

**For Immediate Release:
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Obesity Prevention Grants Awarded in Connecticut

Projects Focus on Preventing Obesity in Children from Birth Through First Two Years of Life

Farmington – The Children’s Fund of Connecticut (CFC) awarded \$230,560 to fund four obesity prevention projects in Connecticut. The work will inform and advance efforts to prevent and reduce early childhood obesity by addressing risk factors in the first two years of life.

Four projects were selected from a competitive [application](#) process. (See below for further details).

- Health Messaging: University of Connecticut, Department of Nutritional Sciences
- Data Development: University of Connecticut Health Center, Center for Public Health and Health Policy
- Policy Development: University of Connecticut Rudd Center for Food Policy
- Baby Friendly Hospitals: The Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition

The grants were inspired by the Child Health and Development Institute’s (CHDI) IMPACT “[Preventing Childhood Obesity: Maternal-Child Life Course Approach](#)”. The IMPACT reviewed scientific research on the causes of obesity and explored implications for prevention and early intervention. Risk factors for early childhood obesity include: maternal pre-pregnancy weight and weight gain during pregnancy, infant feeding practices, weight gain during infancy, and eating habits during toddlerhood and preschool.

“Childhood obesity is a serious epidemic affecting one-third of children in Connecticut and nationwide,” said Judith Meyers, IMPACT co-author and President and CEO of the Children’s Fund of Connecticut and its non-profit subsidiary CHDI. “Research shows that that obesity may be very difficult to reverse if children are obese by 5 years of age. The grant projects funded today will help us get ahead of the curve by preventing the onset of obesity.”

Grant Awards:

Health Messaging: \$75,700, University of Connecticut, Department of Nutritional Sciences

Currently, there is minimal and varying outreach to parents regarding early optimal feeding practices, and the messages that are conveyed are often inconsistent. Effective messages will equip parents and caregivers and providers with the information they need to promote a healthy weight in young children. Amy Mobley, PhD, RD and Assistant Professor Nutritional Sciences, the principal investigator for this project and her staff will develop and test a set of obesity prevention messages for children birth to 24 months that are parent and caregiver focused, culturally appropriate, at appropriate literacy levels and evidence-based, along with information for providers about strategies to disseminate these key messages.

Data Development: \$80,000, University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC), Center for Public Health and Health Policy

The goal of this project is to establish a single, integrated longitudinal database containing child weight and other relevant data, beginning with the 2009 and 2010 birth cohorts, as a means of demonstrating the possibility of tracking population data for all children in CT. Under the direction of Robert Trestman, MD, PhD and Ann Ferris, PhD, RD, this project creates a childhood obesity surveillance database using PATH (a HIPAA-compliant data matching software application) to link birth records from the Connecticut Department of Public Health with electronic health records at Community Health Center, Inc. with 12 sites across the state. Data will be analyzed to identify factors that increase the risk of being overweight at age five and to model the development trajectories to determine the probability of being overweight by age five based on a variety of factors, broken down by sex and ethnicity/race.

Policy Development: \$14,990, University of Connecticut Rudd Center for Food Policy

The Rudd Center's Director of Public Policy, Roberta R. Friedman, will conduct a review of relevant federal and state policies and regulations (Connecticut and elsewhere) to prevent obesity in children birth to two years of age. The results will be a database of policy, legislation, and regulation and the development of a Connecticut policy agenda on childhood obesity for children ages birth to two. The proposed policy agenda will assist academics, practitioners, program staff, community coalitions and advocates committed to preventing and reducing early childhood obesity in Connecticut.

Baby-Friendly Hospitals: \$59,870, The Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition

This project is administered by Michele Vancour, PhD, MPH; Christine Bracken, MSN, RN, IBCLC; and Kathleen Mason, MA, RNC, IBCLC. The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative is an international movement launched by the World Health Organization and UNICEF to increase rates of breastfeeding through policy changes in birthing hospitals. Eight of 28 birthing hospitals in CT have achieved this designation. The project goals include: 1) assist Connecticut hospitals already in the process to complete their work and achieve the baby-friendly designation; 2) recruit one or more Connecticut hospital to start the baby-friendly hospital designation process; 3) strengthen the infrastructure to support hospitals moving from start to finish including developing partnerships with physicians, community providers, mothers and families; and 4) report on the sustainability and maintenance of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.

Learn more about CHDI's work to prevent obesity in early childhood at www.chdi.org. Download CHDI's IMPACT "[Preventing Childhood Obesity: Maternal-Child Life Course Approach](#)" and [Issue Brief](#). For further information about the "Preventing Obesity in Early Childhood Grants, please visit www.childrensfundofct.org or contact Julie Tacinelli at tacinelli@uchc.edu or 860-679-1524.