

New Horizons in Childhood Obesity Research

// Annual Report 2025 //

Expanding What is Possible

Childhood obesity research is entering a period of transformative change. Rapid scientific advances, together with growing recognition of the complex drivers of health, have created new opportunities—and new responsibilities—for the field. Clinical innovations are expanding the range of obesity treatment options for children and adolescents, with an increasing focus on sustainable health and well-being, beyond just weight loss. Outside the clinical setting, decades of evidence continue to affirm the complementary importance of policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) approaches in shaping healthy communities. Together, these developments signal not a departure from past work, but an expansion of what is possible.

NCCOR's 2025 Annual Report, *New Horizons in Childhood Obesity Research*, highlights how NCCOR is helping the field navigate emerging questions, bridge research and practice, and foster collaboration across disciplines and sectors. As childhood obesity research evolves, NCCOR remains committed to advancing evidence that supports healthier children, families, and communities—now and in the years ahead.



New Treatment Options and New Questions

Recent advances in obesity pharmacotherapy have transformed the landscape for pediatric obesity care. Health care practitioners are increasingly treating children and adolescents with obesity medications, including GLP-1 receptor agonists and other emerging therapies. Yet, there is limited evidence-based guidance for clinicians on how to support children and adolescents taking these medications in real-world settings. Health care providers need practical, research-based guidance to support families as they adopt sustainable healthy behaviors. Pediatric obesity medications are still an emerging research area, with limited synthesis of research gaps and priority questions.



Clinical Research Gaps in Pediatric Obesity Pharmacotherapy Workshop

To address this need, NCCOR convened the Clinical Research Gaps in Pediatric Obesity Pharmacotherapy workshop. The objective was to understand current practice and identify gaps and priority research questions that, when answered, could guide clinicians in the prescription, maintenance, and discontinuation of obesity medications for children and adolescents, as well as in supporting their caregivers.

This workshop series brought together experts from pediatric medicine, nutrition, physical activity, behavioral science, mental health and public health to discuss priority gap areas identified by participants. These gap areas included GLP-1 treatment initiation, selection, duration, and discontinuation; treatment effects and outcomes; mental and behavioral health; nutrition and physical activity assessment, monitoring, and counseling; and intensive health behavior and lifestyle treatment (IHBLT). During the final two-day session, participants selected research priorities and identified both existing and needed tools and resources. Many of the discussions highlighted the intersection of clinical advances and policies, systems, and environments—for example, the role of sleep, screen time, and parenting or the influence of social connectedness or stress reduction in IHBLT.

NCCOR plans to publish a white paper in 2026 that will synthesize the gaps and priority research questions identified during the workshop. Designed to engage funders, journal editors, professional groups, community organizations, researchers, and others, the white paper is intended to jumpstart research and encourage the development of evidence-based resources to help guide clinical practice over the next two to three years as the field of pharmacotherapy rapidly advances. To support both providers and patients, the white paper will not only focus on traditional clinical research but also emphasize the need for qualitative research on the patient experience.

WORKSHOP CO-CHAIRS

NCCOR would like to express its appreciation to the workshop co-chairs:

Katherine Balantekin, PhD, RD, University at Buffalo

Meredith Dreyer Gillette, PhD, Children's Mercy Kansas City

Faith Anne Heeren, PhD, Wake Forest University School of Medicine

Jaime Moore, MD, MPH, University of Colorado School of Medicine; Children's Hospital Colorado

Lauren Shomaker, PhD, Colorado State University; University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus; Children's Hospital Colorado; Colorado School of Public Health

Webb Smith, PhD, ACSM-CEP, University of Tennessee Health Science Center; Le Bonheur Children's Hospital

Brooke Sweeney, MD, FAAP, FACP, DABOM, Children's Mercy Kansas City; University of Missouri-Kansas City; Children's Center for Healthy Lifestyles & Nutrition

Linking Clinical Innovation to Policy, Systems, and Environment Approaches

Obesity-Related Policy, Systems, and Environmental Research in the U.S. (OPUS) Workshops

While clinical innovations are expanding treatment options, PSE approaches remain essential to achieving population-wide impact. The Obesity-Related Policy, Systems, and Environmental Research in the U.S. (OPUS) workshops reflect NCCOR’s continued leadership in advancing rigorous, actionable PSE research.

Over 45 experts from across disciplines joined the OPUS workshops to explore the importance of PSE interventions to improve access to health-promoting opportunities for children, their families, and communities. Insights from the workshop were published in a 2025 commentary in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, “Advancing Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change Research to Reverse Upward Trends in Obesity Prevalence—A New Call to Action.” Authored by the workshop co-chairs, the commentary issues a call to action for the next phase of obesity-related PSE research, including the importance of 1) leveraging broader and more innovative research methods and partnerships; 2) recognizing the amount of time needed to bring policy, systems, and environmental research to fruition; 3) measuring proximal, distal, and partner-relevant drivers and outcomes; and (4) accelerating efforts to build capacity for obesity-related PSE research.

COMMENTARY AUTHORS

The OPUS workshop and resources emerging from it were made possible through the leadership and dedication of the OPUS workshop co-chairs:

Jamie Chriqui, PhD,
MHS, University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health

Tamara Dubowitz, ScD, MS, MSc,
University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health

Shiriki Kumanyika, PhD,
MS, MPH, University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine



OPUS Insights Catalyze New Research Investment

Expert presentations during the OPUS workshop series led to a new funded research opportunity. In FY25, the National Cancer Institute awarded 14 administrative supplements to support the development of whole-of-systems approaches to addressing obesity for cancer prevention and control.

BRINGING THE CALL TO ACTION TO THE FIELD

NCCOR shared the new call to action with the field during conferences this fall.

Oral Presentations: “A Call to Action to Advancing Policy, Systems and Environmental Change Research to Reverse Upward Trends in Obesity Prevalence” and “Accelerating Progress in Child Obesity Prevention through Policy, Systems, and Environmental Research” at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting

Symposium: “Obesity-Related Policy Systems, and Environmental Research in the US” at ObesityWeek



Supporting the Next Generation

Translating OPUS lessons to the classroom

This year, NCCOR published five OPUS Learning Guides to extend the impact of these conversations. These resources are designed to help faculty, students, and early-career researchers integrate OPUS insights into the classroom, applied research projects, and practice-based settings. Each guide highlights a keynote presentation delivered during the workshop, summarizing key takeaways and posing potential questions for further reflection.

OPUS LEARNING GUIDES:

- [Applying Rigorous Designs to the Evaluation of PSE Interventions](#)
- [A Design Thinking Approach to Community Engagement to Promote Public Health Intervention Sustainability](#)
- [Planning and Engaging Across Sectors and Settings for PSE Interventions](#)
- [Applying Systems Thinking in Community-Engaged, Participatory Research: Lessons from the Amsterdam Healthy Weight Program](#)
- [Systems Approaches to Obesity Prevention](#)

NCCOR Student Hub

The [NCCOR Student Hub](#), one of the most frequently visited sections of the NCCOR website, connects students to guides, case studies, teaching tools, and newsletters designed to build foundational skills and foster engagement with childhood obesity research and practice. In 2025, NCCOR continued to expand Student Hub content and highlight student perspectives, reinforcing its commitment to developing the next generation of leaders in the field.

Students like Caroline Rodriguez, a public health practice major at the University of Maryland and intern at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, have [shared with NCCOR](#) how they are using tools they discovered through the Student Hub. Ms. Rodriguez used NCCOR's [Catalogue of Surveillance Systems](#) (CSS) for a systematic review she conducted for NCI on the [Classification of Laws Associated with School Students](#) (CLASS), which scores state-level laws for physical education and nutrition in schools. This tool allowed her to compare and cross-reference content between data platforms, helping to ensure that CLASS data was accurately captured and easily accessible to researchers and practitioners in the field.

“NCCOR resources are very beneficial for students to use in their educational development because they connect you to up-to-date and relevant information that you may not have been aware of before. The resources can help students explore research topics and areas of interest related to their coursework. Additionally, the Student Hub is a great resource to learn more about what NCCOR has to offer.”

Caroline Rodriguez
Student, University of Maryland

Evidence in Action

At the heart of NCCOR's mission is developing and disseminating research tools, resources, and findings that strengthen capabilities across the field. In 2025, NCCOR published three research articles, presented findings at four scientific conferences, and hosted three webinars on a wide range of timely and practical research topics designed to impact population health.

The Physical Activity Research Opportunities (PARO) Framework

NCCOR's new PARO framework, detailed in the December 2025 article, "[Development of the Physical Activity Research Opportunities \(PARO\) Framework](#)" and published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, offers a strategic roadmap for researchers, funders, practitioners, and policymakers to advance their work.

The PARO framework highlights that most opportunities call for real-world research and interventions delivered in community settings where people live, work, learn, and play—particularly in studies of effectiveness, but also dissemination and implementation. While the framework found a focus on PSE interventions, it also identified critical gaps—such as limited research considering physical activity across diverse populations.

SHARING THE PARO FRAMEWORK WITH THE FIELD

NCCOR has already had a couple opportunities to disseminate the PARO framework to key audiences in 2025:

Workshop:

"Using the PARO Framework to Advance Dissemination and Implementation Research" at the 2025 Active Living Conference.

Poster presentation:

"Using Qualitative Data Analysis Combined with Expert Consultation to Consolidate Research Opportunities: Developing the Physical Activity Research Opportunities (PARO) Framework" at the 2025 Annual Conference on the Science of Dissemination and Implementation (D&I) in Health.



Reliability and Validity of Physical Activity Measures for Children and Adolescents

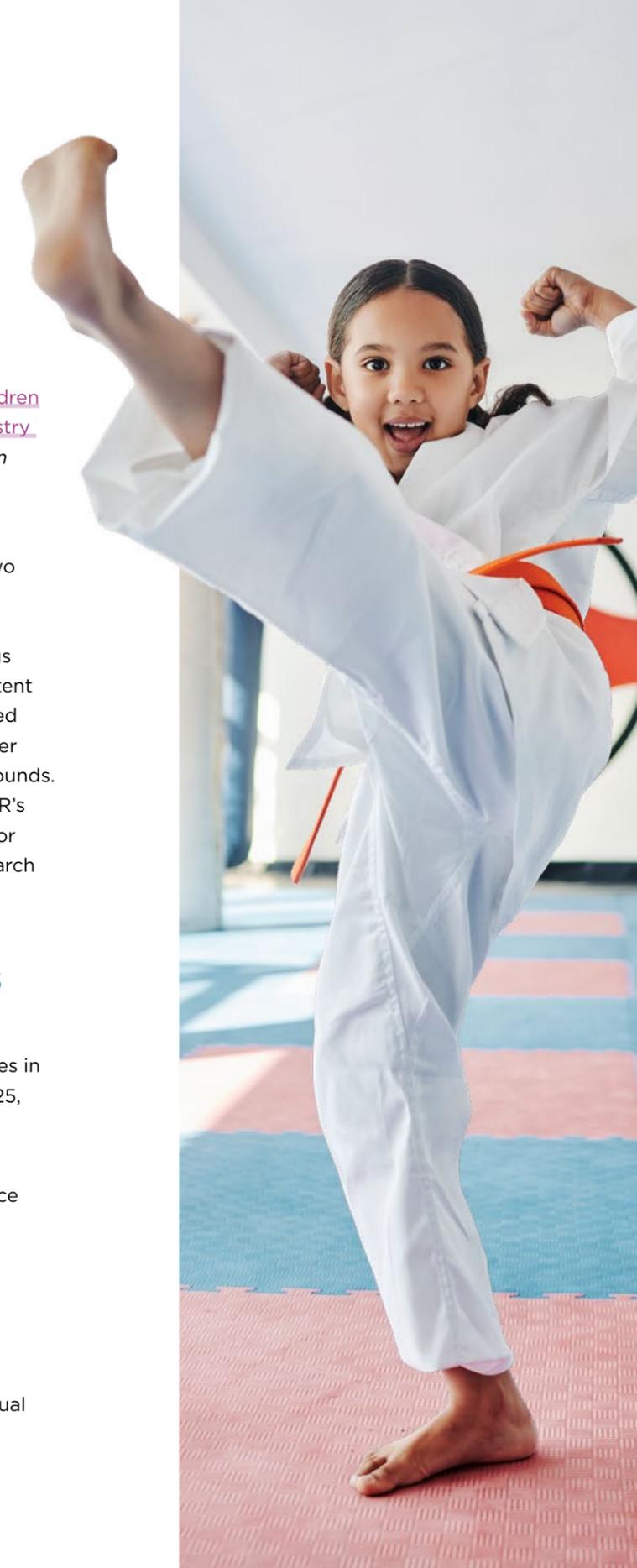
In 2025, NCCOR published "[Reliability and Validity of Physical Activity Measures for Children and Adolescents: The NCCOR Measures Registry Review](#)" in *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science*.

The study examines the extent to which measures report on reliability and validity—two important indicators of scientific rigor—and identifies trends and gaps across age groups, settings, and measurement types. The findings point to the need for more robust and consistent approaches to method development, increased accessibility of measurement tools, and greater inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds. The publication reinforces the value of NCCOR's Measures Registry as a centralized resource for identifying high-quality tools to support research and practice.

Active 2025 Workgroups

Member-led workgroups are the engine of everything NCCOR produces and accomplishes in the field of childhood obesity research. In 2025, NCCOR operated five workgroups, several of which will continue their work in 2026:

- Identification and Categorization of Evidence Gaps in Physical Activity Research
- Implementation Science
- Obesity-Related Policy, Systems, and Environmental Research in the U.S. (OPUS)
- Research Gaps in Treatment of Pediatric Obesity with Obesity Medications
- State of the Science on Measures of Individual Diet, Food Environment, Individual Physical Activity, and Physical Activity Environment



FROM INNOVATION TO IMPLEMENTATION:

NCCOR's Newest Tool for Practitioners

Implementation Scorecard: A Decision-Making Companion for Practitioners

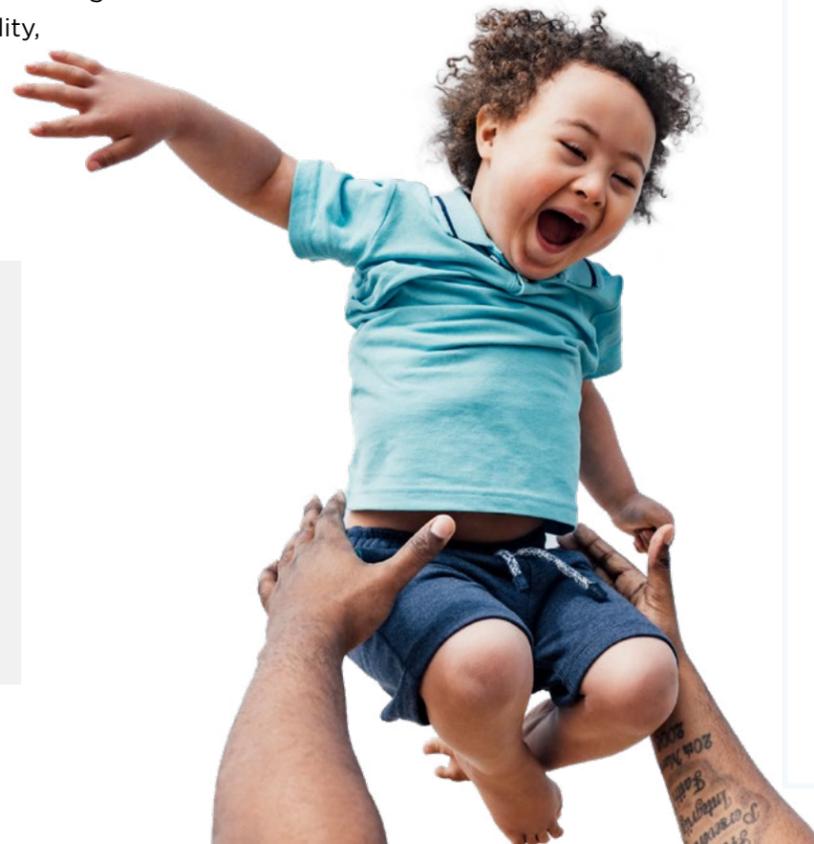
Implementation science plays a critical role in closing the gap between evidence and action. NCCOR's [Implementation Scorecard](#) was developed in response to challenges faced by practitioners implementing childhood nutrition, physical activity, and obesity prevention interventions. The scorecard guides users through four phases of implementation—Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, and Sustainment—helping them identify strengths, anticipate challenges, and make informed decisions.

An accompanying case study, [Using NCCOR's Implementation Scorecard to Strengthen a Community-Based Nutrition Program: The Feeding Forward Case Study](#), illustrates how a community organization might apply the scorecard to adapt and implement an existing evidence-based meal delivery program within a school district. Together, the tool and case study demonstrate how structured decision-making can enhance adaptation, scalability, and sustainability.

DEBUT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION SCORECARD

NCCOR introduced the Implementation Scorecard to a national audience in its October 2025 Connect and Explore webinar titled "Turning Evidence into Action: Using NCCOR's Implementation Scorecard to Strengthen Childhood Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity Interventions."

The Scorecard was also the subject of a presentation entitled "The Development of NCCOR's Implementation Scorecard: A Decision-Making Companion for Public Health Practitioners" at the 2025 Annual Conference on the Science of Dissemination and Implementation (D&I) in Health.



NCCOR Tools to Advance the Field

NCCOR's tools remain central to its mission of building evidence and advancing practice. In 2025, NCCOR continued to support researchers, practitioners, and students through a robust suite of eight tools designed to enhance efficiency, improve rigor, and support real-world application across disciplines and settings. Each of the tools described below is available for free on the NCCOR website:

Measures Registry Resource Suite: (Measures Registry, User Guides, Learning Modules, and Measures for Children at High Risk for Obesity Decision Tree): Helps users understand key measurement concepts and find appropriate measures for research and evaluation projects.

A Toolkit for Evaluating Childhood Healthy Weight Programs: Offers accessible, practical guidance on evaluation and access to guides, databases, research articles, and other tools to support evaluation.

Youth Compendium of Physical Activities: Provides a list of 196 common activities that youth partake in and the estimated energy costs associated with each activity. Available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

A Guide to Methods for Assessing Childhood Obesity: Explains the most common adiposity assessment methods and includes several case studies to illustrate which methods are most appropriate for research and evaluation related to childhood adiposity.

Childhood Obesity Evidence Base: Provides a dataset of childhood obesity interventions using a novel classification method that identifies successful approaches to childhood obesity prevention in children aged 2 to 5 years.

Catalogue of Surveillance Systems: Provides interactive, one-stop access to more than 100 national, state, and local surveillance systems at multiple levels.

Create Thriving, Activity-Friendly Communities: Provides a growing collection of resources and research to help make the business case for improving the built environment.

Implementation Scorecard: A Decision-Making Companion for Practitioners: Helps practitioners spot strengths and blind spots as they move through the four phases of implementing new interventions or programs.

Amplifying Evidence and Identifying Emerging Priorities

Conferences

NCCOR maintained a strong presence at national conferences where we delivered presentations focused on priority topics, including physical activity research gaps, implementation science, OPUS, and pediatric obesity pharmacotherapy. These efforts foster collaboration, amplify research findings, and strengthen connections across sectors.

2025 Active Living Conference

March 16-20, 2025 | Manhattan, KS

Workshop: “Using the PARO Framework to Advance Dissemination and Implementation Research”

Authors: Laura Balis, PhD; David Brown, PhD; Daniel P. Hatfield, PhD; Paloma Lima Dos Santos, PhD; Grace Stott, MS; Melissa C. Green Parker, PhD; Jennifer Matjasko, PhD; Jennifer Baumgartner, PhD; Norma Minkoff, MS; Heather Bowles, PhD; Meher Din, MPH; Amanda Sharfman, MS, MPH; Bramaramba Kowtha, MS, RDN, LDN

APHA 2025 Annual Meeting & Expo

November 2-5, 2025 | Washington, DC

Exhibit Booth

Oral presentation: “A Call to Action to Advancing Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change Research to Reverse Upward Trends in Obesity Prevalence”

Authors: Shiriki Kumanyika, PhD, MPH; Jamie Chriqui, PhD, MHS; Tamara Dubowitz, ScD; Daniel P. Hatfield, PhD; Amanda Sharfman, MS, MPH; and Meher Din, MPH

Oral presentation: “Accelerating Progress in Child Obesity Prevention through Policy, Systems, and Environmental Research”

Authors: David Berrigan, PhD, MPH; Jill Reedy, PhD, MPH, RD; Melanie Abley, PhD; Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, RDN; Susan Vorkoper, PhD, MPH, MSW; Amanda Sharfman, MS, MPH; Meher Din, MPH; and Daniel P. Hatfield, PhD

ObesityWeek®

November 4-7, 2025 | Atlanta, GA

TOS/NCCOR Joint Symposium: “Obesity-Related Policy Systems, and Environmental Research in the US”

Speakers: Kristen Cooksey Stowers, PhD; Erin Hennessy, PhD; Tashara Leak, PhD, RD; Alyson M. Goodman, MD, MPH

Annual Conference on the Science of Dissemination and Implementation (D&I) in Health

December 14-17, 2025 | National Harbor, MD

Poster presentation: “Development of NCCOR’s Implementation Scorecard: A Decision-Making Companion for Public Health Practitioners”

Authors: Taren M. Swindle, PhD; Karen Hilyard, PhD; Olivia Giordano Kean, MPH; Amanda Sharfman, MS, MPH; Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, RDN; and Melissa C. Green Parker, PhD

Poster presentation: “Using Qualitative Data Analysis Combined with Expert Consultation to Consolidate Research Opportunities: Developing the Physical Activity Research Opportunities (PARO) Framework”

Authors: Bramaramba J. Kowtha, MS, RDN, LDN; Laura Balis, PhD; Melissa C. Green Parker, PhD; Sueny Paloma Lima-dos-Santos, PhD; Grace Stott, MS; Norma Minkoff, MS; Meher Din, MPH; Daniel P. Hatfield, PhD; Amanda Sharfman, MS, MPH; and David R. Brown, PhD

NEW LOOK, NEW RESOURCES, GREATER IMPACT

NCCOR’s conference booth has been updated with a newly redesigned look, unveiled for the first time in November at the APHA Annual Conference.

The new booth is complemented by a fresh set of handout materials designed to better support researchers, evaluation scientists, practitioners, and students to enhance their effectiveness, efficiency, and impact.

Three refreshed user-friendly resources include:

- [Overview Booklet](#)
- [Tools Booklet](#)
- [Student Booklet](#)

NCCOR also invites you to visit the new booth in-person at an upcoming conference!

NCCOR External Scientific Panel (NESP)

The NCCOR External Scientific Panel (NESP) continues to provide critical guidance on strategic direction and emerging priorities, ensuring NCCOR’s work remains responsive to the evolving field.

NCCOR is grateful for the contributions of NESP participants:

Shari Barkin, MD, MSHS, Pediatrician-in-Chief, Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta | George W. Brumley Jr. Professor and Chair, Department of Pediatrics | Executive Director, Pediatric Institute | Emory University School of Medicine

Ross C. Brownson, PhD, Professor of Epidemiology | Director, Prevention Research Center | Washington University in St. Louis

John Cawley, PhD, Professor, Department of Policy Analysis and Management and Department of Economics | Co-Director, Institute on Health Economics, Health Behaviors and Disparities | Cornell University

Terry Huang, PhD, MPH, MBA, Professor and Director, Center for Systems and Community Design | City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy

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Mary Story, PhD, RD, Professor of Global Health and Community and Family Medicine, Duke University | Director, Healthy Eating Research

Elsie M. Taveras, MD, MPH, Chief, Division of General Academic Pediatrics | Director, Pediatric Population Health Management | Massachusetts General Hospital | Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Population Medicine, Harvard Medical School



CONNECTING WITH THE FIELD

Connect & Explore Webinars

NCCOR’s Connect & Explore webinar series provides a platform for timely discussions on emerging topics. In 2025, webinars addressed weight stigma, nutritional implications of GLP-1 medications, and practical applications of implementation science, engaging diverse audiences across research and practice.

Understanding Weight Stigma: Impacts on Families and Youth

January 27, 2025

Presenters:

- Rebecca Puhl, PhD, MS, Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health, University of Connecticut
- Katherine M. Ranaivo, PhD, MS, RAND Corporation

Nutritional Implications of GLP-1 Medications in Obesity Care

August 28, 2025

Presenters:

- Sandra Christensen, MSN, ARNP, FNP-BC, MFOMA, FAANP, Integrative Medical Weight Management
- Jaime P. Almandoz, MD, MBA, FTOS, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

Turning Evidence into Action: Using NCCOR’s Implementation Scorecard to Strengthen Childhood Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity Interventions

October 14, 2025

Presenters:

- Taren Massey-Swindle, PhD, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences College of Medicine
- Teddy Swenson, MPH, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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Looking Ahead to 2026

We are at the threshold of a promising new era in addressing childhood obesity, as transformative new treatment protocols converge with prevention efforts that recognize policies, systems, and environments as key drivers in reducing obesity. NCCOR remains committed to advancing the research and growing the evidence base around both clinical approaches and community strategies. NCCOR's agenda for 2026 includes:

- ▶ **Advancing research on pediatric obesity pharmacotherapy.** Following its successful webinar and workshop with leading practitioners and researchers, NCCOR is currently at work on a white paper and other resources to help advance research in five key areas related to emerging pharmacotherapy treatments, including GLP-1 treatment initiation, selection, duration, and discontinuation; treatment effects and outcomes; mental and behavioral health related to treatment; nutrition and physical activity assessment, monitoring, and counseling; and the structure and impact of intensive health behavior and lifestyle treatment.
- ▶ **Learning from the OPUS Grantee Network.** In FY25, the National Cancer Institute awarded 14 administrative supplements to support the development of whole-of-systems approaches to addressing obesity for cancer prevention and control. In 2026, grantees will work on building community relationships needed for PSE approaches.
- ▶ **Identifying best-practice approaches for ensuring access to youth sports programs.** NCCOR will document high-quality school- and community-based sports programs that successfully ensure access for all children and identify contextual factors that improve children's engagement.
- ▶ **Connecting the field to the latest research.** In 2026, NCCOR will continue to host Connect & Explore webinars on important topics in childhood obesity research. The first two webinar topics of 2026 include 1) how to leverage the PARO framework in advancing physical activity research, policy, and practice and 2) strategies to advance quality recess in schools.

By embracing new horizons while building on proven strategies, NCCOR remains committed to helping the field achieve lasting progress in childhood obesity prevention and treatment.

2025 NCCOR by the numbers

4 
conferences

2 oral presentations

1 workshop

2 poster presentations

1 symposium

3 
peer-reviewed publications

53 
experts engaged through workgroups, webinars, workshops

3 
webinars with 1,290 registrants

6,384 
newsletter subscribers

1,140
student newsletter subscribers

19 
resources added to the resource library

