

December 2023 Newsletter

Happy Holidays

from the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living!



Thank you!

A message from Dr. Deanna Hoelscher



As the holiday season approaches, I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for your continued support for the Center's vision of "healthy children in a healthy world." I hope you have a safe, healthy, and restful holiday season with your loved ones. I look forward to the continued collaboration and success that the coming year holds!

~ Dr. Deanna Hoelscher

Director, Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

We had an incredible year! Here are some highlights.



Lectureship 2023

The Center welcomed **Dr. Marlene Schwartz** as the 2023 Michael & Susan Dell Center Lectureship in Child Health Award Recipient in April.

The webinar addressed current debates surrounding school food and highlighted the importance of public health nutrition research to guide policymakers.

[Watch the recording >](#)

Texas Collaborative for Healthy Mothers and Babies (TCHMB)

In September, we welcomed 13 new faculty and staff members from UT-Tyler and the UT System's Population Health group! The addition brought to Austin the **TCHMB**, a long-standing multidisciplinary network of in-state health professionals, who work to advance healthcare quality, equity, and patient safety for Texas mothers and babies.



[Read more >](#)



Nader 2023

We were pleased to welcome **Dr. Cynthia Osborne** as our 2023 keynote speaker for the [Philip R. Nader Legacy of Health Lectureship](#) in November.

Dr. Osborne spoke about 12 policy solutions that help foster the nurturing environments infants and toddlers need to thrive and that reduce longstanding disparities.

[Watch the recording >](#)



2024 Sharma Fellowship

UTHealth Houston Doctoral candidate **Che (Qi) Xue** was selected as the 2024 Sharma Fellow, supported by the Shreela and Vibhu Sharma Endowed Fund for Excellence in Community Nutrition, Health, and Wellness. Fellows receive a stipend for two semesters, become eligible for in-state tuition, and work with Brighter Bites, a nonprofit with a mission to create communities of health through fresh food.

[Read more >](#)

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

The TX RPC Project completed another successful year of connecting Texas legislators and health researchers during the 2023 legislative session.

This year, the project:

- Followed **460 bills** across **14 different health topics** on our Texas Legislative [Bill Tracker](#)
- Held **4 Lunch & Learns** at the Capitol to educate legislators on topics including maternal and child health, policy and community health, food prescription programs, and substance use prevention and treatment programs
- Sent **8 project newsletters** to legislators and researchers in the TX RPC Project network
- Had over **400 email engagements** with legislators to disseminate legislative resources
- Had **2 TX RPC Project researchers** invited to give testimony during the 2023 Legislative Session
- Developed **11 health policy resource reports** based on feedback from legislators, topics relevant to the 2023 session, and rapid response requests from legislators

We look forward to continuing this important health policy work in 2024!

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Doula care provides support and serves as a liaison between pregnant women and their prenatal care providers.
2. Doula support can improve birth outcomes and reduce pregnancy complications leading to healthcare cost savings.
3. Nine states and the District of Columbia currently cover prenatal, labor and delivery, and postpartum doula services for women enrolled in Medicaid.
4. Pilot programs in Texas testing the effectiveness of doula-Medicaid partnerships show positive impacts on pregnancy and delivery.

What are Doula's? What do they do?

Doulas are non-medical health professionals who provide physical, emotional, and educational support to women and their families before, during, and after labor and delivery. (1, 2) Doula do not provide medical care but are knowledgeable about many medical aspects of pregnancy and can play an important role on the maternal healthcare team.

<p>PRENATAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide emotional support • Help navigate birth plan goals • Coordinate needs with the prenatal healthcare team (1) 	<p>LABOR & DELIVERY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with non-medical birthing techniques and emotional support • Facilitate communication with the prenatal healthcare team (1) 	<p>POSTPARTUM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide emotional and practical support • Educate on infant care, breastfeeding, and bonding with the newborn (1)
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Benefits of Receiving Doula Services

- Having the extra support from a doula through pregnancy can prevent the occurrence of pregnancy-related emergencies outside the hospital, and ensure the mother and baby receive best care. (4)
- Studies show that doula care is associated with improved birth outcomes and fewer pregnancy complications. (5, 6, 7, 8, 9)
- Reduced labor time
 - Fewer low birthweight babies
 - Lower use of epidurals
 - Lower rates of cesarean births
 - Lower rates of postpartum depression
 - Increased satisfaction with the birth experience
 - Higher breastfeeding initiation rates

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. More than 60% of Texas 8th and 10th graders report spending more than 4 hours a day on a screen per day. Increased screen time has been associated with sedentary behavior, and negative physical and mental health outcomes.
2. Despite some negative outcomes associated with screen time, social media networking has helped adolescents discuss and seek advice for mental health questions. Children and teenagers have also adopted digital tools to reach adolescent providers.
3. Recommended adolescent screen time includes helping teenagers balance the positive and negative effects of technology, providing parents with resources to set consistent limits on their child's social media time and use, and supporting research on how to best use technology to reduce health inequities and increase positive health outcomes in adolescents.

PROBLEM

Teenagers are spending increased time online. Approximately 48% of U.S. teens say they are online almost constantly. (1, 4)

Adolescent sleep 13-17 use of social media and cell phones has increased in recent years, with 65% of teens reporting turning off their phones to sleep in 2022, compared to 73% of students from 2015-2016. (2)

There are concerns about how technology influences adolescent well-being, including contributors to lower levels of physical activity, decreased interpersonal connection skills, and increased rates of depression and anxiety. (2, 3)

Increased use of screen time can increase sedentary behavior, which is associated with negative health outcomes such as:

- Increased overweight or obese
- Decreased physical activity
- Lower self-esteem

Social media exposure youth daily to thousands of images of celebrities and other online influencers, which leads to the internalization of unrealistic beauty standards, resulting in higher rates of dissatisfaction with body image. (6)

- Body dissatisfaction has been linked to risk-taking behaviors and mental health problems, with poor body image also preventing adolescents from engaging in healthy behaviors. (5)
- Approximately 40% of adolescents say they compare their body image to images from social media. (5)
- An adolescent's desire for the appearance of the "ideal appearance" (media and other people) is often the catalyst for the development, feelings of depression, and the need to conform to influences on body image. (5)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. In 2018, Texas ranked 48th in the nation for SNAP participation, with only 75% of eligible individuals enrolled and receiving benefits.
2. With a large SNAP Gap, the potential economic and health benefits seen with SNAP participation will not be fully realized.

What is SNAP?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal nutrition and health program administered by each state. SNAP provides benefits that supplement the food budget and provide additional nutritional quality for eligible adults and children. (1)

- Even though SNAP is 100% federally funded, the state of Texas is responsible for general program administration and program integrity. (2)
- The state is also responsible for ensuring the eligibility of individuals and households applying for SNAP benefits and is responsible for meeting with issuing monthly allotments of benefits. (2)
- SNAP has been shown to positively influence people experiencing food insecurity, as well as counteract inequities in economic development and quality of life. (3)
- An estimated 11 million U.S. residents (12% of the U.S. population) and 3.4 million Texans (11% of the state population) received SNAP benefits in 2022. (4)
- More than 70% of SNAP participants in Texas were families with children, and around 27% of recipients were families with older adults or people living with a disability. (1)

What is the "SNAP Gap"?

The "SNAP Gap" is the difference between the number of individuals and families who are eligible for SNAP and the total number enrolled. (3)

- Nationally, 82% of eligible individuals and families participate in SNAP leaving 18% of eligible individuals unenrolled. In Texas, only 75% of eligible individuals enrolled receive SNAP benefits. (3)
- Eligible households not enrolled in SNAP tend to be in more densely populated areas, suggesting that rural areas participate in SNAP at higher rates than urban areas. (6)

[View Health Policy Resources](#)

[Learn More About TX RPC Project](#)

Austin Campus

Don't forget the final application deadline for Fall 2024 is April 1!

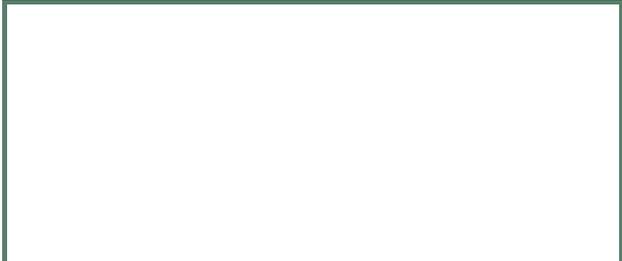


UTHealth Houston School of Public Health in Austin is the largest regional location within the school, boasting 21 local faculty members. Our Austin campus welcomed 70 new students in the Fall 2023 semester!

We offer **8 different MPH degrees**, **1 MS degree**, and **3 doctoral degrees**. The master's degrees are offered across three delivery modes. For students interested in fields related to public health — e.g., social work, global public policy and public affairs, medicine, pharmacy — we have **8 dual degree master's programs**, 5 in partnership with **The University of Texas at Austin**.

Our award-winning faculty research a wide range of topics that explain and impact health. They are driven by their curiosity about student participation at recess; patterns of youth vaping; benefits of access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity; early childhood outcomes; state health trends; and many other health-related topics.

Meet our students!





Meet Maribel Dominguez, a doctoral candidate in Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences! From El Paso, she said pursuing a career in public health renewed her passion for fulfilling others' needs.

[Learn more about Maribel.](#)



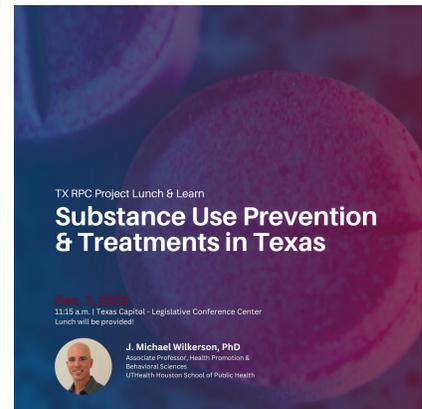
Meet Shelby Flores-Thorpe, one of our recent PhD students who successfully defended her dissertation in October! Shelby was a Center Dell Health Scholar & focused her student research on our TX RPC Project.

[Learn more about Shelby.](#)

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Every donation, no matter the size, makes a difference in our vision of Healthy Children in a Healthy World.

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