

National Children's Study Research Plan Preface

Growing up healthy is every child's right and every parent's dream for their children. As a nation, we have made significant advances in improving child health and development over the past century by identifying the causes of many diseases; by developing preventive measures, treatments, and cures; and by improving the overall health status of our children. Still, children today suffer high rates of conditions and chronic diseases that interfere with health and development: Asthma, developmental disorders, obesity, preventable injuries, and other problems. The progressive improvement of our children's health during the last century has reached a plateau and now threatens to move backward. In fact, our children are experiencing major increases in chronic health conditions, especially obesity, asthma, and learning disabilities. Many experts believe that fundamental changes in children's environments appear to be a common pathway for these increases.^{1,2}

As many health and safety practices from past generations have been validated or dismissed based on new evidence, we have come to understand that the environments our children live in are profoundly important. From the air they breathe to the food they eat, from where they live to how they live, the environments in which our children grow affect their lifelong health and well-being. As described in the following research plan, multiple studies point to the association of various environmental exposures with problems in our children's health and development, such as air pollution and allergens with asthma, poor diet with obesity, and pesticides with impaired neurodevelopment. Today these problems stand among the most pressing public health concerns in the United States. Yet, with the prevalence of these conditions remaining stubbornly persistent or on the rise, few studies can confirm more definitive links that lead to prevention strategies. In addition, with threats of terrorism, violence, and other stress-inducing experiences becoming a daily exposure for many families, our children face unprecedented challenges to their well-being. Consequently, understanding and protecting our children's health and safety must be a national priority.

The National Children's Study reaffirms the federal government's commitment to the health and well-being of children by drawing together the nation's top experts on child health and the environment in an unprecedented collaboration. Multiple federal agencies, national non-profit groups, community health care providers, and more than 100,000 families stand poised to help child health move forward in the 21st century. The goals of the Study complement government efforts to challenge individuals, communities, and professionals to take action to ensure that good health and long life are enjoyed by all.

I am pleased to present this proposed Research Plan for the National Children's Study to inform scientific reviewers, professional colleagues, contributors, and all who are interested in this ground-breaking initiative that addresses these major challenges to our children's future. The Plan describes the Study's background, design, and measures, and the rationale for their selection, in sufficient detail so that readers can understand the basis of the Study and how it will be carried out. This plan was developed with input from scientists and other professionals across the country and from multiple federal agencies, especially the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences at the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, with full awareness of competing priorities, limitations of cost, and acceptable burden on participants. We welcome constructive comments and proposals for how the National Children's Study might address these pressing health concerns of our nation's children even more effectively. Comments and communication about the Research Plan may be submitted by e-mail to: ncsinfo@mail.nih.gov.



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¹Van der Lee, J.H., Mokkink, L.B., Grootenhuis, M.S., Heymans, H.S., & Offringa, M. (2007). Definitions and measurement of chronic health conditions in childhood. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 297, 2741-2751.

²Perrin, J.M., Bloom, S.R., & Gortmaker, S.L. (2007). The increase of childhood chronic conditions in the United States. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 297, 2755-2759