

NESP Thoughts and Recommendations for NCCOR

NCCOR External Scientific Panel (NESP) Webinar
April 13, 2021

Attendees:

NESP Members: R. Brownson, J. Cawley, T. Huang, S. Kumanyika, A. Ramirez, T. Robinson, J. Sallis, M. Story

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On April 13, 2021, the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) hosted a webinar with the NCCOR External Scientific Panel (NESP) members to discuss priority topics and emerging areas, current research needs and gaps, and potential strategic alliances. Highlights from those discussions follow.

Priority Topics and Emerging Areas from NCCOR Strategic Planning

- Infant feeding practices and how they affect risk of obesity and eventual chronic disease
- Understanding the influence of social determinants of health on childhood obesity
- Cross-sector partnerships to leverage public health co-benefits and resources
- Dissemination and implementation science
- Mapping core indicators for early life influences to different interventions and systems

Key recommendations discussed during the webinar:

Food Security

- For the next one to two years, food insecurity will be a critical topic, given it has tripled, and a third of children are in food-insecure households. It will be important to understand how food insecurity will affect risks for obesity and diet-related diseases. Previous studies have shown mixed results about food insecurity and obesity.

Partnerships / Intersection of chronic disease, health, and sustainability

- NCCOR can more intentionally curate sub-topics within cross-sector partnership to leverage public health co-benefits and resources. Transportation, EPA, and climate-change organizations are potential partners that can amplify the work of NCCOR and ensure health is firmly on the agenda.

Dissemination and Implementation Science

- A suggestion to focus on topics within implementation science could be relevant to childhood obesity. NCCOR could look at what theories, models, and frameworks might be applied to childhood obesity. What would we measure differently in the uptake of a child obesity intervention? We could also apply an equity lens to many of these ideas.

Threats and opportunities due to COVID-19

- A research agenda could be built on the next phase of this pandemic. There are many possible natural experiments that can be studied such as cities where streets were closed and the effect on walkability. Schools will also be doing different things with food and activity, and these can be evaluated.

Mapping core indicators for early life influences to different interventions and systems

- It is important to look at what other countries such as the UK and Australia are doing and what lessons we can learn.

Health Equity Issues

- NCCOR should look at each of these topics with an equity lens. For example, infant feeding practices and how they affect risk of obesity and eventual chronic disease can be rephrased as how to inform feeding practices as they relate to disparities, and what are some of the solutions?
- There is a methodological issue about targeting interventions or proportionate universalism. More intention should be given to recruiting for intervention so that research can close gaps related to equity issues. One suggestion is for NCCOR members to look across their initiatives and see how many intentional studies have been done and try to close gaps related to equity/disparities.
- Under-represented minority researchers may lack networks that can help them with grant preparation and senior faculty contacts who could serve as consultants to help with applications. A mentorship program to match early career scholars with volunteer senior scholars could help increase diversity and equity. Early career researchers are more likely to think differently as they are not following a well-trodden path and will blaze their own path. The issue is more senior researchers will not see the value in what they are doing, so ensuring these early career professionals get extra consideration can help achieve breakthroughs.
- NIH also had a new funding opportunity around mentorship that includes reaching out to minority-serving institutions. The funding will recruit 10–20 early career scientists.
- NIH has a request for information out for the [united initiative](#). More announcements will likely come out over time. Racial equity, precision nutrition, and nutritional security are cross-cutting priorities for USDA.

Solutions-Oriented

- NCCOR should focus on solutions-oriented research, rather than studying and understanding risks. Decades of researching and understanding the influence has not gotten us very far and changing the focus to actionable solution is important.

Obesity Treatment Among Adolescents

- There may be an opportunity to look at treatment interventions outside of health care or those that combine healthcare with community approaches like parks and recreation.

Big data

- Ability to integrate data systems for data from across agencies within the federal government.

Food marketing

- USDA could release data on food marketing for researchers to analyze. Typically, this data is not affordable because it comes from the commercial side. Any data to help us analyze and develop standards for food advertisements and food composition would be helpful.
- [Access to Nutrition Initiative](#) is coming out with a new U.S. index fairly soon. These new analyses and findings may seed new ideas for how NCCOR can be involved in a broader effort.
- [Portion Balance Coalition](#): Georgetown is bringing together different sectors. This could also be another opportunity to think about what kinds of research and translation of research could be useful.

Strategic Alliance Opportunities

The group also discussed potential strategic alliances that could be formed with funders, organizations that conduct research, groups that can strengthen NCCOR's work, and other government agencies/groups (for collaboration).

- [Rockefeller Foundation](#) – NCCOR has been having conversations with Rockefeller around food systems.
- [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#) – What Works Cities uses data driven approaches to improve governance at the city level. NCCOR may be able to leverage cities as innovative laboratories.
- [WT Grant Foundation](#) – They are youth focused and have a serious initiative on research translation.
- [Dell Foundation in Texas](#) – They sponsor the learning centers around this work at UT.
- [Lancet Commission on Obesity](#) – This commission proposed pursuing win-win solutions for combined pandemics of obesity, undernutrition (food insecurity) and climate change.
- Former inter-agency task force (DOT, HUD, and others) – NCCOR may want to think about reviving or deepening inter-agency work. There may be opportunity to re-think health in all policies.

Current and Future Funding Opportunities

- NCCOR can be proactive in making sure these rapid response funds are available and are disseminated. NIH has put out rapid response funding recently and is trying to go from application to funding in four months. It is important to communicate this ongoing opportunity to the membership.
- Time sensitive FOA: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/par-18-854.html>
- Career development for scientists from underrepresented groups in Nutrition, Obesity, and diabetes: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-DK-20-034.html>
- NIH UNITE initiatives: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-21-066.html>

Next Steps

NESP is interested in being more engaged with NCCOR and having more frequent calls and opportunities to provide feedback/guidance.