

2022 Call for Proposals

Concept Paper Deadline: October 12, 2022

HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH SPECIAL SOLICITATION: EVALUATING THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC DRIVEN POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Good nutrition, food security, and a healthy weight are cornerstones of health and well-being throughout the lifespan, and foundational during childhood. One simply cannot be healthy without sufficient nutritious food. The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges and barriers to these tenets of health, especially among lower-income households and communities of color. The economic impacts of job losses saw soaring rates of food insecurity. Extended child care and school closures meant many children did not have access to nutritious breakfasts and lunches. Eating and physical activity patterns shifted, and recent data shows many adults and youth in the U.S. gained excess weight during the pandemic.

In efforts to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and well-being, large-scale government investment was made in health, economic recovery, and the social safety net. In 2020, the U.S. Congress passed four special appropriations laws to assist federal agencies with recovery and provide aid to state and local governments, businesses, and families. Additional emergency COVID-relief packages were passed in late 2020 and early 2021 to provide further economic assistance to American workers, families, small businesses, and industries.¹ Federal agencies and individual states also put many program flexibilities and waivers in place to make it easier for American families to access social safety nets during this critical time. States, tribal nations, cities, school districts, and the charitable food system launched new and innovative ways to

HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH PROGRAM

Healthy Eating Research (HER) is a national program of the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)* committed to building a *Culture of Health* through identifying effective strategies to improve children's nutrition and weight. HER's mission is to support and disseminate research on policy, systems, and environmental strategies that promote healthy eating among children and advance nutrition security and health equity. The program goals are to:

- 1) build a research base for policy, systems, and environmental strategies that advance health and nutrition equity in the areas of healthy food access, nutrition security, diet quality, and healthy weight;
- 2) foster a vibrant, inclusive, interdisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers; and
- 3) communicate research findings to accelerate policy, systems, and environmental changes that promote healthy eating and advance nutrition and health equity.

HER issues calls for proposals (CFPs) to solicit scientifically rigorous, solution-oriented proposals from investigators representing diverse disciplines and backgrounds. To learn more about the program, applicants are encouraged to visit the Healthy Eating Research website at www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

¹ More information on each of these policies can be found in the FAQ document for this CFP.

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improve food access. Some of these COVID-related efforts have continued while others have ended, and yet little is known about their positive or negative impacts on health and well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic vividly highlighted how closely food, nutrition and health are intertwined and exposed stark nutrition and racial inequities in populations and communities and across the U.S. food system. As a result, USDA made a commitment in March 2022 to advance nutrition security through bold strategic approaches to ensure consistent access to safe, nutritious food that supports optimal health and well-being for all Americans. These and other government and public efforts have the potential to reduce poverty and improve nutrition security and thus impact child health and well-being. To date, little research has been done on the relationships and interconnections between nutrition, obesity, and food and nutrition security in families and policies related to poverty reduction, economic resources, and housing security. The current context provides us with an important opportunity to build this evidence base to improve childrens' health and inform policies and approaches for the post-COVID-19 era.

This CFP aims to fund research on how policies and programs (such as the COVID-19-related relief and recovery policies and now the post-pandemic recession) impact child health and well-being. HER is interested in understanding how social and economic programs and policies related to poverty reduction—such as financial payments to families, income assistance programs, housing assistance or housing security programs, and increased access to social services—impact child obesity, diet quality, food and nutrition security, and other relevant child and family health outcomes among lower-income families and populations of color. Evidence generated through this special solicitation should be timely and policy-relevant and aimed towards identifying policies and programs that advance nutrition and health equity.

TARGETED AGE GROUPS, PRIORITY POPULATIONS, AND TOPIC AREAS

The target population is children (0 to 18) and families in the United States, with high priority on those who are at highest risk for poor nutrition and obesity, specifically lower-income families and racially and ethnically diverse populations (e.g., Black, Latino/a, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander).

The COVID-19 recovery plans and now the post-COVID-19 era, provide a unique opportunity for researchers to evaluate the implementation and impact of pandemic-driven policies and programs on children's health, nutrition, weight, or food security status. These could be policies directly focused on food and nutrition (e.g., nutrition assistance programs), or policies indirectly but synergistically related, such as improved income supports (e.g., child tax credits, increasing minimum wage), paid family leave, housing support, and healthcare access (e.g., Medicaid provisions). Some of these efforts have continued post-COVID, while others have expired or are set to expire. It is important to understand the impact they have had on families with children facing hardships and identify the most effective approaches that should be sustained and scaled up.

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Examples of research topics include (but are not limited to):

- Relationships between affordable housing/housing security and indicators of child health, including food and nutrition security.
- Impacts of increased benefits or social services for families (e.g., childcare subsidies, universal free meals) on disposable income and diet quality.
- Impacts of COVID-19 relief provisions on racial/ethnic or geographic disparities in health outcomes, such as diet and weight, among children and families.
- Identify structural barriers, facilitators, or unintended consequences of COVID-19 relief provisions at federal, state, or local levels for achieving improvements in child obesity, diet quality, food security, or other child health outcomes.
- Explore how funding for food/nutrition supports in the COVID-19 relief packages specifically impacted family/child poverty, given poverty is a risk factor for obesity, and what would happen if these supports were discontinued.
- Impacts of the increase in SNAP benefits via the Thrifty Food Plan updates on diet quality and health amongst families with children.
- Impacts of COVID flexibilities in the WIC program, what is continuing, and what is working.
- Effect of school meal flexibilities on the nutritional quality of food served by schools.

All proposed studies must have a clear impact on children and families in the U.S. and have the potential to reduce inequities related to child health and well-being. Studies must have a link to child nutrition, diet quality, weight, or food and nutrition insecurity, but can also include other child health indicators. Studies must have a clear, data-driven, and testable research question with a rigorous study design. A variety of research designs and analyses, including mixed methods and linkages of existing data sources, can be used to answer research questions.

TOTAL AWARDS

Up to \$1.5 million will be awarded through this CFP, with each award up to a maximum of \$250,000 and 18 months in duration. Proposals requesting lower budget amounts and shorter periods (e.g., 12 months) are strongly encouraged.

Awards will be made from Duke University to the principal investigator's home institution. Indirect costs (up to 12% for U.S. colleges/universities and hospital or health systems; up to 20% for nonprofit organizations; and 0% for for-profit organizations or government entities) are included in the total project awards [per RWJF budget guidelines](#).

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.
- Awards will be made to organizations, not to individuals.

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- Preference will be given to applicants that are either public entities or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are not private foundations or Type III supporting organizations. Additional documentation may be required by Duke University.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Concept Papers will be reviewed by HER leadership and RWJF senior staff. *Concept Papers* will be evaluated based on the rationale of the project, strength of the research question and aims, strength and feasibility of the research design, alignment with the goals and topics described in this CFP, balance in topic areas, and potential to target the age groups and priority populations as described above.

Invited *Full Proposals* will be reviewed by at least three external reviewers (with relevant research, content area, and/or policy expertise), HER leadership, and RWJF senior staff. Final funding decisions are made by RWJF leadership. *Full Proposals* will be evaluated based on:

- 1) Importance and relevance of study aims, hypotheses, methods, and outcomes
- 2) Use of a clear theoretical framework, conceptual model, or rationale
- 3) Scientific rigor of proposed research, sampling approach and effect sizes needed, data collection and analytic methods, and data sources
- 4) Research qualifications and experience of the investigator(s) and appropriateness of disciplines and perspectives represented
- 5) Appropriateness of proposed budget and project timeline, including the realistic feasibility of completing the project within the specified funding period
- 6) The approach for communicating, disseminating, and translating research findings to advocates, decision-makers, policymakers, and community members, if applicable

RWJF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITMENT

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is committed to building a Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. Achieving this goal requires focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. To that end, the Foundation is committed to fostering diverse perspectives, recognizing that individuals' perspectives are shaped by a host of factors, such as their race, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, age, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, familial status, education, religion, legal status, military service, political affiliation, geography, and other personal and professional experiences.

While the presence of diverse perspectives alone is not sufficient, the Foundation is also committed to creating inclusive environments where all individuals are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences. RWJF believes that only through valuing our differences

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and similarities, and remaining vigilant in advancing equity, will we be able to maintain an equitable workplace and actively pursue equity in all aspects of our work. RWJF is committed to being continuous learners and working alongside others to cultivate equity, diversity, and inclusion.

USE OF GRANT FUNDS

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, and other direct project expenses, including a limited amount of equipment essential to the project. In keeping with RWJF policy, grant funds may *not* be used to subsidize individuals for the costs of their health care, to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, for lobbying, for political activities, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for this solicitation must be submitted electronically via the RWJF online system.

To apply for this special solicitation, visit <https://my.rwjf.org/applyFromWebsite.do?cfp=3324> and click the “Apply Online” link.

If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at my.rwjf.org before you begin the application process. Applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online submission requirements well before the final submission deadline. Program staff may not be able to assist all applicants in the final 24 hours before the submission deadline. There are two phases in the application process:

Phase 1: Concept Paper

All applicants must submit: 1) a concept paper narrative of up to three pages (1.5 line spacing) describing the study; and 2) bio sketches for key personnel. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the online system.

Phase 2: Full Proposals (if invited)

Selected Phase 1 applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal narrative of up to 15 pages (1.5 line spacing) accompanied by a budget and budget narrative and additional supporting documents. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the online system.

Please see the section below for a complete list of key dates and deadlines for the two phases.

Please direct inquiries to:

Healthy Eating Research

Phone: (800) 578-8636

Email: healthyeating@duke.edu

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Late Submissions

Per RWJF policy, HER will accept only those proposals that are completed/submitted at the time of the deadline. Because one of our Guiding Principles is to treat everyone with fairness and respect, RWJF's deadline policy applies to all applicants. Applicants are expected to notify the program administrator immediately if experiencing difficulty with the online proposal system that may interfere with a timely submission. To do so, click on the "Contact Us" link found in the "Resources" area on the left side of most screens within the online proposal site. We encourage you to submit your proposal in advance of the deadline so that any unforeseen difficulties, e.g., technical problems, may be addressed well before the deadline.

RWJF and HER do not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted. RWJF will make all final grant decisions.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **August 3–October 12, 2022 (3 p.m. ET)**
RWJF online system available to applicants to submit concept papers.
- **October 12, 2022 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of concept papers. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.*
- **November 9, 2022**
Applicants notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal.
- **January 11, 2023 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of invited full proposals. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.*
- **March 31, 2023**
Notification of finalists.
- **May 2023**
Awards begin.

*All proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at my.rwjf.org before you begin the application process. All applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online proposal requirements well before the final submission deadline. Staff may not be able to assist all applicants in the final 24 hours before the submission deadline.

PROGRAM DIRECTION

Direction and technical assistance for the Healthy Eating Research program is provided by Duke University, which serves as the national program office located at:

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Healthy Eating Research

Duke Global Health Institute

310 Trent Drive

Duke Box 90519

Durham, NC 27708

Phone: (800) 578-8636

Email: healthyeating@duke.edu

Website: www.healthyeatingresearch.org

Responsible staff members at the national program office are:

- Mary Story, PhD, RD, *director*
- Megan Lott, MPH, RD, *deputy director*
- Erin Escobar, MPH, *senior research manager*

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Jamie Bussel, MPH, *senior program officer*
- Katherine Hempstead, PhD, *senior policy adviser*
- Jennie Day-Burget, *senior communications officer*
- Jan Mihalow, *program financial analyst*

ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

For more than 45 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working alongside others to build a national Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. For more information, visit rwjf.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter at www.rwjf.org/twitter or on Facebook at www.rwjf.org/facebook.

Sign up to receive email alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at <http://www.rwjf.org/manage-your-subscriptions.html>.

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