



June 7, 2024

Texas Department of State Health Services
Task Force of Border Health Officials

Re: Written Comment

Unidos Contra la Diabetes is a collective impact initiative working with community partnerships dedicated to preventing diabetes in the Rio Grande Valley. We bring people together in a structured way to achieve social, behavioral, and sustainable community change. Unidos Contra la Diabetes (UCD) began in 2014 as a group of community leaders who wanted to improve the lives of the Rio Grande Valley. Looking at upstream, strategic, and sustainable changes, the group made its mission to focus on prediabetes and the prevention of diabetes. UCD works together with hospitals, community clinics, foundations, universities, agencies, and faith-based organizations to improve the lives of children and families in our area. We are building on existing efforts and partnerships by coming together as a united group to increase our impact on diabetes prevention. UCD focuses on the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. This includes the counties of Hidalgo, Willacy, Cameron, and Starr. UCD's partners work across the RGV to build strengths and wellness among our community.

The goal of Unidos Contra Diabetes is to reduce the number of new cases of type 2 diabetes, resulting in a 10 percent reduction in the prevalence of diabetes by 2030. We are committed to doing this by integrating primary and behavioral health for people at risk for diabetes in our community, with a particular emphasis on meeting the needs of low-income and underserved populations.

UCD is working diligently with our partners to reduce new cases of type 2 diabetes and below are a few problem statements with recommendations:

- I. [Children in Region 1 at Risk for Type 2 Diabetes](#); according to the UTRGV Border Health Office, Texas Risk Assessment, 2 of 25 Children have Acanthosis Nigricans (AN) and are at a high risk of developing type 2 diabetes. 90% of the children with AN are obese and 36% are hypertensive.
 - a. The recommendation is for healthy food options at schools, removal of sugary beverages and snacks from vending machines, eliminating fundraising activities focused on sugary snacks (candies) and include recess time (nonstructured physical activity) in schools.

- II. In the [Rio Grande Valley, the number of adults with type 2 diabetes](#) has been steadily increasing from 2015-2023. While the rates in the state of Texas and the US are declining, the RGV is increasing.
 - a. Recommendation is for additional education on prevention and awareness, with a focus on the entire household (family unit). Possible creation of a sugar tax on sugary beverages and sugary items (candies, snacks). SNAP ED to provide

additional funding to Public Health Departments with the focus on providing education on nutritious meals for the family and include education on reading nutrition labels, making healthy choices and purchases with SNAP ED funds. Booklets in appropriate language on balanced meals, etc for families receiving SNAP Benefits.

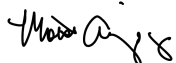
- b. Creation of additional walking trails and parks in rural areas to encourage residents to walk, run, jog and exercise. Must be strategically located with appropriate lighting for security reasons.
 - c. Reduction of new fast-food restaurants in the community and if they are to be approved to add healthy options that are low fat and low sugar content.
- III. A change in healthcare policy regarding screening for A1C's. A1C's are performed annually as part of a patient's wellness check.
- a. Recommendation to mandate and recommend healthcare providers perform quarterly A1C screenings for type 2 diabetes. By performing quarterly screenings, type 2 diabetes can be prevented before it is too late.
- IV. UCD's "A Culture of Good Health" guideline. A Culture of Good Health was created after attending community health fairs/events; where vendors/providers provided health screenings (A1C's, blood pressure, vision, dental, foot, etc.) to the participants and as a give-a-way were providing the participants with sugary beverages and/or sugary snacks.
- a. Recommendation is for organizations hosting community health fairs/events to stop providing sugary beverages and snacks and provide healthy nutritious snacks and water.

UCD is tackling this health challenge through a multifaceted approach. Key strategies include promoting sustainable lifestyle changes such as increased physical activity and healthier eating habits, which have been shown to significantly reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Additionally, UCD emphasizes the importance of regular preventative screenings and early detection to manage and potentially reverse the condition in its initial stages. Education and community outreach programs are also integral to our efforts, aiming to raise awareness and equip individuals with the knowledge to make informed health decisions. Through these concerted efforts, UCD and its partners strive to decrease the prevalence of type 2 diabetes and improve public health outcomes.

UCD is pleased to provide this commentary to you and will continue to provide commentary to the Task Force of Border Health Officials. We are open to working together to reduce type 2 diabetes rates in the Rio Grande Valley with the goal of preventing new cases and bringing awareness to our community members.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share a few of our recommendations.

Sincerely,



Moises Arjona Jr., MS
Collective Impact Director