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HER NOPREN COVID-19 Food & Nutrition Work Group Receives the 2021 ACPP Health Promotion Policy Award for a Group Contribution to Policy Change

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (August 1, 2021) – Each year, the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) and the Advisory Committee on Public Policy (ACPP) recognizes an individual or group instrumental in nutrition education policy change that forwards the Society’s mission of advancing food and nutrition education research, practice, and policy that promote equity and support public and planetary health. The Healthy Eating Research (HER), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supported Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (NOPREN) jointly supported an ad hoc COVID-19 Food & Nutrition (F&N) Work Group. Formed in early March 2020, this COVID-19 F&N Work Group aimed to quickly identify and disseminate best practices to bring a full range of nutritious foods and beverages to children to protect their health and reduce their risk of obesity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This year’s award will be announced during the 2021 SNEB Annual Conference held virtually on August 8 – 10 and presented at the Advisory Committee on Public Policy Open Meeting on Wednesday, September 15.

The HER NOPREN COVID-19 F&N Work Group is made up of 40 collaborative organizations including SNEB; more than 600 members including a range of researchers, advocates, and practitioners, which strategically includes more than 200 students and early stage investigators. The work group was open to anyone interested in COVID-19, public health emergencies, and food and nutrition, including research focused on financial policies/poverty alleviation program, healthy food distribution, food and nutrition security, diet quality, and disaster response, all with an equity-centered approach.

This innovative work group was launched by SNEB member, Dr. Sheila Fleischhacker (Co-Founder and Co-Chair), in collaboration with several other SNEB members including Dr. Erin Hager (Co-Founder and Co-Chair) and Dr. Caroline Dunn (Fellow) when COVID-19 restrictions began to impact school meal distribution.

The USDA National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service/Seamless Summer Option programs serve nearly 35 million children daily, delivering vital nutrition and financial assistance to families in need. When schools began to close the delivery system for these meals was disrupted. The need for these meals and other pivotal community food access points also increased dramatically as business closures caused parents to lose their jobs.

In order to share information and resources, the HER NOPREN COVID-19 F&N Work Group created a website, weekly resource digest, resource links, and shared drive. In addition to sharing best practices among group members, the HER NOPREN COVID-19 F&N Work Group has produced a student summer speaker series; more than 40 peer-reviewed research articles, perspectives or legislature updates; along with a variety of fact sheets, infographics, press releases, and editorials.

Besides hosting more than 19 meetings to distribute key information, the work group leaders presented more than 23 presentations including briefings to key decision makers.

The value of the work group becomes clear through comments from group members. As one example, Dr. Jim Krieger, Executive Director of Healthy Food America and Clinical Professor at the University of Washington School of Public Health, commented, “The HER NOPREN COVID-19 F&N Work Group is a truly remarkable collaborative environment unlike anything I have experienced. The opportunity to be part of a virtual group of nearly 600 researchers, advocates and public health practitioners focused on nutrition and equity has provided me with community – intellectual and collegial – during this challenging and isolating pandemic. It quickly became the go-to place to keep up with the rapidly developing and impressive policy responses to the challenges COVID has brought to assuring food security and good nutrition.”

As the COVID-19 public health emergency transitions, the group will now focus on long-term food and nutrition resiliency, food systems transformation, and public health emergency and disaster preparedness, including climate-related emergencies under new leadership.

Sara Bleich, PhD, Professor of Public Health Policy at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health, writes, “One of the silver linings from COVID has been the rapid mobilization the public health community to help address food insecurity. A shining example of this is the HER NOPREN COVID-19 F&N Work Group. The evidence generated and collated by this work group has greatly benefitted the field, contributed to policy discussions, and informed my own research. The work group has also provided a critical repository for research in progress and for research tools to advance the science.”

The ACPP Health Promotion Policy Award for a Group Contribution to Policy Change is being awarded to the following members of the HER NOPREN COVID-19 F&N Work Group Leadership Team:

Co-Founders and Co-Chairs

- Sheila Fleischhacker, PhD, JD, RDN
- Erin Hager, PhD

Fellow

- Caroline Dunn, PhD, RDN

Sub-Group Leaders

- Lauren Clay, PhD
- Amelie Hecht, PhD
- Christina Hecht, PHD
- Eliza Kinsey, PhD
- Hannah Lane, PhD
- Gabriella McLoughlin, PhD
- Margaret Read, MS
- Jessica Soldavini, MPH, RD, LDN
- Lina Walkinshaw, MPH

HER Team

- Mary Story, PhD
- Megan Lott, MPH, RDN
- Kirsten Arm, MPH, RDN
- Lindsey Miller, MPH, RDN

NOPREN Team

- Hilary Seligman, MD, MAS
- Melissa Akers, MPH, CPH
- Ronli Levi, MPH, RDN

CDC Team

- CAPT Heidi Blanck, PhD
 - Amy Lowery Warnock, MPA
 - Sarah Sliwa, PhD
 - Caitlin Merlo, MPH, RDN
 - Carrie Dooyema, PhD
 - Brianna Dumas, MPH, RD, LD
 - Diane Harris, PhD
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The Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior advances food and nutrition education research, practice, and policy that promote equity and support public and planetary health. To learn more, visit www.sneb.org.