

Advancing Measurement of Environmental and Policy Influences on Childhood Obesity: Implications and Recommendations for the Field

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

[The National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research \(NCCOR\)](#) is a public-private partnership of four leading research funders—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—that addresses childhood obesity through research, evaluation, and dissemination of research findings.

NCCOR aims to make an impact on childhood obesity research by creating tools for researchers and practitioners, building knowledge on key research topics, engaging with leading experts on new science, and ensuring robust communications and information dissemination. From its inception, a key priority for NCCOR has been to promote the common use of high-quality and standardized measures and methods for use with childhood obesity prevention research, including surveillance, epidemiology, evaluation, and interventions. Use of such measures enhances the potential for comparison of results across different studies and the rapid advancement of progress against childhood obesity. This progress includes the identification of individual, family, policy, and environmental factors that influence obesity risk and the development of effective interventions to address childhood obesity.

On February 27–28, 2020, NCCOR convened a workshop entitled “Advancing Measurement of Environmental and Policy Influences on Childhood Obesity.” This workshop was the third in a series of three workshops and focused on identifying priorities to capture policy and environmental influences on childhood obesity. The other two workshops in the series concern measurement needs of individual behavior and measurement needs in high-risk populations, with a focus on children and families and their communities.

Workshop Aims

This third workshop aimed to convene leading experts to (1) illustrate current challenges, needs, and gaps in measurement of environment and policy; (2) discuss current practices used to adapt existing measures and develop new measures of environment and policy; and (3) determine how NCCOR can contribute to better measurement and measurement practices over the short term (1–3 years) and medium term (3–5 years) for research and evaluation on selected environmental determinants related to childhood obesity.

Workshop Proceedings

The first day of the workshop consisted of a series of panel presentations examining what policies and practices should be measured in children-specific environments and in communities. Panel presentations also examined different methods of measuring these policies and practices, including self-report, device-based, observational, mobile, and other approaches. Moderated discussions followed each group of related presentations. These discussions covered a range of topics, including ways in which environmental and policy factors contribute to, and can potentially mitigate, health inequities. The day ended with a moderated discussion of next steps to advance the science related to methods used to measure environment and policy supports for diet and physical activity.

On the second day, participants heard a final panel presentation on the data resources needed to explore the relationships between social determinants of health (SDoH) and childhood obesity, with a focus on housing and transportation. A moderated discussion followed this panel presentation. The day concluded with small group sessions in which participants discussed priorities for environmental and policy measures in the domains of the food environment, physical activity environment, and housing and transportation SDoH. Following report-outs from the small groups, the participants winnowed down the lists generated from the small groups to identify the key priorities for advancing measurement of environmental and policy influences on childhood obesity.

Next Steps

This white paper can be accessed on the NCCOR website at <https://www.nccor.org/measurement-workshop-series/>. White papers for the other two workshops have been posted on the NCCOR website. In addition, NCCOR plans to publish a synthesis of findings and recommendations from the three workshops in the scientific literature.

It is anticipated that recommendations from these workshops will advance the development of improved measures that can be used across a range of research, surveillance, and intervention activities related to childhood obesity. NCCOR hopes that by addressing the many levels of factors that influence childhood obesity and with focused work on environmental and policy measures, these efforts will ultimately help reduce health inequities associated with childhood obesity.