



89TH

LEGISLATIVE

SESSION

RECAP

AUGUST 2025



**PARTNERSHIP FOR  
A HEALTHY TEXAS**

**CONQUERING OBESITY**

*Dedicated to developing and promoting policies  
and programs that prevent obesity in Texas.*



**Methodist Healthcare Ministries**  
OF SOUTH TEXAS, INC.

*"Serving Humanity to Honor God"*

The Partnership for a Healthy Texas gratefully acknowledges Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc. for their financial support of this publication.

The opinions expressed in this document are those of The Partnership and do not necessarily reflect the views of Methodist Healthcare Ministries.



The Partnership for a Healthy Texas began in 2006 when a diverse group of organizations came together to address the epidemic of obesity in Texas. We believe that working together we can maximize our impact on the health of Texans and drive economic productivity by reducing the burden of chronic disease.

**MISSION:** To develop and promote state policies that prevent and reduce obesity in Texas.



Find what works for Texans



Set priorities for the Legislature



Follow through and track success

**Chair: David Lakey, MD**

Chief Medical Officer and Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs,  
The University of Texas System

**Vice-Chair: Clayton Travis**

Director of Advocacy and Health Policy,  
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**Legislative Chair: Joel Romo**

Vice President of Governmental Affairs,  
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**Communications Co-Chair: Klaus Madsen**

Independent Population Health Consultant  
Klaus Madsen Health Solutions

**Communications Co-Chair: Kara Ihedigbo**

Project Coordinator  
Harris County Public Health

**Programs Chair: Shelby Flores-Thorpe, PhD**

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living  
UTHealth School of Public Health Austin Campus

**Partnership for a Healthy Texas Steering Committee Members include:**



**Educational Resource Partners:**



The Partnership for a Healthy Texas gratefully acknowledges Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc., for their support.



## SESSION BY THE NUMBERS

**140  
DAYS** 

 **8,719**  
Bills Introduced

**\$148.2  
BILLION**   
Available Funds in  
General Revenue

 **1,213**  
Bills Passed

 **13.6%**  
of Filed Bills Passed

### Policy Wins to Keep Texans Healthy!

1. \$6 million GR in Renewed Funding for Nutrition Incentives Programs.
2. \$432 AF in Investments to Improve Eligibility and Enrollment for Medicaid and SNAP
3. House Bill 26: Expanded Nutrition Counseling and Nutrition Programs in Medicaid.
4. Senate Bill 25: Strengthened Recess & Physical Education Requirements.

## CONTEXT OF THE 89TH

The 89th Texas Legislative Session saw an eagerness for policymakers to be back in the building filing a record-setting 8,719 bills between the House and Senate. While the session lacked the acute crises that defined previous years, broader contextual factors including persistent inflation, growing interest in health and wellness policy, and massive shakeups in public health at the federal level helped shape the policy landscape. Additionally, state leadership priorities regarding school choice, property taxes, border security, and social issues all influenced conversations in the Pink Dome.

The Partnership's Legislative Committee identified strategic priorities aligned with some of these emerging issues. Rising food costs and economic instability underscored the need to expand access to affordable, nutritious food. New concerns around the content of food from the "Make America Healthy Again" movement elevated the role of nutrition and food-as-medicine approaches in chronic disease prevention. A healthy state budget again presented an opportunity to push forward bold, evidence-based solutions.

Throughout the session, the Partnership remained committed to engaging with lawmakers, providing expert input, and advancing bipartisan support for key initiatives. As a result, the Partnership helped secure major policy victories, including authorization of Medicaid to pay for nutrition counseling, prohibition in restricting recess participation, renewed investments in Double Up Food Bucks (DUFBS) and aid to state agencies to ensure children and their families have timely access to healthcare services and food assistance.



The Partnership for a Healthy Texas has identified three priorities and seven recommended policies for consideration by the 89th Texas Legislature. These policies are aimed at positively impacting the obesity epidemic in Texas.

## PRIORITIES FOR THE 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION:

### **Drive Systems Change to Meet the Needs of Texas Families**

1. Address nutritional needs of low-income families and other non-medical drivers of health through Texas Medicaid.
2. Eliminate administrative hurdles to get enrolled in Medicaid and SNAP by:
  - Notifying parents about their child's eligibility for Medicaid when applying to SNAP
  - Boosting ex parte/administrative renewal rates
  - Fix all known system errors and glitches in TIERS
  - Increase Community Partner Program funding
  - Improved 211 capabilities.

### **Ensure Children Are Active and Healthy**

1. Require school districts to create and institute recess policies that reflect best practices and strengthen physical education requirements.
2. Reinstate health education as a graduation requirement to ensure our children are learning healthy and safe habits for life.

### **Connect Families with Healthy Food Options**

1. Create permanent funding for SNAP Incentives program, Double Up Food Bucks, to increase access to fresh fruit and vegetables by SNAP beneficiaries.
2. Automate 6-month SNAP eligibility checks to decrease burden on families.
3. Keep kids fed by implementing Summer EBT for 2025.

# POLICY PRIORITY WINS

## **PRIORITY: Address nutritional needs of low-income families and other non-medical drivers of health through Texas Medicaid.**

### **House Bill 26: (Hull) Advances Nutrition Counseling in Medicaid**

Research indicates that nonclinical factors, such as where a person lives, contribute to as much as 80 percent of a person's health outcomes. Food insecurity is one of those key drivers of health, and as a result, a driver of higher health care costs. The CDC suggests food insecurity adds about \$53 billion annually to health care costs in the U.S. and up to \$2 billion in Texas. Access to nutrition counseling, along with nutritious foods, can help prevent health issues, chronic diseases, and the associated health costs.

House Bill 26 by Representative Lacey Hull was heard in the House Human Services committee early in session and voted out unanimously on March 25, and passed on a 132-13 vote a month later. The Senate version of the bill, Senate Bill 3001 by Senator Lois Kolkhorst, was left pending in committee a month after the House bill was passed in the House committee. The final version of the bill will authorize Medicaid to pay for nutrition counseling, instruction services, and authorizes a pilot program that will provide medically tailored meals to high-risk pregnant women on Medicaid.

*Though the final form of the bill is not as comprehensive as we had hoped, through continued advocacy efforts, HB 26 passed as amended with the opportunity to keep expanding in future sessions.*

### **Key Partnership Advocacy**

Feeding Texas hosted Food is Medicine Advocacy Day and mobilized its 80+ organization Texas Food Policy Roundtable to meet with their elected officials, educate them on Food is Medicine, and urge them to vote for the bill with the appropriate language.



# POLICY PRIORITY WINS

## **PRIORITY: Create permanent funding for SNAP Incentives program, Double Up Food Bucks, to increase access to fresh fruit and vegetables by SNAP beneficiaries.**

### **\$6 Million General Revenue Investment in Nutrition Incentives**

During the 88th Texas Legislative Session (2023), Sustainable Food Center (SFC) together with American Heart Association, the Partnership for Healthy Texas, and a network of farmers markets across the state, secured \$6 million in state funding for Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB), a statewide nutrition incentive program that supports SNAP recipients and strengthens local agriculture. In the 89th session, SFC successfully secured continued support. Senate Bill 1 (Sen. Joan Huffman / Rep. Greg Bonnen), the final state budget includes \$6 million in General Revenue for FY 2026, with authority to carry forward unspent funds into FY 2027. The adopted rider directs HHSC to administer grants to nonprofits with the capacity and partnerships to implement fruit and vegetable incentives for SNAP households. Programs funded under this rider must report outcomes related to produce consumption, local food sales, and healthy food access.

### **Key Partnership Advocacy**

"With Double Up Texas, low-income families have more access to nutritious foods, local farmers and merchants benefit from increased business, and additional dollars stay within the local economy – a triple win for Texas."

- Hannah Thornton, Sustainable Food Center testimony to Senate Health and Human Services Committee, November 2024

In addition, Partnership Organizations held many meetings with Legislators on the respective Article II Subcommittees and on the Budget Conference Committee.

SFC's legislative strategy began in August 2024 with outreach to the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), which ultimately included DUFB in its Legislative Appropriations Request—a key early milestone. Throughout the session, SFC engaged legislative champions in both chambers, including Senators Perry, Huffman, Kolkhorst, Paxton, and Alvarado, and Representatives, Bonnen, and Howard. SFC staff and partners provided testimony, delivered policy briefs, and met with key committees to advocate for continued investment. Local farmers markets and grocers also voiced their support. The rider remained in place through the full appropriations process, including floor debates and conference negotiations. As a result, DUFB will continue to expand its impact in communities across Texas, and its success contributed to broader discussions on food access and preventative health in the state.

***Through continuous advocacy efforts, led by the Sustainable Food Center, funding was included to expand nutrition incentive programs! opportunity to keep expanding in future sessions.***

# POLICY PRIORITY WINS

## **PRIORITY: Eliminate administrative hurdles to get enrolled in Medicaid and SNAP**

### **\$432 Million All Funds Investment to Improve Eligibility and Enrollment Processes**

The end of the federal public health emergency initiated a redetermination of eligibility for millions of Texans, adding to the already substantial workload of HHSC. Although this redetermination process is largely complete, the aftermath continues to strain HHSC resources. In addition to these challenges, Texas lags significantly behind other states in using data matching technologies that could streamline the eligibility determination process, relying instead on outdated and labor-intensive methods that increase costs and error rates. This inefficiency not only impacts the health outcomes of vulnerable populations but also represents a considerable financial burden on the state due to the inefficient use of resources. Additionally, the existing 211 system struggles to provide accurate support to families navigating the complexities of the application or appeals processes. The cumulative effect of these challenges underscores an urgent need for enhanced staffing, improved systems, and better workload management within HHSC.

**Senate Bill 1 (Sen. Joan Huffman / Rep. Greg Bonnen)**, the state's budget bill, included **\$432 million in All Funds** to meet eligibility processing standards, support the 2-1-1 system, and continue the overhaul of the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS). However, it did not allocate additional funding for the Community Partner Program or provide guidance to enhance ex-parte (automatic) enrollment.

However, **House Bill 321 (Rep. John Bucy)** would have required the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to notify parents when their child is likely eligible for Medicaid or CHIP based on income data collected from their SNAP application. This commonsense reform could have helped bridge the gap in enrollment by ensuring families don't miss out on health coverage their children are eligible for. The bill passed the House with bipartisan support but was not referred to a Senate committee and ultimately failed to pass. Furthermore, **House Bill 38 (Rep. John Bucy)** aimed to transform the 2-1-1 Texas Information and Referral Network (TIRN) into a more powerful statewide connector for services. Key provisions included adding texting capabilities, enhancing screening and referral navigation, supporting closed-loop referrals, and increasing data transparency. These changes would have significantly upgraded 2-1-1's functionality as a real-time, tech-enabled public resource. Like HB 321, the bill passed the House but was not referred to a Senate committee and did not advance.

***The Partnership would like to thank all advocates of the Children's Health Coverage Coalition for their support and partnership to secure this funding!***

### **Key Partnership Advocacy**

The Partnership played a key role organizing organizational sign on to multiple comment letters throughout the Appropriations process advocating for this investment of funds!

# POLICY PRIORITY WINS

## **PRIORITY: Require school districts to create and institute recess policies that reflect best practices and strengthen physical education requirements.**

### **Senate Bill 25: (Kolkhorst) Ensuring Children Have Access to Recess and PE**

Research shows that fit students perform better inside and outside the classroom. Recess is a critical time for physical activity during the school day. Recess is considered unstructured time for physical activity during the school day. At least 20 minutes of recess per day allows children the opportunity to practice life skills such as cooperation, taking turns, following rules, sharing, communication, negotiation, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Recess also provides the creative social and emotional benefits of play. Physical education is an opportunity for students to learn age-appropriate skills to develop the mind-body connection, which improves overall wellness and mental health. Physical education teaches youth how to be active and inspires fitness as a key element of daily life.

**Senate Bill 25 (Sen. Lois Kolkhorst)** prohibits a school employee, in providing an applicable physical education curriculum, from restricting participation recess or other physical activity offered as part of the district's or charter school's physical education curriculum for a student enrolled in kindergarten or in a grade level below grade six as a penalty for the student's academic performance or behavior. This will be effective as of September 1, 2025 and we are appreciative of this initial step in increasing physical activity and the discussions held on this policy that we hope will further other policies related to recess. The bill also requires nutrition education for health-related degrees and establishes an advisory council to provide nutrition guidelines for Texans. Finally, the bill requires certain foods to be labeled, warning consumers about their contents.

Similarly, **House Bill 2849 (Rep. Alma Allen)** would direct the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop model policies on recess periods during the school day that encourage unstructured, age-appropriate outdoor playtime for at least twenty minutes daily. The legislation would also require each school district board to implement a model recess policy based on the TEA model policies and recommendations from the local School Health Advisory Council. Districts would also report their policies to TEA and include them on their district website. House Bill 2849 passed the Texas House but was not referred to a committee in the Texas Senate and ultimately failed.



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED WORK

## **PRIORITY: Reinstate health education as a graduation requirement to ensure our children are learning healthy and safe habits for life.**

Effective health education helps students develop skills and habits to maintain a healthy lifestyle. A dedicated health education course in high school is essential to equip Texas students with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions that support lifelong well-being. At a time when young people are facing rising rates of anxiety, obesity, substance use, and risky behaviors, a comprehensive health class offers a critical opportunity to build a foundation in physical, mental, emotional, and social health. Such a course can cover vital topics including nutrition, physical activity, substance abuse prevention, mental health awareness, healthy relationships, consent, reproductive health, and disease prevention, many of which are already part of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Ensuring that every student has access to this education is an investment in a healthier, safer, and more informed generation of Texans.

While no stand-alone bill passed during the session to require a separate health education graduation requirement, **Senate Bill 25 (Sen. Lois Kolkhorst)** does require all school districts and open-enrollment charter school to provide an elective course in nutrition and wellness that meets the requirements for one-half elective credit. This instruction must include curriculum requirements based on nutritional guidelines recommended by the Texas Nutrition Advisory Committee, created in this same legislation. In addition, the course may incorporate other relevant material including culinary skills, horticulture, and consumer economics.



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED WORK

## **PRIORITY: Automate 6-month SNAP eligibility checks to decrease burden on families.**

Texas HHSC had a significant backlog of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications, with over 222,000 applications waiting to be processed as of September 2024. Despite being under a federal Corrective Action Plan, HHSC has struggled for years to meet processing deadlines. As a result, thousands of Texans eligible for SNAP are going months without critical food assistance. HHSC requires most SNAP recipients to provide updated information about their household circumstances every 6 months to ensure that they are still eligible, and HHSC staff must manually process each submission. Streamlining this 6-month eligibility check using technology and verified data sources offers a systemic solution to reduce workload and improve timeliness.

**Representative Guillen filed House Bill 2202** and **Senator Cesar Blanco filed the companion, Senate Bill 1031** in the Senate. Unfortunately, neither bill received a hearing.

### **Key Partnership Advocacy**

Feeding Texas, along with the Texas Food Policy Roundtable, hosted the Streamline SNAP Eligibility Checks at 6 Months Advocacy Day at the Capitol. Feeding Texas brought two advocates with lived experience to advocate for a hearing and passage of HB 2202 / SB 1031.



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED WORK

## **PRIORITY: Keep kids fed by implementing Summer EBT for 2025.**

Child hunger spikes in the summer because millions of children lose access to the school breakfasts and lunches they receive during the regular school year. Summer EBT is a brand-new USDA program that allows low-income families with school-aged children to receive benefits when schools are closed for the summer. Summer EBT benefits are 100% federally funded, and administrative costs are split 50/50 between state and federal funds.

**Senate Bill 1 (Sen. Joan Huffman / Rep. Greg Bonnen)** appropriated \$60 million GR to implement Summer EBT in FY27. The approved budget rider language included language that the appropriation will be void if the federal matching rates for the program administration are changed in a matter that results in a higher cost to Texas. Unfortunately, Governor Abbott ultimately vetoed the appropriation. The door remains open for advocates to bring Summer EBT back on the table for future sessions. As legislation is not necessarily required, advocacy continues with the Governor's office in the interim.

## **Key Partnership Advocacy**

The Texas Pediatric Society sent 80 pediatric residents, fellows and medical students to the Capitol during session to advocate for Summer EBT via their Pediatric Trainee Advocacy Day.

Feeding Texas, in partnership with Share Our Strength and Every Texan, hosted a Summer EBT Advocacy Day at the Capitol at the beginning of the legislative session, bringing 15 advocates to meet with lawmakers. A press conference was also held to raise awareness about the importance of Summer EBT.



# ADDITIONAL BILLS AND BUDGET ITEMS OF NOTE



## **PASSED:**

### **Senate Bill 379 (Sen. Mayes Middleton) – Restricting SNAP Purchases of Non-Nutritious Items**

SB 379 prohibits the use of SNAP benefits to purchase sweetened beverages and candy without further preparation. The bill passed both chambers and was signed by the Governor. Implementation is contingent on federal waiver approval from the USDA. If approved, it will take effect September 1, 2025.

## **FAILED TO PASS:**

### **House Bill 2677 (Rep. Senfronia Thompson) – Medicaid Coverage for Obesity Treatment and Diabetes Prevention**

HB 2677 would have expanded Medicaid coverage to include services such as anti-obesity medications, bariatric surgery, intensive behavioral therapy, and CDC-recognized diabetes prevention programs. The bill was voted out of Committee and placed on the House calendar, but it did not receive a vote. The Partnership monitored this bill due to its implications for access to obesity care.

### **House Bill 2412 (Rep. John Bucy) – Private Insurance Coverage for Anti-Obesity Medications**

HB 2412 proposed requiring employer-sponsored health insurance plans to cover GLP-1 receptor agonist medications for obesity treatment. The bill was filed and referred to Committee but did not advance. The Partnership monitored this bill due to its implications for access to obesity care.



## 2025 Partnership for a Healthy Texas Legislative Champions

The success of the Partnership's policy priorities relies on key legislative champions who advocate for the policies that will impact obesity and healthiness across the state. This year, the Partnership recognizes Representative Armando Walle and Representative Lacey Hull as our 2025 Partnership for a Healthy Texas Legislative Champions for their work on health and nutrition policies!



**Representative  
Armando Walle**

**Houston – District 140**



**Representative  
Lacey Hull**

**Houston – District 138**

During the 89th Texas Legislative Session, Representative Armando Walle emerged as a key advocate for addressing food insecurity and advancing health equity. Rep. Walle championed Summer EBT throughout the budgetary process, working with colleagues to secure \$60 million in funding to help feed low-income children during the summer months. Although the appropriation was ultimately vetoed, Rep. Walle remains committed to ensuring children and families have access to nutritious food year-round.

Representative Lacey Hull emerged as a leading advocate for advancing preventive health and nutrition policy in Texas as the Chair of the House Human Services Committee. She authored House Bill 26 which authorizes Medicaid managed care organizations to offer medically appropriate nutrition counseling and instruction services. HB 26 also establishes a pilot program to provide medically tailored meals to high-risk pregnant women on Medicaid who may be struggling with a chronic condition.

We look forward to continuing to work with these legislators to address access to nutritious foods and prevent obesity across Texas!

# Partnership Policy Achievements Over the Years

Policy achievements often take many sessions of advocacy. Each session, we are excited to get new wins across the finish line and continue to push others closer to passage.

*Below are the historic achievements of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas.*

## 80TH

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2007)

- **Senate Bill 530** – Set requirements for 30 minutes of physical activity in elementary school, 4 semesters of physical activity in middle school, and required annual fitness assessments for students in grades 3-12.
- **Funding** to implement coordinated school health programs along with comprehensive obesity prevention programs statewide.
- **Senate Bill 555** – Recognizing Texas Fruit and Vegetable Month in April, and House Bill 2313 designating the second week in September as Texas Obesity Awareness Week.
- **House Bill 1297, House Bill 2252** - Established structure for worksite wellness programs for state employees.
- **House Bill 4062** – Moved nutrition programs from HHSC to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

## 81ST

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2009)

- **Senate Bill 283 & Senate Bill 892** – Support implementation of coordinated school health by strengthening criteria for SHACs and requiring all schools to evaluate their school health program as a part of their campus improvement plan.
- **Senate Bill 282, Senate Bill 343, Senate Bill 1027, and Senate Bill 395** – Improve nutrition education by creating grant programs to support nutrition education, creating an advisory committee to study availability of healthy foods, establishing a farm-to-school task force, and creating the Early Childhood Health and Nutrition Interagency Council.
- **Senate Bill 891** – Set clear definitions of physical education and required a student-teacher ratio for PE classes.
- **Senate Bill 161** – Allows specialty license plate fees to fund the Safe Routes to School Program.

## 82ND

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2011)

- **Budget Measure** Allowing the comptroller to use \$2 million to direct an anti-obesity program, including mapping obesity data and creating an obesity information web portal.
- **Senate Bill 226** – Requirement to report de-identified individual data from the Fitnessgram to the Texas Education Agency.
- **Senate Bill 89** – Expanded the Summer Food Program for low-income children.

## 83RD

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2013)

- **Senate Bill 376** – Ensures nutritious breakfast for students at schools where at least 80 percent of children are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.
- **House Bill 749** – Requires TDA to partner with Baylor University's Texas Hunger Initiative to develop a plan to increase outcomes in the summer food service program.
- **House Bill 1018** – Encourages school and community partnerships for increasing physical activity and fitness.
- **House Bill 2020** – Allows state agencies to develop wellness programs that provide financial incentives to employees.
- **Senate Bill 503** – Establishes the Expanded Learning Opportunities Council.

# Partnership Policy Achievements Over the Years

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*Below are the historic achievements of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas.*

## 84TH

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2015)

- **House Bill 262** - established limited immunity from liability for landowners offering space for community gardens.
- **Increased funding** for Brighter Bites School Nutrition Program.
- **Increase in funding** for Feeding with Impact Program.

## 85TH

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2017)

- **Senate Bill 1873/House Bill 3606** - Required a report from school districts to the Texas Education Agency on the quality of the districts' physical education requirements.

## 86TH

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2019)

- **House Bill 3541/Senate Bill 952** - Created SNAP incentives programs pilot at HHSC.
- **House Bill 1808/Senate Bill 952** - Updated child care standards related to nutrition, physical activity, and screen time.

## 87TH

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2021)

- **Ensured Full Funding** of the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant Program.
- **Senate Bill 224** - Streamlined the application process for SNAP for senior citizens.
- **Protected health promotion and chronic disease prevention funding.**

## 88TH

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2023)

- **\$6 Million** New general revenue investment in nutrition incentives.
- **House Bill 1287** - Updated SNAP vehicle asset test limits.

## 89TH

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(2025)

- **\$6 Million** New general revenue investment in nutrition incentives.
- **\$433 Million** to upgrade the state's aging eligibility system to help families access Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP.
- **House Bill 26** - Authorization of Medicaid to pay for nutrition counseling.
- **Senate Bill 25** - Strengthened PE and Recess Requirements.