

## National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) OPUS II Workshop Executive Summary

---

### **Background**

The National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) brings together four of the nation's leading research funders—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—to accelerate progress in reducing childhood obesity in the United States. NCCOR addresses the determinants of childhood obesity through research, evaluation, and dissemination of research findings.

On October 9–10, 2024, NCCOR hosted the second Obesity-Related Policy, Systems, and Environmental Research in the U.S. (OPUS II) virtual workshop featuring presentations from leading obesity-prevention and public health experts. The workshop included more than 25 presenters and had over 480 registrants across the two days.

### **Workshop Aims**

This second installment of the two-part OPUS workshop series aimed to 1) explore progress in designing and rigorously evaluating policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) interventions in childhood obesity research, with specific attention to methodological challenges, and 2) describe key learnings from past efforts to advance childhood obesity research.

### **Workshop Proceedings**

Building on insights from the OPUS I workshop, OPUS II focused on the next generation of community-engaged PSE interventions for childhood obesity prevention.

The workshop was divided into three sessions:

- 1) Planning and engaging across sectors and settings for PSE interventions
- 2) Applying rigorous designs to the evaluation of PSE interventions

- 3) Adapting, scaling, and sustaining whole-of-community PSE interventions

Each session included a mix of keynotes, panel presentations, and discussions, generally followed by facilitated conversation addressing questions from the moderator and the virtual audience.

During session 1, Dr. Erin Hennessey provided a keynote highlighting the importance of planning and engaging across sectors and settings for PSE interventions by applying a systems approach. The subsequent discussion and panel presentation covered community engagement and multi-sectoral approaches in obesity-related PSE research.

During session 2, Dr. Amy Carroll-Scott delivered a keynote describing the evaluation of PSE interventions using rigorous designs. The subsequent discussion and panel presentation further explored PSE intervention design, implementation, and evaluation, as well as the future of PSE intervention methods.

During session 3, Dr. Terry Huang provided a keynote describing a design thinking approach to community engagement for promoting public health intervention sustainability. The subsequent discussion and panel presentations covered the importance of ensuring local relevance and sustainability of PSE interventions to address a range of determinants of childhood obesity.

### **Key Learnings and Next Steps**

Key learnings from the workshop include:

- Advancing understanding of PSE interventions will likely require more extensive application of a range of existing methodologies, like natural experiments, agent-based modeling, systems mapping, group model building, and social network analysis, in the context of child obesity research.

- Authentic community engagement and community capacity building are key elements required to support PSE intervention implementation, scalability, and sustainability.
- It is critical to reduce the risk of unintended adverse consequences for communities participating in PSE research, from grant conception through intervention evaluation.
- It can take extended periods of time for researchers to build community partnerships; design and implement PSE interventions; and evaluate those interventions, including impacts on downstream outcomes like obesity. Novel approaches may be needed to support work over such long time horizons.
- To advance the field, the next generation of researchers will need training focused on systems and design thinking, authentic community engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and research translation and dissemination.

Advancing progress in childhood obesity research requires designing and implementing PSE interventions that address various determinants of obesity. Ongoing exploration of the complex systems and factors that impact childhood obesity is a key step in strengthening the field. Key learnings and next steps from OPUS I and II will be shared in forthcoming publications.