

# Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project: Policy Impact

May 12, 2022

Joel Romo  
Texana Public Affairs  
Partnership for a Healthy Texas





## Texana Public Affairs

A JOEL ROMO GROUP

### 87<sup>th</sup> Regular Session

- Texas Research to Policy Collaboration instrumental in advancing key policies and priorities for:
  - Texas Public Health Coalition
  - Partnership for a Healthy Texas
  - Texas Tobacco Control Partners
  - Numerous public health organizations
  - Legislative Offices

# 87th Texas Legislative Session:

## TX RPC Project Impact



Health Policy Topic	Bill Number	Resource Provided	Result/Status
Cigarettes/Tobacco/ E-Cigarettes	-SB 216 -SB 248	-TX RPC Health Policy Reports  -TX Child Health Status Reports and Toolkits  -Data and resources from RPC researchers	<b>Passed (SB 248) without Governor's signature, effective 9/1/21</b>
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	-SB 224	-TX RPC Health Policy Reports  -Data and resources from RPC researchers	<b>Passed, effective 9/1/21</b>
Healthcare Access	-SB 50	-TX RPC Health Policy Reports  -Data and resources from RPC researchers	<b>Passed, effective 9/1/21</b>

# 2022 House & Senate Interim Charges



## Health Policy Reports In Progress

**\*Business & Commerce Committee:** Broadband and telecommunications

**\*Higher Education Committee:** Enrollment trends

**Committee on Agriculture & Livestock:** Dairy facilities

**Committee of Appropriations:** Children's instruction loss and mental health challenges, Texas-Mexico border health (*charge listed in 11 other committees*)

**Committee on Business & Industry:** Unemployment benefits and how they impact children

**Committee on Culture, Recreation & Tourism:** Affordable public access to outdoor recreating and education opportunities

**Committee on Human Services:** Medicaid and healthy Texas women

**Committee on Public Education:** COVID-19 learning loss, chronic absenteeism in public schools

## Health Policy Reports Created

**\*Education Committee:** Vaping in schools

**\*Finance Committee:** Mental health delivery, nursing facility long-term care funding

**Committee on Agriculture & Livestock:** Food deserts

**Committee on Ways & Means:** Tobacco products and e-cigarettes

**Committee on Public Education:** COVID-19 on students mental health

**\*Senate Interim Charges**

# Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project: Welcome Reception

May 12, 2022

Deanna M. Hoelscher, PhD, RDN, LD, CNS, FISBNPA  
Principal Investigator

Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH  
Co-Principal Investigator



# Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration: Linking Policymakers to Researchers



- **Improve the health of Texans through policymaking**
  - Assist legislators seeking to use Texas research, data, and trusted resources
- **Engage state and local stakeholders in capacity building**
  - Link policymakers to researchers for the 2023 Texas Legislative Session
- **Respond to State Legislative Requests**
  - Facilitate researcher-policymaker connections and support requests for information to inform policy



# TX RPC Project Timeline 2022-2023 - Legislative Office Participation



## May-August 2022

- Identification of Texas Health Policy Needs
- Feedback Questionnaire #1



## June 2022-December 2023

- Collaborative Meetings



## May 2022-May 2023

- Respond to Legislator Information Requests



## May 2023-December 2023

- Feedback Questionnaire #2



# Data-Driven Tools and Resources for Legislators





# Health Policy Resources & Support for Legislators



**1. Collaborative Meetings**

**4. Center for Healthy Living Webinars**

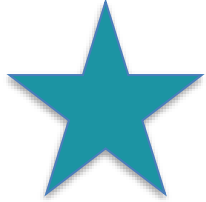
**2. TX RPC Health Policy Reports**

**5. TX RPC Newsletters**

**3. TX Child Health Status Reports**

**6. TX Legislature Bill Tracker**

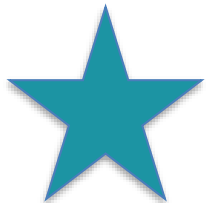
# Collaborative Meetings between Legislative Offices and RPC Experts



**Consultation from content experts on health policy topics**



**Provide data-driven information to support development of health policy**



**Produce state- and legislative district-level information**



**Scheduled and coordinated by the TX RPC Team  
Held virtually, by phone, or in-person**

# Responding to Legislative Requests & Health Policy Priorities



- **June 2020 – Present: Development and dissemination of health policy resources to state legislative offices**
  - Developed by TX RPC staff in collaboration with content experts from TX RPC network
  - Online Information Request Form:  
<https://go.uth.edu/TXRPCInformationRequestForm>

Series of health policy reports developed based on legislative requests and policy priorities

Resources posted on TX RPC webpage and distributed by email and newsletter

# TX RPC Health Policy Reports



## Double Up Food Bucks: A SNAP Produce Incentive Program



A Resource for Improving Measurable Impact  
October 4, 2021

### What is Double Up Food Bucks?

The Double Up Food Bucks (Double Up) program is a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Produce Incentive that matches SNAP spent on locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets and selected grocery stores up to \$20.00/visit\*. Double Up supports families by improving health and combating food insecurity, boosts business for local farmers, and strengthens rural and urban communities in the United States.<sup>1-10</sup>

\*Double Up in Austin, TX matches up to \$30 per person per visit at farmers' markets for recipients of SNAP, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).

### Impact on Families

- In 2020, a total of 441,363 families nationwide participated in Double Up, purchasing more than \$30 million of fresh fruits and vegetables through Double Up and SNAP.<sup>2</sup>
- Families who participate in Double Up have greater food security and eat more fruits and vegetables, compared to families who do not participate in Double Up.<sup>1,10-12</sup>
- In several states, 80% of Double Up participants reported eating less junk food than before participating in Double Up.<sup>1</sup>
- Prediction models show Double Up has the potential to lower rates of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, as well as reduce healthcare spending, by supporting healthy eating.<sup>1</sup>

### Impact on Farmers, Grocers, and Local Economies

- In 2020, 4,708 farmers nationwide participated in Double Up, earning \$4.6 million in Double Up and SNAP sales at 642 farmers' markets and fair stands.<sup>2</sup>
- Farmers report having new customers and hiring more staff because of Double Up.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2020, over 400 grocery stores across 25 states participated in Double Up, selling \$22.36 million in fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>1,11</sup>

### Double Up Food Bucks Outcomes and Opportunities in Texas

**3.5+ million**

Texans rely on SNAP benefits to provide food for their families.<sup>12,13</sup>



Food insecurity in Texas has nearly doubled from December 2018 to June 2021 and remains high as the pandemic continues.<sup>14,15</sup>

- In 2021, Double Up Food Bucks is available at more than 40 locations in Texas, including the Amarillo, Austin, Houston, Lubbock, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Waco areas.<sup>16</sup>
- Among Double Up participants in Austin, 72% of SNAP recipients and 78% of WIC recipients reported they would not have visited the farmers' market without Double Up.<sup>17</sup>
- In Houston, SNAP transactions increased from 2 per market per month to 25 per market per month with Healthy Houston Bucks in 2017.<sup>17</sup>



## A RESOURCE FOR IMPROVING MEASURABLE IMPACT

JANUARY 28, 2022

### Impact of COVID-19 on Child Mental Health

**During Fall 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. (1)**

As a result of altered experiences at home, school, and in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, a vast number of children have faced social, emotional and academic challenges, increasing their risk for **depression, anxiety, suicide, sleep disorders, and substance use.** (2-5) The U.S. Surgeon General issued a public health advisory on December 7, 2021, to address the nation's youth mental health crisis. The Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health outlines the pandemic's unprecedented impacts on the mental health of America's youth and families. (6)

### Children's Mental Health During COVID-19 Pandemic

- For many children, school closures and remote learning have resulted in increased **food insecurity** and need for **social and academic support** (including special education programming), which can have long-term mental health consequences. (2, 3, 7, 8)
- Reduced in-person interactions with friends, teachers, school counselors, pediatricians, child welfare workers, and other professionals or social supports have made it more difficult to recognize signs of **child abuse or neglect** and other mental health concerns. (10)
- Mental health disorder rates are likely to increase over time given that sustained COVID-19 stressors may result in **years-long mental health impacts.** (11, 12)

**Globally, between January 2020 and mid-February 2021, symptoms of depression and anxiety doubled among youth compared to pre-pandemic estimates. (9)**



1 in 4 youth experienced depressive symptoms during the first year of the pandemic.



1 in 5 youth experienced anxiety symptoms during the first year of the pandemic.

**Some children are at greater risk of experiencing mental health struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The COVID-19 pandemic heavily affected the mental health of youth with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth, low-income youth, youth in rural areas, youth in immigrant households, youth involved with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, and homeless youth. (6)

## Public Health Outcomes of Healthcare Access



A Resource for Improving Measurable Impact  
August 27, 2021

### Healthcare Access

#### What is the problem?

Access to and affordability of healthcare are significantly worse for low-income adults in Texas than in other southern states (including Arkansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana).<sup>1</sup>

**54% of low-income adults in Texas do not have a primary care physician.**<sup>2</sup> This leads to increased ER visits, impacting subsidized taxpayer dollars and health insurance buyers.<sup>3</sup>

#### Improved access to healthcare is associated with:

- Increased care utilization, and decreased uncompensated care costs, such as emergency room visits<sup>4</sup>
- Greater provider capacity<sup>5</sup>
- Improved self-reported health and health outcomes<sup>2</sup>
- Increased likelihood of having a personal physician and having at least one outpatient physician visit<sup>4,5</sup>
- Increased awareness and control of hypertension among low-income adults<sup>2</sup>
- Increased probability of getting an HIV test<sup>6</sup>
- Greater ability to afford follow-up care and pay medical bills<sup>4</sup>

#### Improved access to healthcare can be accomplished by:

- Enabling services – care coordination, health education, transportation, and assistance with obtaining food, shelter, and benefits<sup>7</sup>
- State Medicaid expansion<sup>8,9</sup>
- Access to telehealth services<sup>10,11</sup>
- Incentives to enhance workplace insurance provision

### Health Outcomes

Medicaid expansion has provided public health researchers the opportunity to study the impact of increased healthcare access. Research shows that state Medicaid expansion has significant associations with:

Improved access to healthcare among low-income adults (14)

Higher rates of diabetes management (15) and mental health management (16,17)

Slower rates of health decline, especially among low-income adults, in southern states (18)

Delays in seeking care due to appointment availability or wait times (6)

<sup>1</sup> Increased healthcare utilization and improved self-reported health may not be sustained in the long term<sup>14</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Despite increased access to care, researchers did not find significantly different rates of ICU admissions or in-hospital mortality among patients with COPD, asthma or heart failure<sup>18</sup>



# TX RPC Health Policy Reports:

## State and Legislative District Level Data



### State and Legislative District Level Data Reports:

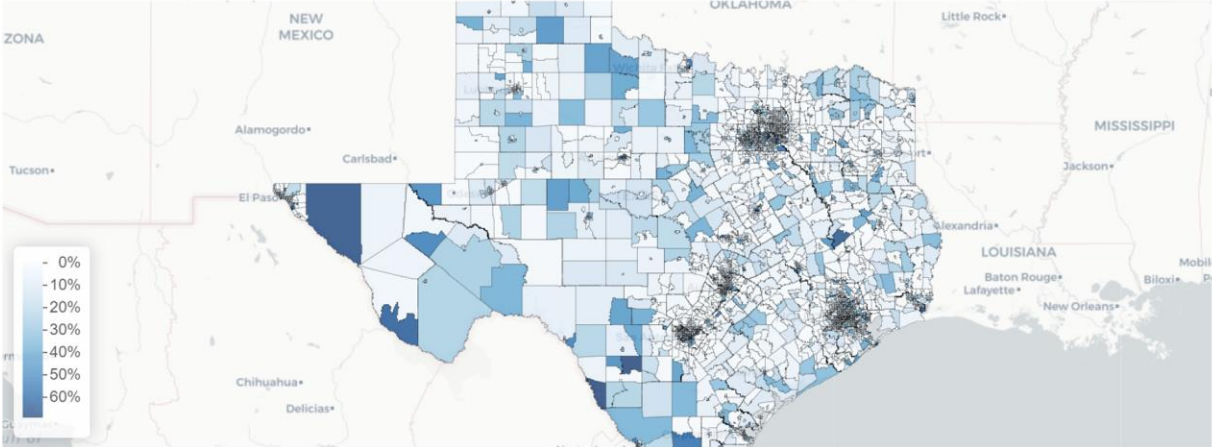
- SNAP Utilization and Eligibility in Texas and Texas Legislative Districts
- Data Brief: Food Access in Texas and Texas Legislative Districts
  - 33.8% email open rate

#### Food Insecurity By Legislative District

Chamber:  Legislative District:  Metric:

**Low-income:** Defined as the population living with income at or below the Federal poverty thresholds by family size.  
**Low-access:** Defined as the population living more than 1 mile (urban areas) or 10 miles (rural areas) from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.

Figure 1: Percentage of All Individuals with Low-Income and Low-Access to Grocery Stores



# Texas Child Health Status Reports




Healthy Children, Healthy State:


## CHILD OBESITY CRISIS IN TEXAS

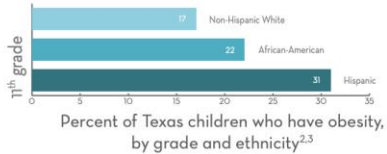
Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Obesity is a major public health crisis in Texas!

 Texas has the 8<sup>th</sup> highest obesity rate for youth ages 10-17 and the 12<sup>th</sup> highest adult obesity rate in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

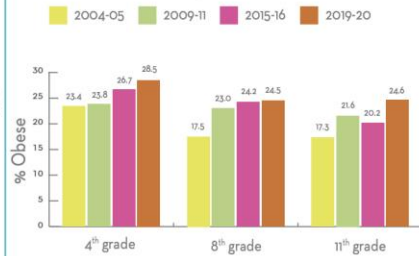
 17.3% of Texas youth ages 10-17 have obesity.

 In Texas, Hispanic and African American children have higher rates of obesity compared to non-Hispanic white children<sup>2</sup>.



Childhood obesity in Texas is getting worse.

Trends in childhood obesity from 2004-05 to 2019-20<sup>2,3</sup>



### Childhood Obesity is Risky

Obesity is associated with increased lifetime risks for adverse health outcomes<sup>4,5</sup>, including:

- diabetes
- heart disease
- asthma
- high blood pressure
- depression
- sleeping difficulties
- higher risk of being obese as an adult

### Childhood Obesity is Costly

Childhood obesity results in extra health care costs. A child with obesity has **\$12,900** more in medical costs than a child with normal weight<sup>6</sup>.

Educational attainment is associated with lifetime earnings<sup>7</sup>. Obesity in childhood is associated with poorer educational outcomes<sup>8,9,10</sup>, including:

- lower GPA
- lower reading scores
- lower math scores
- more school absences

**We must do more to combat obesity in Texas.**

Translate public health research into policy and practice using state-level data

- Brief, concise reports
- Useful to public health advocates and legislators



# Texas Child Health Status Reports



## 11 Reports Released To Date

**Obesity**

**Nutrition**

**Physical  
Activity**

**Screen Time**

**Sleep Quality**

**Sugar-  
Sweetened  
Beverage**

**Teen Vaping**

**Vaping  
Advertisements  
and Teens**

**Vaping with  
Flavors**

**Eating Away  
From Home**

**Breakfast  
Consumption**

# Center for Healthy Living Webinars

## Webinars:

- **46 Webinars** hosted, disseminated, and archived, December 2019-present
  - 26,244 Registrants
  - 15,548 Attendees
  - 11,119 Archived Views Online
- **Topics**
  - COVID-19 Response
  - Food Systems
  - School Health
  - Health Disparities
  - Obesity Prevention (Physical Activity, Nutrition)
- **Features Texas public health researchers & experts**







## WEBINAR

# STATE-FUNDED TEXAS PROGRAMS ADDRESS YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

**MAY 19 (12-1 PM CDT)**

**SPEAKER:** LAUREL WILLIAMS, D.O., PROFESSOR,  
MENNINGER DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY &  
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES, BAYLOR COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



**SCAN TO REGISTER**



# TX RPC Newsletters

## TX RPC Project Newsletters:

- **22** Newsletters featuring COVID-19 news and other public health-related resources, April 2020 - present
  - Distributed to:
    - **397** Texas Legislators
    - **91** TX RPC Research Network Members
    - **24** advisory committee members
  - Future newsletters to focus on more broad public health-related policy research from Texas

"The newsletter provides good, relevant information."

"Our office is interested in the newsletter as we move toward the upcoming legislative session."



# Texas Legislature Bill Tracker

5 Texas Legislative Sessions tracked: 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021

53 bills tracked in 2013 → 352 bills tracked in 2021

9 Bill Topics Tracked in 2021

2021 Tracked Bills	
Topic	#
Active transportation/built environment	13
Early childcare education	19
Food access and insecurity	29
Maternal and child health	6
Obesity	6
Oral health	5
School and after-school care	76
Tobacco and e-cigarettes	7
Health care access	191

# Texas Legislature Bill Tracker



## Texas Legislative Session Bill Tracker

Identify selected health policy legislative actions through an accessible organized tool for researchers and policymakers in real time

### Food Access and Insecurity

Bills that are relevant to food policy, hunger, food access, and food insecurity research taking place at the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living can be viewed here.

Food Access and Insecurity				
Bill #	Author	Status	Brief Description	Past Bills (2019)
<a href="#">HCR 54</a>	<a href="#">State Rep. Theresa Meza</a>	<b>PASSED</b> - Signed by the Governor on 6/18/21	Approving the SNAP settlement agreement between the U.S. Department of Justice and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.	
<a href="#">SB 224</a>	<a href="#">State Sen. Charles Perry</a>	<b>PASSED</b> - Signed by the Governor on 6/16/21, effective 9/1/21	The commission shall develop and implement simplified certification and recertification requirements for supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits for certain individuals. <i>Companion Bill: <a href="#">HB 701</a> and <a href="#">HB 1019</a></i>	



# How can we help you?

The TX RPC project offers data-driven tools and resources for health policy, using state and legislative district-level information.



# Contact Us



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**UTHealth** | The University of Texas Health Science Center at  
Houston

School of Public Health in Austin

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

# Questions?

# Project Details



## Research Team

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Melissa Campos-Hernandez, MPH, Research Coordinator II

Emily Levin, Graduate Data Collector

Amelia McClellan, Research Associate

Callie Evarts, Graduate Research Assistant

Allyson Luong, Graduate Research Assistant

**Advisory Committee:** 24 state and community partner organizations

**Funding Agency:** Michael & Susan Dell Foundation





# Legislative Initiative Resources

## TX RPC Resources

[Go.uth.edu/RPCresources](https://go.uth.edu/RPCresources)

## Texas Child Health Status Report

[go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth](https://go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth)

## Texas Legislative Bill Tracker

[go.uth.edu/LegTracker](https://go.uth.edu/LegTracker)

## TX RPC Newsletter Archive

[go.uth.edu/RPCnewsletter](https://go.uth.edu/RPCnewsletter)

## Michael & Susan Dell Center Webinar Series

[go.uth.edu/RPCnewsletter](https://go.uth.edu/RPCnewsletter)

Scan to view our  
Legislative Initiatives



# Thank You!

