

# Whole Child Growth | The Development of a Community Research Agenda

## Our Purpose

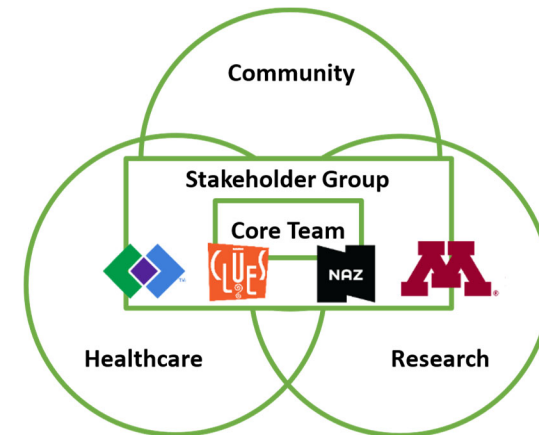
Healthy growth and well-being are important to all communities and healthy behaviors and early experiences promote well-being. Doctors and researchers also often measure body weight as a marker of growth, especially in research that compares the impact of two or more programs or policies (“comparative effectiveness research” or CER). But focusing on body weight can negatively impact children’s mental health. **Centering whole-child growth better promotes well-being in our communities.** To improve how we study whole child growth, this work followed a community-engaged approach in partnership with local communities of color. Together we worked to:

- (1) Understand how families think about whole child growth and
- (2) Create a plan for studying and improving whole child growth.

We hope this work **is an opportunity for community, research, and healthcare to join us in future work that centers children** and is grounded in culture. Below is our shared vision for whole child growth.



## Our Approach








To do this work, we convened a core team with members from community-led organizations Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) and the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), and healthcare and research organizations the University of Minnesota and HealthPartners. Our core team met regularly from Spring 2023 – Spring 2024 and engaged a broader stakeholder group of 25 parents and 13 researchers and healthcare professionals to learn about CER and **share their voices in the development of our research agenda** during a Fall and Spring meeting series.

Through this work we embodied the PCORI Engagement Principles of Reciprocal Relationships, Co-Learning Partnerships, and Transparency, Honesty, and Trust. These were foundational to developing shared norms for our time together including **a commitment to curiosity, listening to one another, and creating safe and brave space together.** We also evaluated the quality of our engagement work throughout the process using tools like surveys to gather feedback and make real-time improvements. This approach allowed us to create an agenda to guide the way we will do CER and other types of research together going forward.

## Our Shared Work

Our team brainstormed and prioritized research questions to study and improve whole child growth. These **dynamic research ideas are organized by our Whole Child Growth research framework** adapted from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) Research Framework and aligned with our shared vision. A key takeaway from our work is how much children and families are impacted by their community and broader society and the role of culture and norms in shaping actions at the child, family, and community levels. Broadening CER to consistently consider these factors is important for researchers and families alike.

Whole Child Growth	Child 	Family 	Community 	Society 
Actions	Health Behaviors, Preferences	Family Interactions, Parent Beliefs, Preferences	Community, School, Healthcare Interactions	Local, State, National, Policies
Environment	Personal Environment	Home Environment	Community, School, Healthcare Environment	Social Structure
Culture	Cultural Identity	Family Norms	Community, Cultural Norms	Societal Norms 

Adapted from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) [National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities \(NIMHD\) Research Framework](#)

### Priority Child-Centered Research Questions



- How is whole child growth best measured?
- How does improving one whole child growth outcome improve others? How does physical health support emotional health? How does emotional health support other whole child growth leaves?
- How do different approaches to supporting a child's cultural identity compare in their impact on whole child growth?

### Priority Family-Centered Research Questions



- How do different programs that support parent well-being compare in also improving whole child growth?
- How does offering free parent advocate programs improve whole child growth?
- What can be done in the home environment to help children feel safe, secure, loved, honored, and valued?
- What ancestral or cultural parenting practices improve whole child growth?

### Priority Community-Centered Research Questions




- How do programs to create safe community spaces compare in improving whole child growth?
- How do healthcare practices and policies that value culture lead to increased trust in healthcare systems?
- What programs or policies improve inclusivity, prevent bullying, and improve access to mental and emotional support in schools?

### Priority Society-Level Research Questions



- How do successful affordable housing policies or initiatives compare in improving whole child growth?
- How can guaranteed basic income policies be better implemented and do they improve whole child growth?

 - Research questions especially focused on CER

## Our Roadmap for Future Research



## Closing Thoughts from Our Team

“Providing the space for the community voice in the research process leads to effective and meaningful community growth.”

– Norma Carrera-Perez, CLUES

“Improving the health and well-being of children in today’s challenging world requires innovation, creativity, and hope. Having the opportunity to partner with community organizations, healthcare providers and research offered a glimpse into what the future of impactful, generational change could be, and it certainly looks bright.” – Corinne Brown-Robinson, HealthPartners

“How does one measure love, care, growth, culture and how do those metrics help us give our children the best possible start to a lifetime of health and wellness? In an unprecedented collaborative effort, the Core Team delved into this question and many others, bringing together community members, medical professionals, and health and wellness advocates...” – Alex Palacios, CLUES

“The opportunity to partner with local community organizations, partners, health care providers, and researchers has been unique and beneficial. Being able to draw parallels between the way research happens and what supports Whole Child Growth can provide us many insights to better our communities.” – Arielle Handevitd, NAZ

“Our community-engaged work has challenged me and helped me grow in ways I never expected. This different approach to research has helped me see my own biases and has given me tools to take them into account in support of better ways to study and improve whole child growth.” – Meghan JaKa, HealthPartners Institute