other DFC members really do want your input and would also be more than glad to place you on a project that you are more comfortable with.
- Be ready to work independently and become a leader!

Improving Access to Primary Care for All Texans

I had the opportunity to choose Doctors for Change (DFC) as my practicum site and worked mainly with the Access to Care Committee. When I signed on, DFC had already created a County Judge Survey that was to be sent to all Texas County Judges.

The survey and public health issue addressed the need to improve access to care for all Texans. The County Judges would answer a list of questions, which included open-ended questions. The answers are to be used later to show Texan Legislators the opinions that the Texas County Judges have in relation to the need to improve access to care and how to do so. The Texas County Judges were selected since they oversee health care in their perspective counties.

Roughly 20% of all the County Judges responded. I obtained responses from both Qualtrics as well as mailed in surveys, which were later put into Qualtrics by me. Qualtrics then interpreted the data, which I used to create my final report. The survey still needs further follow up in order to increase the number of responses. In addition, when I followed up with the County Judges who did not respond, many of them did not have time due to the current legislative session. DFC is hopeful that they will receive more responses this summer.

Public Health Significance

Doctors for Change is a non-profit organization that has provided many of the services listed in the 10 Essential Public Health Services. The one that I focused on during my practicum experience includes research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems. The Texas County Judge Survey was a tool used to assess the access to health care by Texans living in their perspective counties. In the survey, the County Judges also answered open ended questions in which they would assess the positives and negatives of their current health care system. In addition, the survey also asked the county judges suggestion for future changes. Another public health service that the Texas County Judge Survey overlaps includes evaluating effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
Modeling Urban Physical Activity

Utilizing the Integrated Transport and Health Impact Modeling (ITHIM) Tool in Houston, Texas
By: Gregory Bounds

I am working with UTSPH faculty to assemble data from many different sources to create a model that estimates health effects in urban setting. The inputs are indicators of physical activity, risk of injury from traffic, and exposure to fine particulate matter (PM2.5). This model has been assembled previously in southern California, Tennessee, and the UK. Houston is an interesting setting for this model as it has only recently attempted to create safe pathways for cyclists, greater public transportation options, and more green space. As Houstonians increase their physical activity, this model helps project the benefits and risks unique to the greater metropolitan area.

As I continue to receive data, I am more excited about the power behind the model given the hundreds of inputs.

Public Health Significance

Other sites that assembled the ITHIM tool have used it to inform as well as assist with policy. Additionally the model serves to educate the public on the benefits of physical activity in terms of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and colon cancer, and risks such as road injuries and PM2.5 exposure.

I believe this project can be used to assist local policymakers with public health related legislation such as urban cycling routes, outdoor recreation, and projects that increase the number of non-vehicle commuters. Most importantly, tools such as ITHIM can be used to promote climate mitigation policies that could positively affect the health of all Houstonians.

Special events/duties during your practicum

• Utilizing several software packages to manage and present data
• Assembling a model that has not yet been done for Houston.

Advice for Future Practicum Students

• Working with state and federal agencies can take time, be patient and plan accordingly!

Summer 2015 • Gregory Bounds • UTSPH • ITHIM
HIV infections due to injection drug use have declined, but injecting drugs remains a significant risk for many individuals, hence why Project HEAL is conducting a surveillance study to learn more about the IDU communities across the country, and collecting data to help with sampling procedures. I was responsible for the following:

- Recruiting IDUs from Harris County by using a respondent-driven sampling
- Interviewing the participants via a standardized anonymous questionnaire to collect information on HIV-related risk behaviors
- Administering rapid HIV testing for participants

**Advice**

- Prior to selecting a practicum site, do extensive research on past and current projects that your potential sites have been conducting—that way, you’ll know if it will be a good fit with your interests.
- Take initiative, become invested in your work, and challenge yourself at all costs. By partaking in all of these things, you will benefit in the long run.
- While working, don’t be afraid to ask questions—inquiring...

**National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS): Injection Drug Users (IDUs)**

By Brenda Cantero

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**Public Health Significance**

The most pertinent public health services that underlined my practicum experience were: inform, educate, and empower the community. As a trained interviewer for NHBS, I am in a position where I am able to communicate, educate, and empower males and females of the IDU community by informing them of safer sexual and substance practices that will prevent them from acquiring HIV or other related diseases. The data that will be collected during the cycle will provide a behavioral context for trends seen in HIV surveillance data—which will provide an...
The Sunbeatable™ Sun Protection Program

Pilot Study for the Implementation of Ray and the Sunbeatable™: A Sun Safety Curriculum for Preschoolers

By: Siedah Garrison

This summer I was a trainee for the Cancer Prevention Research Trainee Program at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Through this program, I worked with Mary Tripp, Ph.D. M.P.H., on one of her current research projects from the Melanoma Moon Shot Prevention Flagship. The main focus of the research is skin cancer prevention for preschool-aged children. Dr. Tripp and her research team developed an evidence-based, educational program for preschools, to increase children’s sun protection. Program components include a curriculum for children, teacher’s guide and training materials, a preschool sun protection policy template, school posters, parent education and other materials in the curriculum, children meet superhero characters Ray and the Sunbeatable™, who travel around the world using their superpowers of sun protection.

The implementation of the Sunbeatable™ program was observed and evaluated in a pilot study this summer. The purpose of the study was to learn how the program is used in a real-world setting in the community, to identify any areas for refinement prior to large-scale dissemination. I assisted the team with developing data collection tools, conducting site visits, and collecting and analyzing data. My final project included a poster presentation at an exposition at MD Anderson Cancer Center.

The Sunbeatable™ educational program aims to educate children, parents and teachers on the importance of beginning sun protection at an early age, to prevent skin cancer. This research will guide any improvements of the current Sunbeatable™ program to increase sun protection behaviors for children. The Sunbeatables™ program incorporates these essential components of public health:

- Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.
- Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.
- Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

Sun Protection in the Community!

- It was really nice visiting preschools and seeing teachers, children, and parents excited about the curriculum.

Research requires Teamwork!

- It is really important to be a team member who works well with others!
Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

**PrEP: The Pill That Prevents HIV**

By: **SAMUEL GOINGS**

During my practicum experience I used my skills in assessment and program evaluation to facilitate the implementation of CDC guidelines for prescribing PrEP in a 100% volunteer community clinic. In addition to helping navigate and remove systematic barriers for accessing care (i.e. affordability, stigma, etc.), the PrEP Access Project also works towards improving medication adherence for taking PrEP through the behavioral health program. My practicum duties included developing an intake questionnaire to assess patients’ adherence behaviors to determine useful interventions to improve adherence.

Data currently being collected will be used to structure behavioral interventions aimed towards improving PrEP adherence for HIV prevention.

**Public Health Significance**

One primary function at the Austin PrEP Access Project is working to address the Public Health Essential Services aimed at identifying the role of social and community factors that contribute to increasing HIV infection. This includes addressing barriers for high-risk populations (i.e. Black and Hispanic Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and Young MSM) who struggle to access HIV prevention services.

Working with patient navigators and clinicians at the Austin PrEP Access Clinic, patients can overcome obstacles and reduce their risk for acquiring HIV.

Low-income and uninsured or underinsured individuals are assisted by patient navigators to access affordable or often free PrEP medication through Patient Assistance Programs. Community education and outreach efforts help to reduce the stigma of taking PrEP, which can often be associated with having multiple partners and/or condomless sex.

**Highlights**

- This brand new clinic, the first of its kind in the country, opened its doors to the public May 9th, 2015.
- The program has participated in several community outreach events and just recently presented at the annual HIV Early Intervention and Street Outreach Workers conference held August 2-5, 2015 in Austin, Texas

**Lessons Learned: Advice for Future Students**

- Networking with similar organizations can really be beneficial during your practicum. Not only can it help improve the work you are doing, but it may also open the door to future career opportunities
A Rotation in Palliative and Supportive Care

By: Lillian Huang

My practicum was a rotation in the Department of Palliative, Rehabilitation, and Integrative Medicine at MD Anderson Cancer. I observed the multiple symptoms experienced by terminally ill and dying patients while in the inpatient Palliative Care Unit and learned how to pharmacologically and non-pharmacologically treat those symptoms. I also got to experience a multidisciplinary team-based approach in assessing the entirety of the patient's physical, spiritual, familial, financial, and emotional needs while rounding with attendings and fellows. I got to witness family meetings and patient's fears and joys, triumphs and disappointments as they learned how to cope with their disease. I also had the opportunity to write a case report on a family in the PCU that highlighted ethical issues when fulfilling patient's wishes and the importance of expressive counseling when dealing with family grief.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience relates to the Essential Services of Public Health by diagnosing and investigating health problems in the community, informing and educating people about health issues, and linking people to needed personal health services. Patients with cancer experience various physical and psychosocial symptoms. Treating these symptoms is necessary for their comfort, helping them function and heal. The inpatient PCU was established to help manage complex symptom control in advanced cancer patients and to provide support to their families. The outpatient clinic provides supportive care and symptom control to patients undergoing cancer treatments while teaching them how to manage their health. Both are focused on improving the cancer community’s quality of life, which may help them tolerate cancer therapies better. In addition, palliative and supportive care can direct physical therapy, alternative medicine, counseling, social work, and hospice transition to patients who are in need of those health services.
Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

By: Diana Lopez

CAN DO Houston (Children and Neighbors Defeat Obesity) is a non-profit organization aiming to prevent and reduce childhood obesity through environmental, policy, and systems change. Using a community-based participatory research approach, the organization tailors the solutions to the needs of different communities in Houston and enables collaboration between individuals and organizations to implement sustainable initiatives that promote physical activity, good nutrition, and healthy minds.

This summer I had the opportunity to coordinate the logistics for implementation of several initiatives, and assist in the implementation itself. I was also responsible for conducting data collection and data entry, literature searches, creating promotional material, conducting physical assessments, facilitating weekly meetings, language translations, and other office logistics.

I spent approximately fifty percent of the time in the field, mostly in Near Northside, where we conducted a Leadership and Advocacy for health training. We engaged community members in activities that focus on advocacy, collective strategizing, relationship building and communication with decision makers on issues impacting the health of their neighborhood.

Public Health Significance

CDH relates to several of the Essential Services of Public Health. These include, inform, educate and empower people about health issues, mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems, and research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

Over the past 30 years, childhood obesity rates have increased drastically. CAN DO Houston emphasis on early prevention is particularly important because research has shown us that if kids can avoid obesity early one, they are much more likely to maintain a healthy weight into adolescence and adulthood.

Both built environment and individual-level factors are necessary for a more sustainable impact. We need to support strategies that focus on changing policies and creating an environment where children and families can easily access healthy choices in the places they live, work, and play.

Advice for future practicum students

- Utilize every opportunity your practicum offers to learn about something new.
- Network and talk to people working in your field of interest.
- Be as proactive as possible
- Don’t be afraid to share new ideas.
- Challenge yourself, but also have fun!
Public Health Significance

My practicum experience relates to 4 essential public health services as follows:

- Inform, educate and empower
- Mobilize community partnerships
- Assure a competent workforce and
- Research new insights and innovative solutions to health problems

Through the community gardening workshop, participants were educated on how to start and maintain a healthy garden. There was also mobilization of community partnerships through our collaboration with community resources such as Urban Harvest, and Harbach-Ripley Neighborhood center to improve obesity related behaviors in the community. For assurance of a competent workforce, I was required to complete a Human Subject Protection Training that increased my knowledge about safeguarding participants’ information. Lastly, my practicum experience utilized innovative solutions through the use of churches as an optimal medium to deliver health promotion activities.

Faith-Based Partnership to Address Obesity in African American Families

I worked as a Graduate Research Assistant on a collaborative project addressing obesity-related behaviors among African American families in Houston-Greater Houston area. My primary assignment involved developing and implementing an evaluation tool for a community gardening workshop targeted towards faith-based groups. The goal of this workshop was to equip participants with the basic skills needed to grow a community or home garden, in hopes that this newly acquired skills/knowledge will improve vegetable consumption. Based on the evaluation results, participants suggested the following capacity building activities for future workshops:

- Healthy cooking sessions
- Parent-teen gardening workshops
- How to build garden beds

Overall, the gardening workshop was considered very informative by majority of the participants.

Lessons Learned [OR] Advice for Future Students

- Be Proactive!
- Demonstrate good work ethics by always giving your BEST on any task you are assigned
- Maximize every opportunity/resources presented to improve your knowledge and skills.

Special events/ duties during your practicum

- Attending a community gardening workshop.
- Designing /Implementing gardening workshop evaluation tool.
- Attending Career Conversation with Dr. Lorna McNeill
Investigating the mysteries of neurodegeneration

By: Kelly Ressler

The Neurocognitive Disorders Center is led by Dr. Paul Schulz, a research clinician who specializes in neurodegenerative diseases. Patients receive not only the most up to date medical care and access to imaging technologies, but are also invited to take part in important clinical research. Research projects at the Center mirror the complexity of the problems seen in each patient. Some projects are targeted at identifying genetic, epigenetic and behavioral risk factors; other projects focus on the development of effective diagnostic tools.

My core duties revolved around two studies. One project involved data analysis of cognitive measurements in 100 geriatric self-neglectors. In the other project, I helped with the data management and organization of patient questionnaires regarding potential behavioral and dietary risk factors.

Public Health Significance

Though dementia is commonly attributed to Alzheimer’s disease, there are several different conditions with unique etiologies that can contribute to neurodegeneration. The Neurocognitive Disorders Center addresses one of the 10 essential public health services by recognizing the importance of diagnosing and investigating each specific pathology as its own specific process.

In addition to the clinical side, considerable time is spent informing, educating and empowering both patients and members of the community about neurodegenerative diseases.

As no one institution could possibly address such a wide variety of research, Dr. Schulz’s team has developed community partnerships and collaborations between various researchers and institutions. Most importantly, the Center is constantly researching for new insight and innovative solutions for each disease.

Program Highlights

- Meeting with biostatistician Dr. Green and nuclear physicist Dr. Mawlawi to discuss data analysis
- Participating in lab meetings and learning about the wide variety of research projects and collaborations

Advice for Future Students

- Don’t be afraid to ask questions! It’s better to speak up and risk looking ignorant than to stay quiet and risk looking uninterested! No one starts off knowing everything.

Frontotemporal Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease are two conditions commonly seen in the clinic. They both involve memory loss due to neurodegeneration in the temporal lobes, but have markedly different pathologies and regional differences. Photo courtesy of frontotemporaldementia.info.

Frontotemporal Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease are two conditions commonly seen in the clinic. They both involve memory loss due to neurodegeneration in the temporal lobes, but have markedly different pathologies and regional differences. Photo courtesy of frontotemporaldementia.info.
A Fitness App for Cancer Survivors

Qualitative Formative Research for the Development of an App to Increase Physical Activity in Cancer Survivors

For my practicum experience I was a summer fellow with the Cancer Prevention Research Training Program (CPRTP) at MD Anderson. I worked with Dr. Basen-Engquist and conducted qualitative content analysis on focus group interviews with 35 cancer survivors to obtain this population’s preferences for fitness app features and tailored text messages to increase physical activity.

We found that participants want: autonomy in goal selection, messages to be causal in tone, concise, always positive, and tailored to the individual based on personal health concerns and personal physical activity data taken from wearable device.

I will present these finding at the MD Anderson trainee exposition, and hope to also present them at the CPRTP Innovation in Cancer Research conference and publish them.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience contributes to the CDC’s 10 essential public health services chiefly by contributing to research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

Cancer survivors face many long term health challenges that living a physically active lifestyle can protect against. Despite this, many cancer survivors are not sufficiently active.

Innovative solutions that address this population’s unique challenges to living a physically active lifestyle are needed.

With an estimated 45% of adults in the U.S. owning a smart phone (Pew, 2013), this increasingly widespread technology presents an exciting opportunity.

Fitness apps have been shown to facilitate adoption of physical activity for the general population, but a very limited number of such apps exist for cancer survivors (Stephens & Allen, 2013).

We hope to develop a tool to help cancer survivors be successful in their unique journey to living a physically active lifestyle.

Highlights of My Practicum Experience

• The MD Anderson CPRTP program is amazing; the diverse people that I have met from all over has brought about much growth, optimism, and happiness for me.
• Working as a part of Dr. Basen-Engquist’s research team really gave me a feel for what it might be like to pursue a career in this field- I love it!
• Practicing presenting scientific research clearly and concisely has been a very useful experience for me. This experience will shape my future.

Pearl of Wisdom

• Periodically plan out your path, but always remain receptive to sweet serendipity!

Practicing the presentation of scientific research is a very useful experience- it forces you to really be in touch with the essential take-home-message of what you are doing, and enables you to spread your ideas and garner support.
Expanding Smoke-Free Policies in Austin/Travis County Multiunit Housing

By: AMY SCHNEIDER

During my practicum, I assisted the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (HHSD) with efforts to expand smoke-free policies in local multiunit housing complexes. Smoke-free policies are critical for reducing exposure of residents and employees to secondhand smoke, which can lead to a number of health risks.

One of my duties was to develop an Outreach Plan to increase awareness and adoption of policies by property managers and owners within Austin/Travis County. This plan was modeled on successes from other U.S. cities, as well as past HHSD experiences with the local housing industry. Additionally, I developed a Best Practices Report to document historical efforts, and I participated in outreach activities -- all with the goal of making Austin a healthier community!

Public Health Significance

One of the Public Health Essential Service(s) (PHES) that was most closely related to my practicum experience was PHES number 4: Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems. For the purpose of promoting health improvement in the community (a component of PHES 4), the main focus of my practicum involved outreach to key stakeholders in the housing industry who could influence expansion of smoke-free policies. Without the buy-in of these stakeholders, namely local property management companies & property managers, expansion of smoke-free policies throughout Austin cannot succeed. HHSD also formed the Austin Tobacco Prevention and Control Coalition for the purpose of reducing secondhand smoke exposure, and overall tobacco use.

As a member of this and other health promoting coalitions, HHSD is doing its best to help prevent and control chronic disease here in Austin!

Special events/duties during your practicum

- Met with several local property managers to discuss free services from HHSD that would assist them in implementation of smoke-free policies
- Attended the Chronic Disease Coalition meeting and other very informative events!

Advice for Future Students

- Take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way during your practicum and make it a productive learning experience! You will not only get the most out of your experience, but you will also enjoy it more!
Public Health Significance of HEAL

Currently, Medicaid finances 40% of all births in the US. Women enrolled in Medicaid services are more likely to have risk factors for an adverse birth outcome, including premature birth. 1 in 8 babies are born prematurely, making them susceptible to future health problems and disabilities.

HEAL is a low cost intervention that can help reduce unnecessary adverse birth outcomes and increase healthy deliveries for both mom and baby. HEAL informs, educates and empowers women to make healthy life choices for themselves and their babies. Additionally, the HEAL staff is very diverse and offers an array of support. CHWs help bridge cultural gaps and provide a peer-facilitated classroom, which helps to further engage participants.

Advice for Future Students

- **Be flexible.** A project’s priorities change and it is best to be open-minded about your practicum objectives. Be willing to help advance the main aims of the project.
- **Talk to everyone.** The staff has invaluable insight into the project. The more you learn about the project, the more you will be able to engage in your practicum.
- **Get to know the people whom you are serving.** Putting faces to the project’s outcomes help make your practicum feel more tangible.
- **Have fun!** Enjoy your time at your practicum!

Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) is an innovative, evidence-based strategy to reduce low birth weight and preterm birth. It is a partner project between UTSPH and Thrive, a UT Physicians (UTP) program. HEAL offers pregnant UTP patients a free, five-week program. The educational classes are led by Community Health Workers (CHWs) and cover topics such as maintaining a healthy pregnancy weight and breastfeeding. Participants also engage in physical activities and meal demonstrations during each class.

During my practicum, I had the opportunity to engage with the participants by observing the classes and helping with the meal prep. I helped advance HEAL’s data management by streamlining the class check-in process and data collection. I also assisted with data entry and analysis, and learned Access Database and Qualtrics.

Helping Shape Delicious Lifestyles for Moms

By: Angela M Spencer

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- **Have fun!** Enjoy your time at your practicum!
Systematic Literature Review of Early Childhood Development

By: Emily Wei

During the summer of 2015, I worked at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy with Dr. Quianta Moore. Although I worked on two different projects, the overarching theme was early childhood development. For the first project I worked on designing and developing content for a health blog tailored for the Third Ward, specifically children and their parents. The blog is meant to introduce people to the concept of healthy living, specifically nutrition and physical activity information, and help children develop healthy habits. For the second project, Dr. Moore is working with the Episcopal Health Foundation to investigate the best strategies to support healthy early childhood development. I worked on conducting a systematic literature review on which environmental factors influenced early childhood development and how they did so.

Public Health Significance

• **Inform, educate, and empower** people to make healthy life choices by educating them about nutrition and physical activity.

• **Mobilize** community partnerships including Change Happens!, S.H.A.P.E. Community Center, and Project Row Houses.

• **Develop policies and plans** that support individual and community health efforts to support early childhood development including health technologies and telemedicine.

• **Evaluate** effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of population-based health services that support early childhood development through a systematic literature review.

• **Research** for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems including the effectiveness of communicating health information through technology, and strategies to support healthy early childhood development.
For more information regarding
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