

# PROFILE

## Location

Boston, Massachusetts

## Populations of Focus

children, families

## Topic Areas

family and child nutrition,  
physical activity, healthy  
eating, obesity prevention,  
health equity



**Improving the nutrition of children's food through programs like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the National School Lunch Program are proven strategies that can lead to better health and improved equity.**

“We are fortunate to be able to partner with HPRC to further the Boston Public Health Commission's mission to build a healthy and equitable city. HPRC has supported us to think broadly about how to invest our time and resources into interventions that promote healthy eating and active living.”

## Mary Bovenzi

*Director*

Chronic Disease Prevention  
and Control Division,  
Boston Public Health  
Commission

The [Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) (HPRC) is one of 26 Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the 2019–2024 funding cycle. Each PRC is funded to establish and maintain its center and to conduct a core research project. PRCs may receive supplemental funding to conduct additional research projects and activities.

The mission of HPRC is to work with community partners to develop, evaluate, use, and share cost-effective strategies that will improve population health, nutrition and physical activity, reduce obesity and chronic diseases, and improve health equity.

When communities play a role in identifying, creating, and applying cost-effective strategies to address their problem, it provides “a clear path to achieving these goals,” according to Steven Gortmaker, PhD, principal investigator and director of HPRC.

HPRC also uses community-based participatory research methods to engage with partners in public health practice at local and state levels to support its efforts.

## CORE RESEARCH

Each PRC uses a community-engaged approach to conduct one primary applied public health prevention research project called a core research project. Project activities include design, development, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination. PRCs use at least 50 percent of their CDC funding to conduct the project in partnership with communities.

### **Massachusetts-Childhood Obesity Intervention Cost-Effectiveness Study (MA-CHOICES) Project**

[MA-CHOICES](#) works with community partners, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and the Boston Public Health Commission to develop strategies to reduce obesity prevalence and to study how cost-effectiveness metrics are used by partners across the state. This work builds off the broader [CHOICES Project](#), which includes other partners.

Identifying what works to prevent childhood obesity has become a priority for public health researchers, policy makers, and the general public. But little attention has been paid to finding solutions that deliver the best results for the dollars invested. HPRC uses the MA-CHOICES Project to help address the obesity epidemic in the United States by identifying the most cost-effective strategies that can prevent obesity and improve health equity.

To support these efforts, the [MA-CHOICES research team](#) has created cost-effectiveness estimates for more than 40 of the most widely promoted or used childhood obesity prevention interventions. Many of these interventions have never been fully evaluated for comparative- or cost-effectiveness.

The MA-CHOICES project also uses a learning collaborative implementation strategy to build knowledge and self-efficacy among state and local health agency staff and community partners on cost, effect, population reach, cost-effectiveness, and health disparity concepts and methods. This information is shared through trainings and partner meetings.

The research conducted by the MA-CHOICES Project focuses on cost-effective interventions in schools, during



**Addressing childhood obesity with a range of cost-effective strategies across a variety of settings can ensure that children have opportunities to eat healthy and be physically active.**

early care and out of school time, and in clinical, treatment, community, and government settings. The research team is working to document how obesity prevention interventions are affecting health equity and to find the most effective ways to communicate this valuable information.

## ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

PRCs may receive supplemental funding to work on additional research projects each funding cycle. These Special Interest Projects (SIPs) focus on a variety of health topics or gaps in scientific evidence. PRCs can also conduct additional research as part of SIP [Thematic Research Networks](#), which are groups of PRCs working together on related health topics.

## 2021

### **[PRC Vaccine Confidence Network \(PCR VCN\)](#)**

In April 2021, CDC funded a 12-month award to all 26 PRCs to form the PRC VCN in support of the agency's [Vaccinate with Confidence](#) strategy for COVID-19. As part of this network, HPRC is working with partners to promote vaccine confidence, increase vaccine uptake, and reduce disparities in three Massachusetts communities. The focus is on addressing the needs of immigrant residents and ultimately reducing the incidence of COVID-19 in the United States.

## HIGHLIGHTED PUBLICATION

[Impact of the healthy, hunger-free kids act on obesity trends](#)

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### Principal Investigator

Steven Gortmaker, PhD

### Department

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For more information on HPRC and ways to get involved, visit [www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc).

To achieve this goal, HPRC seeks to engage trusted community-based organizations to increase knowledge, improve access, and shift norms and attitudes around the COVID-19 vaccine. The main components of this strategy are to:

- Support community-based health ambassadors to address vaccination concerns and improve access among residents.
- Develop accessible communication materials in multiple languages

## 2019

### Physical Activity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (PAPREN) Participant

In 2019, HPRC joined [PAPREN](#), which seeks to increase physical activity in communities by working across sectors; focusing on factors that affect the built environment, like land use and transportation policies; and integrating health equity into all policy efforts.

### Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NOPREN) Participant

In 2019, HPRC joined [NOPREN](#), which is a collaborative, equity-focused applied research network that informs policies and practices designed to improve nutrition and prevent obesity.



CDC Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) conduct innovative public health research at the community level. The PRC Program is a network of academic research centers in the United States that work with their communities to identify public health problems and develop, test, and evaluate solutions that can be widely shared and applied within the public health system. PRCs research a wide range of health topics and focus on populations experiencing health disparities.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRC PROGRAM

Visit [www.cdc.gov/prc](http://www.cdc.gov/prc) or contact [prcprogram@cdc.gov](mailto:prcprogram@cdc.gov).



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention