

News & Updates

from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project



May 2021

Resource Reminders

COVID-19 Rapid Response Requests

We are now over a year into the pandemic. The Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration (TX RPC) Project continues to create accessible and accurate information from experts in the field. If you would like to request information on a public health topic related to the upcoming legislative session, please complete the following form.

[ACCESS FORM HERE](#)

The Texas RPC Project resources are available on our website. We hope these resources are valuable to your respective offices.

- [TX RPC Health Policy Resources](#) (resources available to policymakers to provide facts and evidence on health-related topics)
- [Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living Webinars](#) (includes COVID-19 specific webinars)
- [TX RPC Newsletters Archive](#)
- [Texas Legislative Bill Tracker](#)
- [Texas Child Health Status Reports and Toolkits](#)

General COVID-19 Resources

The TX RPC Project is committed to promoting optimal health for all Texans. For further information and updates on the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the [Texas Department of State Health Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and [World Health Organization](#) provide masking, social distancing guidelines, and recommended best practices to limit transmission of the coronavirus.

Resources from TX RPC Members Conducting COVID-19 Research

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Vehicle Value Limits Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration

SNAP is a proven program to combat food insecurity and poverty and improve child outcomes. Asset limits, especially vehicle value limits, create a significant barrier

for otherwise eligible families, and two-parent households are disproportionately affected by the vehicle asset test. Texas policymakers have an opportunity to expand SNAP eligibility by increasing or eliminating the vehicle value limit and by increasing the liquid resource limit.

Key Takeaways:

- Texas is one of four states that does not exempt the value of at least one vehicle in determining SNAP eligibility. Thirty-seven states exclude the value of all vehicles owned by the applicant.
- Due to a lack of wide-spread public transportation in Texas, most people in Texas require a reliable vehicle to get to work. Texas ranks 15th in terms of states with longest commutes to work (over 26 minutes).
- Changes to eligibility guidelines would increase the number of families eligible for SNAP's 100% federally funded benefits.

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Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Work Requirements Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration

SNAP is a proven program to combat food insecurity and poverty and improve child outcomes. Work requirements for SNAP prevent many otherwise eligible Texans from qualifying for SNAP benefits. For example, current work requirements are challenging for those with fluctuating schedules, and if the primary wage earner fails to meet them, the entire family loses their SNAP benefits. Texas policymakers have an opportunity to support policies that facilitate increased enrollment in SNAP, including for college and community college students.

Key Takeaways:

- Currently more than 3.4 million Texans receive SNAP benefits, representing 1.6 million households.
- In Texas, approximately 79% of SNAP recipients live in households with children, and more than 27% live in households with seniors or people with disabilities.
- SNAP has been shown to reduce poverty and food insecurity and to lead to improved health and economic outcomes, especially for children in families who receive SNAP.

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Public Health Experts are Needed in Policy Work Groups, Task Forces, and Advisory Committees Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration

Approximately 80-90% of a person's health outcomes are due to social determinants of health, such as where one lives and works. These foundations of health are especially important when predicting health outcomes for diverse populations, women, and children. Public health experts examine "upstream"

issues like structural and systemic factors that contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of a person. Public health experts' approaches to health tend to be proactive to reduce the burden of chronic disease, costs, and to improve life expectancy and quality of life for everyone. Public health experts add value to policy work, task forces, and advisory committees that aim to improve population health because they can provide timely recommendations based on the essential components of public health service.

Key Takeaways:

- Public health researchers and experts focus on the social determinants of health, which are particularly important in predicting health outcomes for women, children, and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC).
- Seven in 10 voters indicate public health departments are important to create a healthy community.
- Public health experts are uniquely situated to provide timely recommendations based on the essential components of public health service.

[VIEW THE REPORT](#)

Highlights from TX RPC Members Conducting COVID-19 Research

COVID-19 vaccine demand drops in Texas, though less than a quarter of population is fully vaccinated

Catherine Troisi, PhD, MS - UTHealth School of Public Health in Houston

Although a significant proportion of the state's population has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, demand for vaccines are dwindling. Vaccination rates vary between counties, with many border counties such as Starr, Cameron and El Paso reporting 40% or more of their population having been vaccinated. To increase the rates of vaccination, many local leaders are offering walk-in appointments and continue to promote vaccinations through TV campaigns. Dr. Troisi said that vaccination efforts are still not reaching those who have faced multiple barriers, specifically people who do not have internet and cannot make appointments, and those who lack transportation to vaccination sites. Further, Black and Hispanic communities in Texas are not being vaccinated at the same rates as whites in Texas, even though appointments are becoming more readily available. Experts across the state say that vaccination against COVID-19 is the key to keeping a resurgence at bay, and that as new variants of the virus continue to spread in the state, they hope Texans will continue to learn about the vaccine and make the initiative to be vaccinated.

Key Takeaways:

- Demand for vaccines is dwindling across the state, with less than 25% of people fully vaccinated.
- Barriers such as lack of access to the internet and transportation to vaccination site pose problems for many Texans.
- With new variants continually being discovered, experts hope many will learn more about and receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

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Epidemiologist says Churches, Schools Need To Be The Next COVID-19 Vaccination Sites As Demand For Shots Dwindles

Catherine Troisi, PhD, MS - UTHealth School of Public Health in Houston

Health officials are calling for new distribution efforts in order to “bring the vaccine to people” if Texas wants to reach herd immunity. Dr. Troisi said that schools, churches, and mobile clinics should be the next to hold vaccination clinics, and those who are homebound should be eligible to be vaccinated at home. She also says there are additional benefits from vaccination options in common community sites, such as trusted messengers like pastors or nurses who can help spread the message about the effectiveness and safety of vaccinations. “When people who are not vaccinated see what those of us who are vaccinated can do...there are privileges with it,” she said. Dr. Troisi also hopes that communities work to get more people vaccinated soon to try and prevent the spread of new variants and hope that people who are hesitant about the vaccine begin to change their minds as more people are vaccinated.

Key Takeaways:

- New distribution efforts are needed in order to serve harder-to-reach communities, including mobile clinics, vaccination sites at schools and churches, and providing vaccinations for those unable to leave their homes.
- Community messengers like nurses and pastors can help spread the message about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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TX RPC Partner Events

Webinar: Texas Cares: A COVID-19 antibody project. How bad is COVID-19 in Texas, and how should schools respond?

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

As Texas schools close for the spring session, and prepare for summer and fall, experts and RPC Network Members, Drs. Steven Kelder, George Delclos and Bill Kohl at UTHealth School of Public Health provided information on a statewide COVID-19 antibody study called Texas Cares. Support for this webinar comes from the Science Teachers Association of Texas (statweb.org). Key topics of interest to school administrators and teachers will be covered, such as:

1. How should I answer questions from my students about COVID-19, vaccines, and antibodies?
2. What commonsense strategies can I use to protect my students from getting COVID-19 and spreading it to my community?
3. What is herd immunity, and when it be safe to resume normal activities in my community?

Recent Publications by TX RPC Researchers

COVID-19 Publications

Gallagher, S., Roy, A., Domeracki, S. J., Mohrmann, T., Missar, V., Jule, J., **Sharma, S.**, & DeWitt, R. (2021). The Low-Wage Essential Worker: Occupational Concerns and Needs in the COVID-19 Pandemic-A Round Table. *Workplace Health & Safety*, 69(4), 154–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165079920988682>

Hossain, M. M., Rahman, M., Trisha, N. F., Tasnim, S., Nuzhath, T., Hasan, N. T., Clark, H., Das, A., **McKyer, E.**, Ahmed, H. U., & Ma, P. (2021). Prevalence of anxiety and depression in South Asia during COVID-19: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Heliyon*, 7(4), e06677.

Piquero, A. R., & Kurland, J. (2021). More stringent measures against COVID-19 are associated with lower cases and deaths in Florida and Miami-Dade. *The American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, S0735-6757(21)00352-1. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajem.2021.04.066>

Sonke, J., **Rodríguez, L.**, & **Valerio-Shewmaker, M. A.** (2021). Toward a Culture of Health in the United States: Introducing the HPP Arts in Public Health Supplement. *Health Promotion Practice*, 22(1_suppl), 5S–7S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248399211002512>

Williams, S., Xie, L., Hill, K., Mathew, M. S., Perry, T., Wesley, D., & **Messiah, S. E.** (2021). Potential Utility of School-Based Telehealth in the Era of COVID-19. *The Journal of School Health*, 10.1111/josh.13031. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13031> (also Texas specific)

Texas Population Publications

General:

Stone, K. W., Felkner, M., Garza, E., **Perez-Patron, M.**, Schmit, C. D., McDonald, T. J., & Horney, J. A. (2021). Changes to Timeliness and Completeness of Infectious Disease Reporting in Texas After Implementation of an Epidemiologic Capacity Program. *Public Health Reports* (Washington, D.C. : 1974), 333549211009490. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549211009490>

Central Texas:

Szeszulski, J., Walker, T. J., McCurdy, S. A., & **Hoelscher, D. M.** (2021). Use of School Wellness Policy Templates in One Texas Public Health Region: A Mixed-Methods Analysis. *The Journal of School Health*, 10.1111/josh.13032. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13032>

South Texas:

Zolezzi, M., Lopez, J., Mitchell-Bennet, L., Payne, L. Y., **McCormick, J. B.**, & **Reininger, B.** (2021). A Chronic Care Management Framework Bridging Clinic, Home, and Community Care in a Mexican American Population. *Health Promotion Practice*, 1524839920987842. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839920987842>

Other Publications

Lairmore, S., Stone, K. E., Huang, R., & **McLeigh, J.** (2021). Infectious disease screening in a dedicated primary care clinic for children in foster care. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 117, 105074. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105074>

Lee, S., Washburn, D. J., Colwell, B., Gwarzo, I. H., Kellstedt, D., Ahenda, P., & **Maddock, J. E.** (2021). Examining Social Determinants of Undiagnosed Diabetes in Namibia and South Africa Using a Behavioral Model of Health Services Use. *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice*, 108814. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diabres.2021.108814>

Pérez, A., Kuk, A. E., Bluestein, M. A., Penedo, E., N'hpang, R. S., Chen, B., Perry, C. L., Sterling, K. L., & **Harrell, M. B.** (2021). Prospective estimation of the age of initiation of cigarettes among young adults (18-24 years old): Findings from the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) waves 1-4 (2013-2017). *PloS One*, *16*(5), e0251246. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0251246>

Ronca, S. E., Ruff, J. C., & **Murray, K. O.** (2021). A 20-year historical review of West Nile virus since its initial emergence in North America: Has West Nile virus become a neglected tropical disease?. *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, *15*(5), e0009190. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0009190>

About the TX RPC Project

The Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration (Texas RPC) Project is a non-partisan network that aims to bridge research and policy by supporting partnerships between child health researchers and policymakers.

[Learn more online.](#)

The Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project team and overall network are available to support Texas policymakers with informational requests or resources related to health topics, during the interim and throughout the 2021 Legislative Session.

Contact Us

For more information, email TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.

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