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CUNY School of Public Health Selected to Evaluate Community Impact by Food Industry-led Hunger and Obesity Effort

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NEW YORK – The City University of New York School of Public Health (CUNY SPH) has been selected to provide evaluation and external validation of community programs that encourage active, healthy lifestyles, which are sponsored by major food and beverage companies. The initiative, an academic research partnership called Commitment to Healthy Communities, is an agreement between the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation (HWCF) and the CUNY SPH to catalog, assess and report upon the quality and impact of these programs in communities in the U.S.

Selected through a competitive proposal process, CUNY SPH will design the evaluation methodology and provide an external validation of the information collected and reported.

While poor nutrition and physical inactivity remain two of the most preventable risk factors for chronic disease in the United States, the food and beverage industry currently spends millions of dollars each year investing in community health programs. To date, however, no standardized metrics have been developed to measure the impact of these industry-supported programs.

Under the leadership of Professor Terry Huang, an expert on obesity and community health, CUNY SPH researchers will partner with HWCF to develop an evaluation system

to benchmark community programs that encourage active, healthy lifestyles, which are supported by member companies of the foundation.

“The CUNY School of Public Health is focused on innovations that can spur change across sectors to promote health,” Dr. Huang said. “However, these are complex public health challenges that require multi-pronged and multi-sectoral approaches. Benchmarking industry activities is an effective way to hold companies accountable and to incentivize innovation and change, and we are very enthusiastic about this opportunity to contribute to this partnership.”

The ultimate goal of the academic research partnership, Huang, says, is to better maximize industry investment to promote health in communities. The project was launched in January 2015. The first industry report is expected in early 2016. Data collection will be on an ongoing basis, with the methodology refined and program information updated in 2016-17. The partners also hope that the new benchmarking system will lead to other companies to participate in the future, so that synergy can be achieved in community health.

About the Commitment to Healthy Communities

The initiative will catalog, assess and report upon the engagement of the food and beverage industry in their local communities, specifically to prevent hunger and obesity.

This initiative will:

- Establish a new standard that allows the food and beverage industry to assess the effectiveness of community programs. It is supported by advisory boards which include key influencers from public health, academia and NGOs.
- Contribute to industry goals as outlined in the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) Healthy Living and Healthy Choices Initiative.
- Develop common metrics for all programs with the potential to contribute to a reduction in hunger and obesity.
- Develop a collective impact-type framework that includes best practices for program, governance, program design, and community engagement. This will be used to assess the effectiveness of each program and identify areas for improvement.
- Provide feedback to participating companies and identify possible partnership opportunities with other companies, NGOs and community members to further the impact of existing programs.
- Results will be externally validated by CUNY and will document the impact of these programs, provide aggregate reporting on common metrics and provide additional information on certain individual programs. Those results will be publically available by Q2 2016.

About the CUNY School of Public Health

The CUNY SPH promotes health and social justice in New York City and across the globe

through innovation and leadership. The mission of the School is to provide a collaborative and accessible environment for excellence in education, research, and service in public health, to promote and sustain healthier populations in New York City and around the world, and to shape policy and practice in public health for all. More information at: www.sph.cuny.edu