

## Health Policy Implementation Science CE Specialist

**Developed and proposed by:** This proposal was developed by the Community Nutrition and Health (CNH) Program Team including specialists, advisors, and academic coordinators, supported by the Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI) and the UC Merced Public Health Department Chair.

**Position title:** Health Policy Implementation Science CE Specialist (hereafter CE Specialist). This CE Specialist will focus on building evidence about barriers and facilitators to implementation of community health promotion policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) programs and interventions. Focus will be school and community settings, to ensure widespread public health impact. The CE Specialist will engage with a diverse group of UC ANR and campus academics, staff, and community stakeholders to examine how PSE efforts: 1) respond to current and emerging needs of communities; 2) are successfully adopted, improved and maintained; and 3) are adequately supported to positively impact community nutrition and health outcomes.

**Headquarter location and coverage area:** The CE Specialist will be based in the UC Merced Public Health Department. This will facilitate collaborative relationships with faculty and colleagues and provide access to students interested in future careers in public health, community nutrition, and related disciplines. The CE Specialist will increase the CE academic footprint in the School of Social Sciences and will be well positioned to work closely with another Nutrition Specialist in the Department, Dr. Karina Diaz Rios, and with faculty focused on health policy, implementation science, and health disparities. The CE Specialist will also have the opportunity to establish collaborations with local San Joaquin Valley communities where UCM Public Health has robust and long-standing partnerships with CBOs and local Public Health Departments, to address endemic health issues. The CE Specialist will be well positioned to build upon these relationships, and the existing departmental expertise in community-based participatory research, to optimize regional impact on community nutrition.

**Position overview, briefly describe:** The ideal candidate should have background and academic training in 1) **Implementation science** (studying how evidence-based interventions get adopted, scaled, and sustained in real-world community settings); 2) **Public health nutrition and/or physical activity** (community-level dietary behavior and physical activity change, food access, food systems, school systems); 3) **Public policy** (local, state, and federal policies that govern food, nutrition and physical activity at the school and community levels); 4) **PSE design, implementation, evaluation**; and 5) **data collection and analyses** (quantitative and qualitative research methods, big data). The CE Specialist will have expertise on the use of implementation science to study the processes of implementing health policy, from development and legislature approval, to real-life adoption. A PhD in Public Health, Public Policy or a related field is required. Post-doctoral experience in implementation science is desired. Other desirable qualifications include experience partnering with schools or public health community organizations, experience working with legislators or other policy makers, strong analytic (quantitative and qualitative) skills, ability to work collaboratively with multiple stakeholders and across disciplines, proficiency in incorporating diversity, equity, inclusivity, and justice principles in research and extension, and proficiency in a second language (e.g. Spanish, Punjabi, Mandarin/Cantonese, or an Indigenous language).

**Justification:** There is a critical need for a CE Specialist who can help UC ANR better understand why evidence-based health policies succeed in some settings and fail in others. Much of the existing work in nutrition, physical activity, and public health focuses on whether a policy or intervention works under research conditions. Far less is known about how policies are actually implemented in schools, communities, and workplaces, and how local context shapes success, equity, and sustainability. This position would build the body of evidence for PSE implementation and thus reduce the time between research, policy, and practice to improve community health

outcomes. This position was ranked #1 by the Community Nutrition and Health (CNH) Program Team because it fills a major gap in UC ANR's ability to support policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change work. Program Team members are already engaged in PSE-related programming and a new PSE workgroup just formed preparing for CalFresh Healthy Living, UC program sunset, but there is limited internal expertise in implementation science focused specifically on policy implementation. This CE Specialist would provide the methodological and applied expertise needed to study implementation barriers, facilitators, fidelity, adaptation, reach, and equity impacts. The need is especially strong because California communities, schools, and public agencies are increasingly asked to implement policies intended to improve nutrition, physical activity, mental health, and health equity. However, implementation varies widely by geography, resources, governance structures, demographics, and local capacity. Without dedicated expertise in policy implementation science, UC ANR cannot fully support stakeholders in understanding how to design policies that are not only evidence-based, but also feasible, equitable, and sustainable. UC ANR and UCCE have the opportunity to build programming and resources that support the implementation of policies to maximize and impact community health.

Over time, this position will strengthen UC ANR's ability to improve public value through better policy design, more effective implementation, and more equitable outcomes. Success will look like:

- stronger evidence on what helps policies succeed in real-world settings,
- improved implementation of school- and community-based health policies,
- greater use of implementation science in UC ANR policy, systems, and environmental change work,
- more equitable reach and impact of health policies across communities,
- stronger collaboration between researchers, extension academics, and policy/practice partners,
- new tools, guidance, and best practices that help decision-makers implement policies effectively.

In 20 years, UC ANR will be recognized as a trusted source, training and research partner of implementation science expertise that helps translate nutrition, physical activity, and health policy evidence into practical, equitable action across the state.

**Extension:** The CE Specialist will build and lead an innovative extension program that integrates Health Policy and Implementation Science, incorporating traditional and new approaches/technologies and opportunities to improve policy implementation and resulting health outcomes for impacted communities across California. The CE Specialist will provide statewide leadership in support of UC ANR CNH Statewide Program and YFC Program Area, with partners including the NPI, CA EFNEP, and the Master Gardeners and Master Food Preservers programs. The CE Specialist will also work collaboratively with the newly created ANR Policy Institute to move forward policy development and implementation efforts focused on improving the health of Californians, as well as to engage directly with local and state legislators around their top priorities. Community engagement in partnership with community-based organizations, stakeholders in the California Departments of Public Health, and food and agriculture will facilitate novel intersectoral statewide discussion and dissemination of recommendation and best-practices to improve health policy development and implementation. The anticipated extension program would build the capacity of county educators and advisors to select, adapt, and deliver evidence-based programs with fidelity, developing training, tools, and implementation guides that amplify the reach of NPI's research across California's diverse counties without requiring direct researcher involvement in every community. By studying how nutrition and physical activity policies are implemented at the local and state level — where they succeed, where they break down, and what contextual factors drive outcomes — this position would deepen ANR's ability to provide actionable evidence to state agencies, legislators, and community partners. This CE Specialist would also ensure that implementation strategies are community-centered and culturally responsive, advancing more equitable health outcomes for California's low-income and underserved populations.

**Research:** The CE Specialist will investigate how PSEs interact with real world practice and examine differential impacts across different groups based on social determinants of health (e.g., demographics, socioeconomic status,

geography, and culture). They will focus on studying local “p”olicies (e.g., workplace wellness initiatives) and at-scale “P”olicies (e.g., state-level mandated recess in public schools) and barriers and drivers for implementation. The CE Specialist’s research will use implementation science frameworks (e.g., [CFIR](#)) to examine effectiveness on PSE implementation strategies. This will build evidence to inform policies that are more equitably implemented at the local, state, and federal levels to effectively address health inequities.

**UC ANR network:** The CE Specialist will have statewide programmatic responsibilities, including continuous collaboration with county-based CE academics, the CNH Director and the Youth, Families, and Communities (YFC) Program Area Chair, and through participation in ANR Program Teams and/or Workgroups. CNH PT members are interested and have been working on PSE, but expertise with regard to understanding how localized and at-scale policies can be successfully and equitably implemented is lacking. This CE Specialist position will increase the capacity for research and extension collaborations with CNH and YFC Advisors working on PSE programming, filling a critical need for multiplicative and statewide impact. This position would serve as a critical bridge between NPI’s rigorous policy research and the on-the-ground work of California’s CE network. By applying implementation science to study how evidence-based nutrition and physical activity interventions and policies are adopted, delivered, and sustained across diverse community contexts, this specialist would help NPI move beyond generating evidence to ensuring that evidence drives real-world change. Working alongside NPI researchers, advisors, and other CE Specialists, the specialist would strengthen program evaluation by examining not just whether interventions work, but how, for whom, and under what conditions — producing the kind of nuanced implementation evidence that informs continuous program improvement and supports competitive funding applications to NIH, USDA, CDC, and other agencies that increasingly prioritize dissemination and implementation research. Early projects could include policy, systems, and environmental implementation evaluations, mixed-methods studies, training for county and community partners, or collaborative development of policy implementation tools and guidance. The main gap is the absence of a dedicated ANR specialist with expertise in implementation science for health policy. Existing programs address nutrition, physical activity, and community health, but there is limited capacity to study implementation mechanisms, contextual variation, and equity impacts of policy change. There is also a gap in cross-sector translation between researchers, policymakers, and community implementers.

**Network external to UC ANR:** The CE Specialist will collaborate with California state agencies, local public health departments, school districts and county offices of education, policy makers and legislative staff, community-based organizations, tribal communities and tribal health partners, advocacy and coalition organizations, and researchers and practitioners working on health equity, nutrition, and school health. The collaboration will include research partnerships, technical assistance, dissemination of findings, convening of stakeholders, and translation of evidence into implementation-ready guidance.

**Support:** According to the current Memorandum of Understanding between UC ANR and UC Merced, the CE Specialist will have access to all UC Merced scholarly resources and administrative support commensurate with those provided to UC Merced-employed faculty. In addition, the CE Specialist will have access to fully-functional and fully-serviced office space, lab space, and equipment, commensurate with that provided to UC Merced-employed faculty, or as negotiated between UC ANR and UC Merced.

**Other support:** Potential support may include Federal (e.g., NIH, CDC, USDA), California state agencies, foundations focused on health equity, child health, nutrition, or policy, UC-based collaborative funding opportunities, and policy or implementation-related grants with community and school partners.