

Active Projects Menu

The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living has a robust portfolio of active 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.



Brighter Bites

Dr. Shreela Sharma

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



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.



Coordinated Approach To Child Health

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

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.



CATCH My Breath

Dr. Steven Kelder

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



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.



Co-CREATE

Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

Prevents adolescent overweight and obesity through information and policy infrastructure that promotes the healthiest choices as the preferred ones.



Community Health Workers for COVID Response: Evaluation of the HEART ATX Project

Drs. Andrew Springer and Sandra van den Berg

Evaluates HEART ATX, a CHW-led and Austin Public Health-hosted initiative addressing disparities in COVID-19 impacts through vaccination outreach and financial/health living programming.



Depressive Symptoms and Tobacco Use Trajectories Across Young Adulthood

Dr. Anna Wilkinson

Studies if and how the role, strength, and/or direction of depressive symptoms in tobacco use trajectories and transitions vary among age subgroups across young adulthood (ages 18-34).



Driver Safety Media Program Planning

Dr. Steve Kelder

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



School-Based Health Programs



Physical Activity



Nutrition, Food Access, Obesity



Family & Child Health



Tobacco & Alcohol Abuse Prevention



Health Policy



Community Development





Digital Physical Activity and Diet (dPAD) Collaborative

Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

Unites researchers interested in addressing obesity, diet, and physical activity through research that is based in technology.



Double Up Food Bucks (DUF) Texas Expansion Project

Dr. Sandra van den Berg

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



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.



Effect of E-cigarette and Hookah Use on Age of Asthma Onset in the USA

Dr. Adriana Pérez

Studies the association between tobacco use and asthma onset age within the contemporary tobacco product landscape.



ENDS Use Trajectories, Adolescence through Young Adulthood: A Longitudinal Study of Risk Factors and Profiles (TATAMS 2.0)



Dr. Melissa Harrell

Studies if and how the role, strength, and/or direction of depressive symptoms in tobacco use trajectories and transitions vary among subgroups across young adulthood.



Engaging Young People in Action Planning to Advance Vision Zero

Dr. Andrew Springer

Informs intervention planning to reduce fatal and serious injuries on roadways in partnership with young adult leaders from the Montopolis community and a community planning group.



Evaluating a Pilot of Developmental Screening and Referral by Community Health Workers

Dr. Dorothy Mandell

Assesses the practicality and impact of CHWs on the provision of developmental screening and service navigation support to families.



Finding Focus

Dr. Michael Mrazek

Improves the focus and emotional health of adolescents through a DOE-funded EdTech program.



Fresh for Less Healthy Food Access Evaluation

Dr. Sandra van den Berg

Assesses Austin's multifaceted healthy food access initiative to enhance prioritization and refinement of efforts by Austin Public Health.



Food is Best Medicine

Dr. Sandra van den Berg

Compares dietary and breastfeeding behaviors and food insecurity status among postpartum women receiving 8 weeks of home-delivered food boxes only or with CHW home visits. *Expanded through Enhancing Food as Medicine Interventions for Food Insecure Women in Central Texas and Increasing Capacity of the Food is Medicine Program.*



Evaluation of the Preschool Development Grant, Birth to Five

Dr. Dorothy Mandell

Strengthens the early childhood system in Texas by assessing needs and evaluating activities across five state agencies.

Healthy Behaviors for a Healthy Planet

Drs. Kevin Lanza and Sandra van den Berg

Development and validation of a theory-based survey that assesses behaviors (meat reduction, active transportation) conducive to planetary health.

Healthy Mujeres

Dr. Divya Patel

Provides pregnancy-related and preventive healthcare services to women in Texas' Rio Grande Valley through a mobile clinic model.

Landscape Assessment of Needs, Assets & Opportunities for Physical Activity Promotion in Travis County

Dr. Andrew Springer

Identifies needs, assets, and opportunities for physical activity promotion in Travis County in partnership with MD Anderson's Cancer Prevention and Control Platform.

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 effectiveness of team-based, neurology-led palliative care at 33 out of 65 academic Movement Disorders Centers in the United States.

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Training Program

Dr. Courtney Byrd-Williams

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.



Nourish

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher and Shreela Sharma

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

nourish

Nourishing the Community Through Culinary Medicine

Dr. Natalia Heredia

Supports healthy eating through culinary medicine education.

Teaching Kitchen Multisite Trial

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher and Natalia Heredia

Implements a teaching kitchen intervention for adults with obesity.

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.

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.

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.



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.

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.



Safe TRavel Environment Evaluation in Texas Schools (STREETS)

Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

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



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.

South American Youth/Child Cardiovascular and Environmental (SAYCARE) Study

Dr. Augusto César Ferreira De Moraes

Provides higher accuracy regarding cardiovascular disease risk factors in children and adolescents from ages 3 to 17.



Texas Collaborative for Healthy Mothers & Babies (TCHMB)

Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

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.



Texas Collaborative for Healthy Mothers & Babies

Texas Mother-Friendly Worksite Technical Assistance and Support Program

Dr. Courtney Byrd-Williams

Provides Texas workplaces with the support and infrastructure needed to become a designated Texas Mother-Friendly Worksite.



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

Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

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



Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project

Texas School Physical Activity (TX SPAN) Project

Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

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



Texas SNAP-Ed Evaluation

Drs. Deanna Hoelscher and Nalini Ranjit

Evaluates the effectiveness of SNAP-ed nutrition education and obesity prevention programming activities in Texas.



Transforming Health Through Reimbursements for Community-Based Interventions

Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

Establishes interventions to increase the purchase, preparation, and consumption of fruits and vegetables by families with elementary students in Austin/Elgin afterschool programs.

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.