

UAMS News Bureau

Office of Communications & Marketing
4301 West Markham # 890
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

uamshealth.com/news



News Release
Sept. 3, 2024

Media Contacts:

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

Yavonda Chase, 501-686-8994
Wireless phone: 501-416-0354
yavonda@uams.edu

**UAMS Receives \$3 Million NIH Grant to Address
Feeding Practices at Early Child Care Sites**

LITTLE ROCK — University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) researcher Taren Massey-Swindle, Ph.D., and a Louisiana Tech University collaborator have secured a \$3 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to address feeding practices at 80 early childhood care and education sites in Arkansas and Louisiana.

Massey-Swindle and Julie Rutledge, Ph.D., from Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, found in prior studies that early childhood care and education settings frequently use inappropriate feeding practices such as hurrying children and encouraging them to eat more. Such practices contribute to eating less healthy foods, overeating and long-term food rejections.

A big part of the five-year, \$3,043,419 grant from the NIH National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases is its “de-implementation” plans for eliminating inappropriate feeding practices.

While early childhood teachers and caregivers may mean well, their words and actions can undermine long-term healthy eating habits, Massey-Swindle and Rutledge said.

“We have no negative judgment for these teachers,” said Massey-Swindle, a former early-childhood educator and now associate professor in the College of Medicine departments of Pediatrics and Family and Preventive Medicine. “When I was a child care provider myself, I told children to clean their plates and make a happy plate. I had no training in how to support children around positive feeding practices at mealtime.”

The issue is significant, she said, because children will eat more than 500 meals a year with the adults in their early care and education classrooms.

“It's really an opportunity to support those adults in this setting with training that they otherwise don't get,” Massey-Swindle said.

The 80 sites are in the Little Rock and Russellville areas in Arkansas and in Ruston and New Orleans areas in Louisiana.

By the end of the five-year study, the researchers expect to have determined the effectiveness of a package of strategies that can be applied and tailored for early care and education settings across the United States. They also expect that by removing inappropriate feeding practices, their results will show a positive impact on children's dietary behaviors. They will track children's willingness to try different foods, fear of new foods, and how many fruits and vegetables they eat.

"Finding ways to impact the health of children in our communities is really my passion," said Massey-Swindle, who recently became director of the Arkansas Children's Research Institute (ACRI) Link, a core of services focusing on community-engaged dissemination and implementation science. "From a scientific perspective, we're going to be answering some really compelling questions about whether de-implementation effects can be sustained over time."

To help secure the NIH award, Massey-Swindle used a pilot grant from the UAMS Translational Research Institute to get preliminary data on the effectiveness of a virtual communication approach to reducing inappropriate feeding practices. Rutledge also received pilot funding from the Lincoln Health Foundation in Louisiana to test in-person approaches to reducing inappropriate feeding practices. Ultimately, they developed an effective hybrid model using in-person and virtual approaches.

"We really work hard to get robust preliminary data to support our R01-level NIH applications," Massey-Swindle said. "Without funding like the Translational Research Institute provides, there's no way for researchers to do that. I think it strengthened our application a great deal."

In addition, Massey-Swindle said the Arkansas Children's Nutrition Center (ACNC) provided funding and support for her to attend an intensive grant development workshop with one-on-one writing, coaching and detailed feedback that helped her submit a competitive grant application. The ACNC is supported by Arkansas Children's, UAMS and the USDA Agricultural Research Service.

The Translational Research Institute is supported by the NIH National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, Clinical and Translational Science Award #UM1 TR004909.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and eight institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W.

UAMS Receives \$3 Million NIH Grant to Address Feeding Practices at Early Child Care Sites

Page 3

Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute, Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,275 students, 890 medical residents and fellows, and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 12,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

Like us, we're social:    