

Obesity Prevention Research



The rising global obesity epidemic impacts both noncommunicable diseases and economic growth. Addressing the epidemic requires solutions at the individual, community, and national levels. RTI International's understanding of food systems and related policies—combined with expertise in health behavior change, economics, and public health—allows us to approach the global challenges that obesity presents from multiple scientific disciplines.

Our research and evaluation efforts strengthen policy and service initiatives that promote healthy diets and physical activity. We conduct studies of policy, environmental, and behavioral interventions that address obesity among targeted populations, such as children, seniors, low-income households, and military personnel. Given rising levels of obesity worldwide, our efforts are increasingly focused on the dual burdens of undernutrition and obesity. We support decision-making that leads to healthier populations and reduces costs to communities, governments, and health care organizations. Our interdisciplinary staff—which includes program evaluators, nutritionists, behavioral scientists, policy analysts, and economists—conducts research for federal and state agencies and private organizations.

Recent Federal Clients

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Food and Drug Administration
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Recent Public- and Private-Sector Clients

- Alliance for a Healthier Generation
- Kansas Health Foundation (KHF)
- Partnership for a Healthier America
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Obesity Statistics

- Worldwide, more than 1.4 billion adults are overweight and half a billion adults are obese.
- More than 2 in 3 adults are overweight or obese.
- About one-third of U.S. children and adolescents ages 6 to 19 are overweight or obese. Obese children are likely to become obese adults.

Addressing Federal Clients' Evaluation Needs

Evaluation of Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) Program. How do policy, systems, and environmental changes contribute to obesity prevention? CDC selected RTI to conduct a qualitative evaluation for the CPPW program, which provided CDC with rich information on local-level impact through 24 in-depth case studies.

Evaluations of Worksite Wellness Programs. Through multiple projects, RTI assisted CDC in several areas. We developed an evaluation framework and process for identifying promising strategies for worksite programs promoting healthy weight. To assess the effectiveness of the National Healthy Worksite Program, we conducted a national evaluation and disseminated information in meaningful and useful ways.

Assessment of Awareness and Use of CDC's School Health Tools. RTI and its research partner are using a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative survey data with extensive qualitative site visit research to evaluate utilization of four school health resources among key state and local health and education stakeholders.

Evaluations of USDA Food and Nutrition Service Programs. RTI has made important contributions to the science supporting nutrition programs for low-income Americans. In a recent study, we used experimental or quasi-experimental research designs to evaluate seven SNAP-Ed programs and to help demonstrate the effectiveness of SNAP-Ed for improving dietary behaviors throughout life.

Evaluation of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) MOVE! Program. RTI helped the VHA explore different ways to implement facility structures, policies, and processes associated with better weight-loss outcomes for patients at VHA medical facilities participating in MOVE!, a multidisciplinary weight management program.

Designing Innovative Obesity Tools and Resources

Neighborhood Map of U.S. Obesity. Obesity data are rarely available at the community level—that is, until now. For a National Institutes of Health Obesity Challenge, we used state-of-the-art modeling approaches to join body mass index data to the RTI U.S. Synthetic Household Population™ database to create the Neighborhood Map of U.S. Obesity. <http://synthpopviewer.rti.org/obesity/>.

Obesity Cost Calculator™. Weight and related chronic disease within the workforce can incur great costs to employers. RTI developed the Obesity Cost Calculator, a methodology that estimates medical and work-loss costs associated with obesity. The tool quantifies employer costs and helps evaluate potential intervention programs to reduce these costs.

Helping Nonprofit Clients with Evaluation Solutions

Evaluation of Obesity-Related Initiatives for the KHF.

Funders want to know the impact of their grant portfolios. RTI conducted a comprehensive evaluation of KHF's grant making focused on healthy behaviors, including indicators of healthy eating and active living. We also evaluated the foundation's Worksite Wellness and Breastfeeding Initiatives.

Evaluation of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Out-of-School Time Initiative. Using surveys, secondary data analysis, and key informant interviews, RTI conducted evaluation activities that showed how a quality improvement and technical assistance intervention helped more than 300 afterschool programs in primarily low-income communities improve snack quality and physical activity offerings.

Evaluation of The Rapides Foundation's Diet and Physical Activity Initiative. RTI conducted an independent evaluation of this initiative that quantified the initiative's success and impact at the regional level, identified lessons learned during project implementation, and identified best practices on a broader level for diet and physical activity efforts.

Drivers of Food Choice in the Context of Overweight Women and Children in Malawi. RTI is conducting a mixed-methods study to explain predictors of dietary intake and food choice among overweight Malawian mothers and children. Results will identify specific barriers to healthy diets that could be targeted in subsequent interventions and studies.

More Information

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