

# Home Plate: An Intervention Empowering Low-income Parents to Prepare Healthy Food at Home

## Statement of Problem

At mealtime, families nationwide face the conflicting priorities of time, taste, cost, and nutrition, and they often make decisions that undervalue nutrition. More than two in three U.S. adults are now considered to be overweight or obese, along with nearly one in three children. But obesity prevention interventions are not one-size-fits-all. In a national study, low-income families were found to be more likely to cook dinner six or seven nights per week compared to their middle- and high-income peers. However, low-income families are also more likely to experience food insecurity and lack of access to healthy foods. Low-income families need targeted intervention and prevention efforts to address the food insecurity and lack of access issues that often get in the way of healthy eating at home. By providing these family-centered programs to parents, we can foster healthy eating at home and improve the health of the children we see in our practices.

## Description

### Improving home food preparation practices among families with young children



**1/2** of all African American and Latino children born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes or heart disease.

Our research explores how to foster healthy eating in the home, recognizing that this is a critical, yet underemphasized, component of the obesity epidemic. We are designing, testing, and refining a series of classes for low-income families with young children that provide them with healthy cooking and food skills. Drawing on best practices and the expertise of our community partners, our program provides one of the few scalable interventions with a peer mentoring component to sustainably address food insecurity and improve health outcomes in low-income communities.

## Next Steps

Starting with a program in a local Philadelphia community, we intend to demonstrate best practice and then offer others the opportunity to learn from our work and implement similar programs in their own communities.

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## Suggested Citation

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## PolicyLab Leads

### **Senbagam Virudachalam MD, MSHP**

#### **Faculty Member**

Senbagam Virudachalam is a faculty member at PolicyLab, the Division of General Pediatrics and Clinical Futures at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). She is also an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania, a primary care pediatrician at CHOP and serves as the faculty lead for PolicyLab's Family & Community Health Portfolio. Dr. Virudachalam's research focuses on food justice, advancing equity in diet quality and health outcomes for all children. She studies cross-sector approaches to ensure that all children have stable access to healthy food environments at home and in their communities, enabling them to grow into healthy adults. Dr. Virudachalam has extensive experience conducting community-engaged research, especially with regard to the evaluation of Home Plate, a food literacy and cooking skills intervention for low-income parents that she developed in close partnership with Early Head Start. Dr. Virudachalam serves as the scientific director of culinary medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine and as the director of sustainable community health partnerships at the Community Health and Literacy Center in South Philadelphia.

Dr. Virudachalam holds a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, where she graduated with honors in Molecular and Cell Biology and with distinction in general scholarship. She earned her medical degree from the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine and completed her pediatric residency at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland. She then completed an academic general pediatrics fellowship at CHOP and earned a Master of Science in Health Policy Research from the University of Pennsylvania.



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## Team

## Funders of Project

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## Related Tools & Publications

- [Adolescent Physical Education Class Participation as a Predictor for Adult Physical Activity](#)  
[Article](#)

Sep 2015

- [Quantifying Parental Preferences for Interventions Designed to Improve Home Food Preparation and Home Food Environments During Early Childhood](#)  
[Article](#)

Jan 2016

- [Mothers' and Clinicians' Priorities for Obesity Prevention Among Black, High-Risk Infants](#)  
[Article](#)

Mar 2016

- [Impact of the 2009 WIC Food Package Changes on Maternal Dietary Quality](#)  
[Article](#)

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