



PRESS RELEASE

San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative catalyzes partnerships that bring \$9 million funding to programs addressing root causes of obesity.

After commemorating National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month in September, the [San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative](#) is happy to announce and celebrate its partners' recent funding awards totaling \$9 million, which will support programs addressing root causes of childhood obesity, including barriers to healthy eating and active living. The funding comes at a time when the region continues to respond to the global pandemic, which has increased visibility of health disparities in low-income and minority communities. [Partners brought together through the Childhood Obesity Initiative](#) will leverage new funding to support communities most vulnerable during the pandemic--improving access to resources, as well as expanding programs supporting food security and resilience against stress. By bringing together partners across multiple sectors, the Childhood Obesity Initiative is committed to addressing barriers to healthy lifestyles to support the health of children and families.

"The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how health disparities play out in our region, for example with our communities of color experiencing the worst of this pandemic," said Dr. Wilma Wooten, MD, MPH, San Diego County's Public Health Officer and Tri-Chair of the Childhood Obesity Initiative's Executive Leadership Team. "These disparities also come into play when we look at childhood obesity, with children from racial and ethnic minorities and from communities with limited resources facing more barriers to staying healthy."

Supervisor Nora Vargas recently began working with the Childhood Obesity Initiative as a champion of its efforts addressing health disparities. "The global pandemic has hit our communities particularly hard and as the safety net for the residents in this county it is our responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to affordable and healthy food," said Vice Chair Nora Vargas. "If we want to build healthier and stronger communities, our priority should be to remove barriers and make these resources accessible in a way that matches the diverse cultures and languages of our community, so everyone has an opportunity to thrive and not just survive."

Funding received by partners working with the Childhood Obesity Initiative includes the following:

- The City of Chula Vista, alongside UC San Diego's Altman Clinical & Translational Research Institute (ACTRI) and the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science, will partner to address health literacy via \$4 million grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health. This effort will create culturally inclusive COVID-19 health literacy initiatives that support vaccination, testing, and contact tracing efforts among racial and ethnic minorities and other vulnerable communities.
- The San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) will benefit from a \$2 million contract with HHS, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to address COVID-19 health disparities by building the health literacy of students in traditionally underserved communities. The SDCOE will provide leadership, professional learning, technical assistance, resources and mini-grants for schools and districts to align health education programming to the *California Health Education Framework*.
- A \$3 million grant from the CA Governor's Office of Research & Planning will support precision medicine interventions in the Latino community. Led by UC San Diego, this project will focus on adverse childhood experiences, to build resilience against stress and reduce childhood obesity.

Much of this funding will directly support residents in San Diego County, and an additional \$25,000 gift from Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan will support other community-led projects proposed to the Childhood Obesity Initiative's mini-grant program.

These new funds bring together a range of partners working with the Childhood Obesity Initiative from multiple sectors. The initiative brings together over 400 partners, with the above efforts including:

- Elected officials from multiple cities, including the cities of Chula Vista, El Cajon, Escondido, Imperial Beach, La Mesa, and National City
- Education partners including UC San Diego, San Diego State University, the San Diego County Office of Education, and numerous school districts
- County offices including the County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors
- Healthcare-focused entities including American Academy of Pediatrics, the Family Health Centers of San Diego, the Alliance Health Clinic, Vista Community Clinic, and Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan
- Community-based organizations including Olivewood Gardens, San Diego Promotores Coalition, Streetwyze, YMCA, Union of Pan Asian Communities, Latino Health Coalition, San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition, American Heart Association, and 2-1-1 San Diego, as well as residents from the communities engaged in these projects

"As a family physician, I've seen firsthand how obesity can negatively impact the quality of life and health outcomes for our communities of color," said Kim Bower, Family Physician and Senior Medical Director with Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan. "That's why Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan is proud to support the San Diego Childhood Obesity Initiative with a gift of \$25,000 to support grant programs that address social equity, improve racial inequities and health outcomes for all San Diegans."

"The YMCA of San Diego County is proud to partner with the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative," said Kim McDougal, Executive Director of Childcare Resource Service for the YMCA of San Diego County. "At the Y, we work to address root causes of poor health through programs designed to address child poverty, influence systems change, and build protective factors for families. We believe that strengthening families and childcare professionals through comprehensive support ensures wellness across the lifespan and for future generations."

Blanca Meléndrez, MA, Executive Director for Community Health at UC San Diego ACTRI, which facilitates the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, summarized the projects: "Our community-centered approaches within the Childhood Obesity Initiative are the foundation for our awarded projects, whether addressing health literacy, food security, or other facets impacting health for children and families."

###

About The San Diego Childhood Obesity Initiative

The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative is a public-private, multi-sector partnership bringing together over 400 partners to address child health through a collective impact model. The partnership is funded by the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and facilitated by the UC San Diego Altman Clinical & Translational Research Institute within its population health arm.

About The YMCA

The YMCA of San Diego County is one of the largest Y associations in the nation, serving nearly 500,000 San Diego County residents and employing more than 5,500 people (pre-COVID). Through a variety of programs and services focused on youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility, the Y unites men, women, and children - regardless of age, income or background - to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation's health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. The YMCA of San Diego County is dedicated to improving the quality of human life and to helping all people realize their fullest potential as children of God through the development of the spirit, mind, and body. Visit www.ymcasd.org

About Vice Chair Vargas

Supervisor Nora Vargas was sworn in on January 4, 2021, as the first Latina, first immigrant, and first woman of color in the history of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. She was unanimously elected Vice-Chair of the Board by her peers. Vice Chair Vargas serves as Co-Chair of the County's COVID-19 subcommittee and is leading efforts to mitigate the impacts of COVID and focus on economic recovery, from an equity lens. To learn more, visit www.SupervisorNoraVargas.com.

As part of her "Families and Communities First Plan" Vice Chair Nora Vargas introduced a board letter to the Board of Supervisors earlier this year declaring racism a public health crisis. The board letter was approved unanimously and advances her vision of addressing racism through transformational change. The root causes of childhood obesity and food insecurity in many cases are tied to social injustice and her top priority is to address some of these issues through her support of the County's Childhood Obesity Initiative.

###