



Developing Solutions for Childhood Obesity: Harnessing Global Learning

The Issue

Childhood obesity is increasing at alarming rates across the world, highlighting the need for evidence-based interventions. Children with obesity are more likely to: 1) develop non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes, 2) suffer from anxiety and depression, and 3) have higher probability of chronic diseases and premature death in adulthood. Innovative strategies to tackle childhood obesity are being developed in the U.S. and abroad. Progress in other countries can inform U.S. efforts as we seek to curb the obesity epidemic at home. However, research is often siloed resulting in a fractured response to a highly interconnected issue.



Fogarty's Response

Fogarty's childhood obesity prevention efforts highlight innovative research and health outcomes among Latin America and U.S. Latino populations as well as food insecurity globally. Latin American countries are testing interventions at national and local levels, including nutrition education, policy reforms, school-based programs, and community engagement, to promote healthier lifestyles and reduce childhood obesity rates. Fogarty convenes researchers from the U.S. and abroad to share and leverage existing knowledge. This fosters collaboration, strengthens research capacity, and accelerates health innovations to address childhood obesity.

NIH Partners

- **National Cancer Institute (NCI)**
- **National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI)**
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive, and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)**
- **Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)**
- **National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD)**
- **NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR)**
- **NIH Office of Disease Prevention (ODP)**



Opportunities To Learn Together

Sharing research strategies and proven methods among researchers from around the world helps identify best practices in proper nutrition and healthy lifestyle promotion. Scientific exchange can also identify shared research questions, ensure data transparency, and develop future priorities that could be addressed collaboratively.

- **Open Streets (also known as *Ciclovía*)**, a program that promotes physical activity by closing streets to cars on the weekends, was started at a national level in Colombia and has later been implemented in New Orleans, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and the District of Columbia.
- Evidence that most food products in Argentina contain high levels of trans-fatty acids led to the decision to significantly reduce trans-fatty acids in the food supply. Similarly, the FDA requires trans fatty acids to be declared on nutrition labels and has taken steps to reduce artificial trans fats in the food supply.
- The **Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative** is a ten-step action plan that encourages health facilities to better support uptake of early breastfeeding, which protects against overweight and obesity in childhood. Researchers from the U.S. and Brazil reflected on the factors that led to the initiative's success and opportunities for continued enrollment.
- In implementing **front-of-package labeling**, which provides quick information to help consumers easily identify foods that can be part of a healthy diet, FDA examined best practices, consumer perceptions, and key design elements in studies from Chile, Ecuador, and Mexico.

Bringing Global Learning to US Application

NIH Collaborations. Fogarty collaborates with seven NIH partners and the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR), a partnership between NIH, USDA, CDC, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to identify research priorities and future directions in childhood obesity prevention and nutrition research. Fogarty has contributed to several initiatives:

- *Obesity-Related Systems and Environmental Research in the U.S.* examines how coordinated interventions on a range of systemic drivers can accelerate progress building on research lessons from outside the U.S.
- *Measures for children at high risk for obesity* decision tree toolkit helps users identify appropriate measures and guides them through assessment options, concerning measurement and adaptation of measures for childhood obesity across the Americas.
- *Implementation science and childhood obesity* efforts focus on effectively translating evidence-based interventions into real-world settings and provide tools for researchers who want to adapt and implement successful childhood obesity strategies in the U.S. that were developed across the U.S. and abroad.
- *Portfolio analysis on NIH-supported nutrition and implementation science research* identified 33 NIH awards in the U.S. and abroad focusing on the adoption, adaptation, and sustainability of culturally tailored interventions that can enhance the effectiveness and scalability of nutrition programs.

Academic Collaborations

To support the development of new research partnerships and expand capacity to conduct high-quality childhood obesity research across the Americas, Fogarty supported the Cross Border Collaborative Awards on Childhood Obesity. These awards seeded and sustained new learning between domestic and international institutions resulting in:

- San Diego State University launched a new Meso-American Center in Oaxaca, Mexico that promotes ongoing binational research projects involving SDSU and institutions in Mexico with obesity as one focus area.
- Fogarty-supported awards provided training and mentorship to over 20 junior researchers, most in the U.S., and added childhood obesity modules to existing research training programs.
- To disseminate key research findings to policymakers and public health advocates, UCLA developed a policy brief analyzing the effectiveness of childhood obesity prevention policies in Latin America and the U.S., focusing on front-of-package labeling, controlling portion size, and TV advertisement.
- The University of Michigan and the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico partnered with the University of Chile to share learning and complement findings from their respective cohort studies on child growth, obesity and development. Together, these cohort studies offer insights into the development and persistence of child obesity in urban settings.

Fogarty's Childhood Obesity Cross Border Collaborative Awards

