

Center Projects Menu

The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living has a robust portfolio of research projects that are fueled by our faculty members' varied interests. At each project's core is a strong motivation to positively impact infant and child health behaviors and outcomes via evidence-based interventions.

Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (TX SPAN) Project

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher, Adriana Pérez, Nalini Ranjit, and Christopher Pfladderer

Monitors health trends (diet, physical activity, sedentary behavior, oral health) in Texas school children at statewide, border county, and non-border county levels.



Active Middle School Communities Project

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher, Baojiang Chen, Ethan Hunt, and Andrew Springer

Collaborates with urban middle schools, researchers, adolescents, and neighbors to co-create and evaluate ways to help low-income communities be more physically active.



Texas Collaborative for Healthy Mothers & Babies (TCHMB)

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher and Divya Patel

Improves birth outcomes in Texas through collaboration with providers, scientists, birthing hospitals, and other community stakeholders seeking to advance healthcare quality, equity, and patient safety.



Social Media, Acculturation, and E-cigarette Use Among Mexican-American College Students in Texas (Project VAMOS)

Dr. Anna Wilkinson

Examines social media related to e-cigarettes and the subsequent use of these devices among Mexican-American college students while considering the explanatory and modifying factors.



Nourish

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher and Shreela Sharma

Encourages lifelong health with hands-on, evidence-based classes taught across its garden, kitchen, clinic, and community.



Texas SNAP-Ed Evaluation

Dr. Nalini Ranjit

Evaluates the impacts of TX Senate Bill 379, which prohibits the use of SNAP benefits to purchase sweetened drinks and candy, on changes in consumption of these items, as well as fruits and vegetables, among SNAP beneficiaries in Texas.



Coordinated Approach To Child Health (CATCH)

Drs. Steven Kelder, Deanna Hoelscher, Shreela Sharma, Andrew Springer, and Dale Mantey

School-based health program that promotes physical activity and healthy food choices, and prevents tobacco use, with outreach managed under the CATCH Global Foundation.



CATCH Healthy Smiles

Dr. Shreela Sharma

Hands-on curriculum that teaches students how brushing, flossing, dentist visits, and healthy dietary choices impact oral health.



Empowering Birth: A Community Doula Program at ASMCA

Dr. Sandra van den Berg

Provides free, patient-centered doula care to 90 high-risk pregnant women in partnership with Ascension Seton, including prenatal, postpartum, and labor support, with evaluation by UTHealth Houston School of Public Health (Austin).

Perinatal Quality Collaborative CDC Grant

Dr. Divya Patel

Strengthens the capacity of the Texas Collaborative for Healthy Mothers and Babies to substantially impact perinatal health in Texas and the United States.



Exploring the Activation of Environmental Supports for Child and Parent Physical Activity in Partnership with the Acres Home Community in Houston, Texas

Dr. Andrew Springer

Explores the barriers, facilitating factors, and opportunities for promoting out-of-school time physical activity among elementary school-aged children and their parents.

Healthy Mujeres Program

Dr. Divya Patel

Increases access to pregnancy-related and preventive health services for women in the Texas Rio Grande Valley through a mobile and community clinic model designed to reach traditionally underserved populations.

CATCH My Breath

Dr. Steven Kelder

E-cigarette prevention program for middle schoolers, developed as a rapid response to emerging vaping trends among teens.



Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration (TX RPC) Project

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher, Sandra van den Berg, Shelby Flores-Thorpe, and Yuzi Zhang

Optimizes the use of Texas research, data, and resources to assist legislators in developing effective health policies.



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Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Training Program

Dr. Dorothy Mandell

Addresses geographic disparities in access to training for rural MCH professionals in the target areas of HRSA Region VI (TX, NM, OK, AR, and LA) and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.



Double Up Food Bucks (DUFEB) Texas Expansion Project

Dr. Sandra van den Berg

Measures customer attitudes & behaviors and management & staff practices to evaluate DUFEB statewide expansion's impact on nutritious food consumption and healthy food access.

Teaching Kitchen Multisite Trial

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher and Natalia Heredia

Implements a teaching kitchen intervention for adults with obesity.

Nourishing the Community Through Culinary Medicine

Dr. Natalia Heredia

Supports healthy eating through culinary medicine education.

Produce Prescription Program Implementation Strategies

Drs. Nalini Ranjit and Shreela Sharma

Evaluates how an AI-supported chatbot impacts dietary habits and produce consumption among pregnant women enrolled in a home-delivery based Produce Prescription program.

Pediatric Cardiovascular Health: Improving Prediction & Causal Inference Models

Dr. Augusto César Ferreira De Moraes

Uses data from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study to assess the impact of social determinants on trajectories of various cardiovascular health components across adolescence.

Routes to Environmental Justice

Dr. Kevin Lanza

Studies the relationship between built environment changes from national program Safe Routes to School, children's heat stress, and their active commuting to school behaviors.

Driver Safety Media Program Planning

Drs. Steve Kelder and Dale Mantey

Identifies audiences and implements behavior change strategies for the new traffic safety mass communications campaign in collaboration with the TxDOT internal marketing team.

Young Adult and Midlife Transitions in Physical Activity and Sedentary Behavior with Heart Failure Risk and Progression: Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA)

Dr. Baojiang Chen

Assesses the relationship between changes in reported physical activity from young adulthood to midlife and the prevalence of heart failure risk during midlife.

Leveraging a Natural Experiment to Determine the Effects of Integrated Palliative Care on Health Service Outcomes and Disparities in Parkinson Disease and Lewy Body Dementia

Dr. Adriana Pérez

Evaluates neurology-led palliative care at U.S. Movement Disorders Centers to determine its impact on quality of advanced patient care.

Cardiometabolic And Mental Health Profiles in University Students (CAMPUS) Study

Dr. Augusto César F. De Moraes

Examines how sleep, physical activity, diet, screen time, and stress affect cardiometabolic and mental health in U.S. college students to inform targeted, evidence-based campus interventions that improve well-being and reduce disparities.

Defining SuperAgers: Integrating Cognitive Reserve, Brain Age, and Life-Course Predictors to Characterize Brain Resilience

Dr. Augusto César F. De Moraes

Investigates how cardiometabolic, behavioral, and social determinants influence cognitive trajectories from adolescence through older adulthood, leveraging multimodal neuroimaging and explainable artificial intelligence to identify resilience pathways and SuperAger phenotypes.

Safe TRavel Environment Evaluation in Texas Schools (STREETS)

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher and Adriana Pérez

Evaluates the Safe Routes to School Program implemented by the City of Austin to determine health and safety effects of infrastructure changes.



Economic Evaluation of Austin Public Health Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) Projects

Dr. Shelton Brown

Determines the cost-benefit and/or cost-effectiveness of DSRIP projects in which Austin Public Health has participated.

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Brighter Bites

Dr. Shreela Sharma

Routinely distributes fresh produce and nutritional education to predominantly low-income families, aiming at changing eating habits and ultimately curbing childhood obesity.



brighterbites™

Produce Prescription Program Implementation Strategies

Drs. Nalini Ranjit and Shreela Sharma

Evaluates how an AI-supported chatbot impacts dietary habits and produce consumption among pregnant women enrolled in a home-delivery based Produce Prescription program.

Coordinated State Evaluation for Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting

Dr. Dorothy Mandell

Evaluates federally funded home visiting programs in Texas to understand the impact of mental health screenings and referrals by home visitors on families.

Safe Babies

Dr. Dorothy Mandell

Supports positive parenting through evidence-based tools, including the Father's Playbook App, Parenting Action Plan, Family CARE Portfolio, and Pediatric Brain Health Network.

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Mobile, Medical, Mental Health (M3)

Dr. Justin Benzer

Evaluates an integrated care model in Austin, Texas, providing comprehensive primary care, mental health services, substance use treatment, and intensive case management for individuals experiencing homelessness.



Texas Care Coordination Initiative

Dr. Justin Benzer

Evaluates gaps in access to mental health care for children treated for suicidal ideation or self-harm through a brief telepsychiatry program and develops care coordination solutions.

