



Texas Senate Finance Committee
Senate Bill 1 – Article II
Written Comments on Behalf of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas
February 21, 2023

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Hinojosa, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas, a coalition of more than 30 organizations working to promote policies that prevent and reduce obesity in Texas, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC's) and Department of State Health Services (DSHS's) budgets for the 2024-2025 biennium.

We are grateful to Chairwoman Huffman and the entire committee for your investments in public health programs and infrastructure that supports Texans leading healthy and productive lives. We look forward to working with you as you refine the budget over the coming weeks to support investments in healthy environments and access to nutritious foods.

Investment in DSHS's Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Programs

We commend the committee for fully funding Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention programs at DSHS. Investment in these programs makes healthy choices easier for all Texans across different stages of their lives, creates the infrastructure for Texas to apply for federal grants, and can help save the state on future health costs.

Chronic Disease Prevention projects under the Diabetes Prevention and Control, Heart Disease and Stroke Program, and the Obesity Prevention divisions provide vital resources to local health departments and community organizations and transform environments with evidence-based interventions addressing physical activity and healthy eating. These programs collect and evaluate intervention data to ensure successful, impactful, and effective use of public health resources. State general revenue investment in these programs also creates the infrastructure that makes Texas a competitive applicant for obesity-related federal grant funding opportunities.

Obesity and chronic disease cost Texas and Texas businesses in health care costs as well as through lost time at school and work, and lower productivity.¹ Continued funding for Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention will keep Texans healthy and productive, saving the state future funds.

Sustaining this investment in health promotion programs is important as obesity remains a critical issue in our state. **Texas has the 8th highest obesity rate for youth ages 10 through 17 and 13th highest adult obesity rate in the country.** Youth have an obesity rate of 20.3 percent and adults have an obesity rate of 36.1 percent, an increase from 29.2 percent in 2012.^{2,3} Texas is 12th in the nation for both rates of adults with diabetes and hypertension at 12.2 percent and 31.7 percent respectively.¹

¹ Combs, Susan. 2011. "Gaining Costs, Losing Time: The Obesity Crisis in Texas."

https://demographics.texas.gov/Resources/Publications/2011/2011-02_GainingCostsLosingTime.pdf, p 17

² The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Trust for America's Health. (2020). The State of Obesity in Texas. Retrieved from <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/states/tx>

³ Trust for America's Health (2022). The State of Obesity 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.tfah.org/report-details/state-of-obesity-2022/#:~:text=Nationally%2C%2041.9%20percent%20of%20adults,obesity%20rate%20of%2041.4%20percent>

Allocate Funds for HHSC to Implement SNAP Incentives Programs

During this time of high inflation, many families are forced to make difficult decisions in order to feed their families. Allocating funds for HHSC to implement SNAP incentive programs can help families access healthy foods within their budget, encourage families to establish healthy habit that support lifelong wellness, and stimulate local economies.

SNAP incentive programs, like Double Up Food Bucks, work by offering SNAP recipients discounts or matching coupons when they spend their benefits on healthy fruits and vegetables.⁴ Without these incentives, thousands of families would not be able to afford fruits and vegetables for their children. In several studies, incentives directed at low-income populations are associated with expanded physical access to healthy foods.

In addition to direct benefits for families, these incentives can also address the problem of food deserts and increase economic activity. Increased spending on fruits and vegetables has a direct impact on revenues for local merchants and grocery stores. Every 5 dollars spent using SNAP generates as much as 9 dollars in economic activity.⁵ These benefits flow all the way back to farms and agricultural producers.

Currently, SNAP incentive programs are implemented at the local and regional level through federal grants and private funding. However, there is a huge opportunity to expand these benefits to rural Texans, who currently lack access. We encourage the committee appropriate \$6 million in General Revenue for HHSC to use to implement a SNAP incentive program in Texas.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on DSHS's and HHSC's budgets for the 2024-2025 biennium. For any questions or follow-up, please contact Joel Romo, Chair of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas Legislative Committee at Joel.Romo@texanapublicaffairs.com.

⁴ Sustainable Food Center. Double Up Food Bucks. <https://sustainablefoodcenter.org/double-up-food-bucks>

⁵ SNAP to Health. "The Real Benefits of SNAP." <https://www.snapttohealth.org/snap/the-real-benefits-of-the-snap-program/>