

Meeting summary for Women & Children's Health Committee Zoom Meeting (09/09/2024)

Quick recap

Dr. Caitlin and Dr. Fran Fleming discussed childhood obesity, disparities in the Medicaid population, and the impact of food marketing on different races and ethnicities. Fran also highlighted the work of Dr. Tatiana Andreyeva on the impact of economic incentives on food choices and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on breastfeeding rates and disparities.

Next steps

- Kate Parker Riley to share link to Oral Health Training Academy for registration.
- Dr. Frances Fleming-Milici to connect with Kate Parker Riley about incorporating sugar reduction videos into oral health training.
- Co-Chair Amy Gagliardi to schedule future presentation on relationship between maternity outcomes and oral health.
- Dr. Tatiana Andreyeva to seek alternative funding to continue breastfeeding support research in Connecticut.
- Amy to connect Dr. Frances Fleming-Milici with Dr. Eva Costo regarding student advocate projects.
- Rudd Center team to provide updates on Hartford teen food marketing research project in future meetings.
- Kate Parker-Riley to update Oral Health Training Academy resources with information on mobile clinics and school-based health centers.

Summary

New Program Introduction by Connecticut Dental Health Partnership

The meeting covered the introduction of a new program by the Connecticut Dental Health Partnership, presented by Kate Parker-Riley. Kate expressed excitement about

collaborating with the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council and the Child/Adolescent Quality Access & Policy Committee.

Free Training with Continuing Education Credits

Kate also mentioned that the training is free and offers 1.5 continuing education credits. She encouraged feedback and mentioned plans for a future course for community health workers.

Addressing Childhood Obesity and Medicaid Disparities

She encouraged feedback and promised to share the link widely. Latosha Johnson asked about the possibility of community-based care, to which Kate responded positively, mentioning the use of mobile clinics and school-based health centers. Fran proposed a collaboration on reducing sugary drink consumption among young children, which Kate agreed to. The conversation ended with Rep. Leeper introducing the next presenters, Dr. Caitlin Caspi and Dr. Frances Fleming, who will discuss childhood obesity and disparities in the Medicaid population.

Addressing Food Security and Marketing Disparities

Caitlin, an associate professor at the University of Connecticut, discussed her roles as the Director of Food Security Initiatives at the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health, and the Associate Director of the Yukon Center. She shared her background as a social epidemiologist and her focus on the social determinants of health. Fran Fleming, the Director of Marketing Initiatives at the Yukon Center, introduced herself and discussed her work on analyzing food marketing to children and adolescents, and the impact of targeted marketing practices on different races and ethnicities. Caitlin highlighted the disparities in obesity rates among different races and ethnicities, emphasizing that these disparities are not biologically determined but are influenced by various factors such as socioeconomic disparities and unequal food marketing. She concluded by stating that their work aims to make healthier choices more accessible and easier through upstream policies.

Research Programs and Food Security Initiatives

Caitlin discussed the research programs of the core red center faculty, focusing on the work of Marlene Schwartz and Maria Gombabaca. Marlene's work primarily revolves around addressing food insecurity and promoting healthier food options in schools and the charitable food system. She has conducted research on the impact of policy changes on children's diets and the benefits of removing sugary beverages from schools. Currently, she is working on a project funded by the CDC to strengthen school

wellness policies and practices. Marlene is also involved in establishing nutrition standards for food banks and food pantries, creating a nutrition rating system and a cultural foods guide. Maria, on the other hand, is working on tracking the nutritional quality of foods in the charitable food system and implementing nutrition standards. She is also exploring the levels of scratch cooking in schools and the potential health and economic impacts of increasing scratch cooking. Caitlin, the Director of Food Security Initiatives, has been researching low-income and food insecure households and ways to improve access to healthy food.

Promoting Healthy Food Options and Economic Supports

Caitlin discussed her work in the food retail and charitable food systems, focusing on promoting healthy food options in small stores and transforming food pantries to resemble grocery stores. She also shared her research on the impact of minimum wage policies on diet and obesity in low-income households. Caitlin highlighted the importance of flexible economic supports, such as the expanded Child Tax Credit, in helping families meet their needs. Lastly, she introduced the Meals Plus program, a collaboration with Meals on Wheels Rhode Island, which offers enhanced services for older adults at high nutritional risk.

Addressing Weight-Based Stigma and Food Marketing

Fran discussed the issue of weight-based stigma and its impact on individuals, particularly in healthcare settings, educational institutions, and personal relationships. She highlighted Dr. Poole's work on addressing weight bias and reducing stigma, including resources for healthcare professionals and parents. Fran also shared her own work at the Rudd Center, which began around 13 years ago at Yale before moving to UConn. She discussed the team's research on the marketing of unhealthy foods to children and adolescents, the misleading marketing to parents, and the team's efforts to improve the food market environment. Fran also mentioned the team's work on energy drink marketing practices and their collaboration with Hartford teens to identify food marketing-related issues.

Economic Incentives, Food Choices, and Breastfeeding

Fran discussed Dr. Tatiana Andreyeva's research on the impact of economic incentives on food choices, including sugary drink taxation, healthy food subsidies, and food assistance programs. Dr. Andreyeva's work also involved developing guidelines for the World Health Organization on using fiscal policies to improve diets and prevent chronic diseases globally. Fran also highlighted Dr. Andreyeva's recent work on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 infant formula crisis on breastfeeding rates and disparities. Fran from the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity emphasized the benefits of breastfeeding, noting a 22% lower risk of childhood obesity in children who

were breastfed at all. The Rudd Center conducts research, creates educational materials, and trains future researchers and advocates to promote breastfeeding and inform policy. Amy expressed interest in the Rudd Center's use of student educators and advocates, suggesting a potential collaboration with Partners in Social Research.