THE MISSION of the Prevention Research Center at Tulane University is to reduce or prevent overweight and obesity in the Greater New Orleans Area by addressing the physical and social environmental factors influencing physical activity and diet. The PRC accomplishes this through participatory research; collaboration with community partners and policy makers; communication about environmental factors related to physical activity and diet with public health practitioners, policy makers and community partners; and training of public health professionals, paraprofessionals and community members. Founded in 1998, the Tulane PRC is one of 26 centers funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Public Health Intervention Research
The overall goal of the Tulane PRC’s Public Health Intervention Research project (2014-2019 grant cycle) is to improve the weight status of residents in one New Orleans neighborhood, compared to residents of a control neighborhood. A variety of strategies will be employed at multiple levels to determine the collective impact on the intervention neighborhood as a whole, as well as within a core cohort of participants, and to create a model toolkit that can be disseminated to other New Orleans neighborhoods.

Active Living Projects
Safe Routes to School
Under a Safe Routes to School grant, the Tulane PRC is partnering with New Orleans City Council’s School Transportation Safety Committee to update the New Orleans Police Department’s Crossing Guard Manual and promote safe walking and biking opportunities in communities and around schools. The PRC has also provided technical assistance to schools applying for Safe Routes to School grants and acted as the lead organization for the KidsWalk Coalition, a New Orleans-based coalition dedicated to improving the health of New Orleanians by creating opportunities for physical activity.

Healthy Eating Projects
Makin’ Groceries
The Makin’ Groceries project was designed to assess the impact of a new supermarket in a low-income neighborhood where the nearest supermarket is more than one mile away. The study aims to also examine the impact of additional health programming and services onsite at the new supermarket and healthy food retail project. Household shoppers in the neighborhood where the new supermarket and health programming are located have been surveyed in addition to household shoppers in a matched control neighborhood that does not currently have a supermarket within one mile.

School Salad Bar Evaluation
In New Orleans, the United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA) provided salad bars to 43 schools through the “Let’s Move Salad Bars to Schools” program. Under a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Tulane PRC has designed an evaluation study, through multiple school levels, to examine the functioning, maintenance, and effectiveness of the salad bars in New Orleans school lunch programs. The knowledge gained from this study may contribute to increased salad bar use in New Orleans schools and assure higher levels of use and sustainability, thereby increasing access to fresh fruit and vegetables by New Orleans students.
New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee
The Tulane PRC leads the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee (FPAC), an advisory body to the New Orleans City Council, which is made up of diverse members from the public, private and civic sectors. In partnership with FPAC, the PRC directed research and advocacy for the city’s Fresh Food Retailer Initiative to improve access to grocery stores, farmers markets and other fresh food retail outlets in neighborhoods. A second FPAC initiative has worked to improve school food and child nutrition in a context that also supports local farmers.

Edible Schoolyard Evaluation
The Edible Schoolyard New Orleans (ESYNOLA), which has garden and kitchen-based programs at five FirstLine charter schools in New Orleans, selected the PRC to lead an evaluation of its activities during the 2013-2014 school year. PRC staff, with the help of public health graduate students, conducted surveys with students and parents and led focus groups with students, parents and teachers. The PRC was selected to lead another year of evaluation for the 2014-2015 school year.

Community Engagement Projects

Health Promotion Practicum Program
The Tulane PRC regularly offers practicum internship opportunities for exceptional public health students at Tulane University. The PRC selects qualified community partners to host students in practica that incorporate critical-thinking skills and address specific public health competencies, such as communication and informatics, diversity and culture, leadership, program planning, and systems thinking. PRC staff support students and host organizations throughout the internship process.

Neighborhood Ambassador Program
In early 2011, the PRC launched its Neighborhood Ambassador Program to connect neighborhood groups to health-related resources and programs, depending on each community’s needs and goals. Assistance from the PRC includes providing skills to support neighborhoods to initiate and maintain future health-related activities, including walking groups, health fairs, cooking demonstrations and community gardens.

Seminars and Trainings
Community partners, students, staff and faculty are invited to our annual series of seminars and workshops. One series features the latest Innovations in Public Health Research and Practice with invited seminar leaders from New Orleans and beyond. Another series teaches valuable communications skills that can be directly applied to research and public health field work. A third series is targeted toward community partners’ needs in career and organizational development, such as grant writing, facilitation skills and program planning and evaluation. And a fourth series is hosted as an online webinar and highlights research and health promotion topics related to the PRC’s mission.

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