

About the Early Stage Investigator Work Group

The Early Stage Investigator (ESI) Work Group is designed specifically for early stage investigators conducting research in the fields of nutrition equity, diet quality, and/or healthy weight/obesity among children and their families. The work group is supported by Healthy Eating Research. Membership is open to postdoctoral fellows and researchers within 5 years of their doctorate degree (PhD, DrPH, ScD, JD, MD, etc.). The sixth cohort launches in August 2026 with membership capped at approximately 30 participants. Membership is open to both HER grantees and researchers new to the HER network.

Since the HER program was launched in 2005, one of the program's primary goals has been to build a vibrant, interdisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers. Leading interdisciplinary work groups that facilitate collaboration and drive the quality and quantity of research and best practices in the field has been one way HER has achieved this goal. Currently, HER leads three work groups in collaboration with CDC's Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NOPREN)—1) [Early Childhood](#), 2) [Healthy Food Retail](#), and 3) [Resilient Food Systems and Nutrition](#)— as well as three additional independent work groups—1) Food Labeling, 2) ESI work group, and 3) Strategic Research Collaborative. This ESI work group is an important mechanism for continuing to support early stage investigators in the field of nutrition.

Work Group Goals

Overall Goal: To support professional development, facilitate collaboration, and build the field of diverse early stage investigators conducting research to improve nutrition equity, diet quality, and reduce obesity among children and their families.

Longer-Term Goals:

1. Increase interdisciplinary collaboration and coordination among ESIs and experienced HER researchers.
2. Increase access to and sharing of measurement tools, data collection, and findings among ESIs.
3. Increase the number and capabilities of ESI applicants for HER proposals.
4. Increase the amount and quality of research conducted by ESIs.

Meeting Frequency and Format

Full work group meetings are held every month for approximately one year and consist of a variety of formats including panel presentations, skill-based workshops, participant research presentations, and group discussions. The topics for the meetings are decided by the two work group chairs and the leadership committee.

Although topics for each cohort may differ, topics covered typically include funding opportunities (e.g., HER, USDA, NIH), work-life balance and well-being, mentorship and networking, non-academia employment, and collaborative sessions where members work towards a deliverable together.

Work Group Chairs

1. Gabby Headrick
2. Kelseanna Hollis-Hansen
3. Ross Hatton

Work Group Fellow

1. Nour Hammad

For more information, please contact:

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