

Award-winning faculty at the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living research a wide range of topics that explain and impact child health. Their collective curiosity is fueled by a desire to create a healthy future for communities through evidence-based information.

Austin Location Faculty

Deanna Hoelscher, PhD, RDN, LD, CNS, FISBNPA



- Behavior-based nutrition & physical activity education
- Obesity prevalence and prevention for Texas children and families
- Communication with legislators to inform health policy
- Culinary Medicine

Alexandra (Sandra) van den Berg, PhD, MPH



- Food systems that decrease food insecurity and increase nutrition security
- Sustainable food systems and Food as Medicine interventions
- Interactions between planetary health and public health
- Culinary Medicine

Dennis Andrulis, PhD



- Health equity for racially and ethnically diverse populations
- Community resilience to the consequences of climate change
- Collaboration with community groups to build accountable care communities

Justin Benzer, PhD



- Organization science approaches to implementing evidence-based practices with specific interests in teamwork and administrative structures
- Integration of health services across settings (e.g., between primary and specialty care)

Henry (Shelton) Brown, III, PhD



- Epidemiologic surveillance research and analyses of survey and EMA data
- Patterns of e-cigarette, cannabis, and other tobacco use among young people
- Behavioral interventions for young people in international settings (e.g., India)

Baojiang Chen, PhD



- Statistical applications in public health and behavioral sciences
- Method development for longitudinal, missing, and survival data analysis
- Child health statistics regarding tobacco control, nutrition, and physical activity

Melissa Blythe Harrell, PhD



- Cost-effectiveness of substance use disorder and nutrition interventions
- Health insurance markets and broader health economics
- Online cost-effectiveness calculators to aid recovery organizations

Ethan Hunt, PhD, MPH



- Childhood obesity prevention in underserved populations
- Disparities in health outcomes and life expectancies due to childhood trauma
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and adversity prevention

Augusto César F. De Moraes, PhD, MS, BS



- Life-Course Cardiovascular–Brain Health and Cognitive Resilience Using Explainable AI
- Environmental and Lifestyle Determinants of Cardiovascular and Brain Health Across Development
- Artificial Intelligence–Driven Modeling of 24-Hour Movement Behaviors, Substance Use, and Mental Health in Adolescents

Steven Kelder, PhD, MPH



- School-based child health programs that support healthy eating and physical activity
- Epidemiology of traffic crashes and media methods to promote safety
- Behavioral epidemiology of oral health and tobacco/e-cigarette use in children

Kevin Lanza, PhD, MCRP



- Burden of extreme heat on low-income and racially/ethnically diverse populations
- Scalable policies that eliminate health inequities due to climate change
- Collaboration with community members to create practical health solutions

Dorothy Mandell, PhD



- Relationship between early experiences and later neurocognitive outcomes
- Father involvement in perinatal and early childhood (EC) outcomes
- Evaluating EC support systems, including maternal, infant, and EC home visiting

Dale Mantey, PhD, MPA



- Nicotine and cannabis use patterns among youth and young adults
- Intervention design and program evaluation for cancer prevention
- Secondary data analysis and quantitative statistics methods

Vahed Maroufy, PhD



- Statistical modeling and prediction using EHR and claim data
- Method development for mixture, high-dimensional, and non-standard data analysis
- RCT and cluster RT, traumatic brain injury, mental health, Alzheimer's disease

Michael Mrazek, PhD



- Impact of attention training on distraction and mental health in schools
- AI-enabled EdTech to optimize student motivation and well-being
- Emerging risks of artificial general intelligence on youth mental health

Divya Patel, PhD



- Maternal/child health epidemiology for underserved populations
- Reproductive health, and access to pregnancy-related and contraception care
- Syphilis screening and treatment in maternity care settings

Adriana Pérez, PhD



- Application/development of biostatistical methods for missing and complex data
- Conduction of clinical and implementation clinical trials (adaptive/hybrid designs)
- Biostatistics in tobacco regulation and health research studies (e.g., design, power)

Christopher Pfladderer, PhD, MPH



- Barriers to and facilitators of meeting recommendations for the 24-hr activity cycle
- Optimizing the implementation and scale-up of childhood obesity interventions
- School-based physical activity interventions in rural communities

Nalini Ranjit, PhD



- Implementation science for Food is Medicine and complex behavioral interventions
- Social epidemiology of health behaviors related to diet and physical activity
- Evaluation of community nutrition education programs

Andrew Springer, DrPH



- Child and adolescent health promotion in the U.S. and Latin America
- Community health promotion planning and evaluation methods
- Socioecological influences on health behaviors in underserved communities

Brownsville Location Faculty

Anna Wilkinson, PhD



- Impulsivity and nicotine use as indicators of suicidal behaviors
- Impact of social media/acclulturation on vape use by Mexican-American undergrads
- Relationship between tobacco use and mental health

Belinda Reininger, DrPH



- Roles and effectiveness of community health workers in health promotion
- Development of dietary and physical activity programs for Hispanic populations
- Analysis of implementation/effectiveness of community-wide health campaigns
- brownsville

Houston Location Faculty

Ru-Jye (Lindi) Chuang, DrPH, MS



- Nutrition and oral health interventions for individuals from low-income populations
- Impact of evidence-based programs on child health promotion
- Health disparities in nutrition and oral health among low-income children

Irene Tamí-Maury, DMD, DrPH, MS



- Digital-based interventions and educational programs for cancer prevention and control
- Tobacco use and nicotine addiction in underserved populations in the U.S. and internationally (e.g., Latin America)
- Oral health and/or dental care research

Rupa Mahadevan, MD



- Culinary medicine in medical and physician education, and clinical care
- Implementation of shared medical visits utilizing teaching kitchens
- Development of healthy eating habits in the newborn phase through adolescence

Timothy Walker, PhD



- Physical activity promotion in schools and community settings
- Implementation strategy development to improve the use of interventions
- Measure development for health promotion and implementation research

Natalia Heredia, PhD, MPH



- Behavioral lifestyle interventions in Latine and other underserved communities
- Multi-level predictors of dietary and physical activity behaviors
- Management of metabolic-dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease

Shreela V. Sharma, PhD, RD, LD



- Nutrition-related health disparities for individuals from low-income populations
- Behavioral epidemiology of diet-related chronic diseases in children
- Health behavior interventions for childhood obesity and oral health