

Decreasing the Health Gap in Texas: Texas A&M University's High Obesity Program



University Partnership

CDC's High Obesity Program (HOP) promotes healthy eating and active living in counties that have more than 40% prevalence of adult obesity. CDC provides funds to land grant universities that work with communities—mostly in rural areas—whose residents may have less access to healthy foods and fewer opportunities to be physically active.

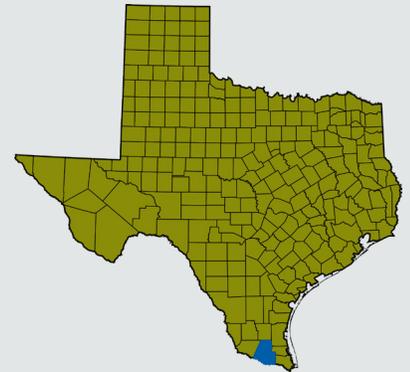
The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Texas A&M School of Public Health work with four coalitions in Hidalgo County and their partners to:

- Increase opportunities for physical activity and active transportation.
- Improve access to healthier food options in communities.

Texas by the Numbers*

In Hidalgo County:

- The estimated adult obesity prevalence is 42.9%, well above the state prevalence of 29.2%.
- 40% of the population doesn't have "reasonable" access to places for physical activity.
- About 1 in 4 low income residents has limited access to healthy food.



*These data were obtained at the time of funding.

Programs in Action

- The School of Public Health partnered with the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to increase bicycle infrastructure through the Bicycle Friendly Business program. As a result, 51 local businesses now offer bicycle parking, discounts for cyclists, and free water stations. The MPO also added five miles of bike lanes in the community.
- AgriLife Extension established a farmers market at a local community center to help increase access to fresh produce. More than 800 community members purchased over 12,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to date.
- AgriLife Extension and the School of Public Health partnered with community leaders to enhance outdoor spaces to promote physical activity. In San Carlos, they worked with church leaders and community volunteers to establish a community play space. A soccer club in Peñitas received equipment to support youth soccer programs. An adopt-a-park initiative was established in Weslaco, resulting in the establishment of a walking trail and public art mural. Additionally, an outdoor exercise station was added to a park in McAllen and a local walking trail was expanded.



Voice from the Community

"It's really rewarding to have several individuals approach you to say what good work you are doing and what great programs you've brought to the community. When you know you created something that made a big impact on one individual and then you triple it by their family, that's a really successful story. And that's the kind of stories that we like...we bring in a program, but it's the community members that takes advantage and makes the changes in their lives."

—Alicia Rodriguez, San Carlos Community Center Director