

## Michael A. Essman, PhD, MSc

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### Education

#### University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill — Chapel Hill, NC

##### Doctor of Philosophy, Nutrition Epidemiology

August 2020

- Dissertation title: “A multimethod approach to evaluating a threshold-based sugar-sweetened beverage tax in South Africa: changes in dietary intake, behavioral drivers, and the news media”
- Advisors: Lindsey Smith Taillie & Barry Popkin

#### University of Oxford — Oxford, United Kingdom

##### Master of Science, Medical Anthropology

September 2015

- Master’s Thesis – “Neoliberalism in Public Health: Why Free Market Thinking has Obstructed Progress on Obesity Policy”
- Advisor: Stanley Ulijaszek

##### Master of Science, Global Health Science

August 2014

- Master’s Thesis – “The effects of a 50% price reduction on fruit consumption in Oxford University dining halls”
- Advisor: Mike Rayner

#### Williams College — Williamstown, MA

##### Bachelor of Arts, Biology and Neuroscience with Honors

December 2012

- Senior Honors Thesis: “Exploring the function of phytosphingosine (t18:0) in *Physcomitrella patens*”
  - Advisor: Daniel Lynch
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### Honors & Awards

#### Department Nomination for Dean’s Distinguished Dissertation Award in Social Sciences

2022

- Nominated by Nutrition Department, Gillings School of Public Health, UNC-Chapel Hill

#### Global Cardiometabolic Disease Training Grant

2017-2019

- Nutrition Department, Gillings School of Public Health, UNC-Chapel Hill
- National Institutes of Health (NIH) T32 Predoctoral training grant, involving coursework and conducting research related to global cardiometabolic disease prevention, including research collaboration with a global mentor.

#### Doctoral Merit Assistantship

2016-2017

- Award of a year of full tuition, fees, and stipend given to outstanding incoming students across the UNC-CH Graduate School.

#### Williams College Donovan-Moody Fellowship

2013-2015

- Two years of fully funded graduate study at Exeter College, University of Oxford
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### Grants & Research Support

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research, Emergent Public Health Priority Funding, United Kingdom, “Understanding representations of ultra-processed foods in the UK media: a thematic content analysis” (Vamos & White) | Role: Co-Investigator

Total amount: Approx. \$240,000 USD (£190,530)

2024-2025

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research development fund for early career researchers, United Kingdom, “Understanding Customer Reactions to and Usage of Calorie Labelling in England’s Out-of-Home Food Sector” (Essman) | Role: Principal Investigator

Total amount: Approx. \$40,000 USD (£29,999.60)

2024-2025

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research development fund for early career researchers, United Kingdom, “Co-produced Analysis of Reformulation in the OOH sector following mandatory calorie labelling in England (CARO)” (Kalbus) | Role: Co-Investigator

Total amount: Approx. \$40,000 USD (£28,205.75)

2024-2025

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## Research and Career History

### **Research Scientist: World Food Policy Center** — *Duke University* May 2025 — Present

- Leading collaborations on interdisciplinary research in food policy, with focus areas including food and nutrition security, food loss and waste, and food systems sustainability.
- Design, implement, and analyze large-scale evaluations of food and nutrition policies using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

### **Research Associate: MRC Epidemiology Unit** — *University of Cambridge* May 2021 — Apr 2025

- Leading the scientific evaluation of a mandatory calorie labelling law in England's out-of-home food sector
- Work Package 1: Evaluate the effects of the calorie labelling law on the frequency and type of out-of-home eating.
- Work Package 2: Expand an existing database of nutritional information of menu items sold by out-of-home food outlets to assess whether implementation was associated with pre-post changes in: calorie profile of menus, and calorie content of popular dishes, portion size, reformulation and menu items available.
- Work Package 3: Conduct post-implementation interviews with those tasked with implementation and enforcement to document perceptions of: barriers and enablers to the intervention achieving the intended changes, the process of intervention implementation, and the barriers and enablers to enforcement.

### **Research Associate: UNC-Chapel Hill** — *Chapel Hill, NC* Aug 2020 — Mar 2021

- Integrate a range of epidemiological data to contextualize the spread of COVID-19 on a web-based data dashboard.
- Content writer for definitions, FAQs, and other materials for the general public on Gillings COVID-19 dashboard website: <https://gillingscovid19.unc.edu/>.
- Led survey and interview processes to refine the Gillings COVID-19 dashboard, enhancing its utility for diverse North Carolina communities.

### **Co-Owner Boutique Fitness Facility: CrossFit Chapel Hill** Nov 2017 — Present

- Community-based fitness facility that fosters inclusion, hard work, positive self-image, and self-belief to adopt a consistently healthy lifestyle.
- Developed gym policies to improve safety of exercise facility during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Hired staff of 10 professional coaches and personal trainers.
- Awarded Best Fitness Facility by Chapel Hill Magazine in all six years of operation.
- Featured in local news for positive impacts on people living with disabilities: <https://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2023/07/07/people-with-disabilities-find-community-fitness-in-crossfit-class/>

### **Food Policy Evaluation: Impact of SSB Tax in South Africa** April 2019 — August 2020

- Utilized a multi-method approach to evaluate the effects of sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) tax in South Africa:
- (1) Estimating changes in SSB consumption in low-income communities in South Africa using two-part logistic and linear multivariate regression models. This aim will play an integral role in evaluating the effects of the national tax on sugary beverage intake and is a key deliverable to a Bloomberg Philanthropies-funded grant and the South African Ministry of Health.
- (2) Psychological measurement methods including confirmatory factor analysis to measure changes in community knowledge about the health effects of SSBs before and after the tax implementation.
- (3) Quantitative media analysis measuring the national news media reaction to SSB tax policy and how stakeholder views of the policy are represented.

### **Data Quality Control Officer** February 2019 — March 2019

- University of the Western Cape, South Africa
- Supported fieldworkers collecting 2,500 dietary intake surveys in Langa, South Africa.
- Ensured data collection was of high quality by identifying mistakes in data collection, determined strategies to avoid future errors to ensure timely completion of the two month data collection.

### **Varsity Tutors** Dec 2015 — Apr 2017

- Private tutor for SAT college prep and GRE graduate school prep.

### **Research Assistant** — *Chapel Hill, NC* Mar 2016 — Sept 2016

- Global Food Research Program
- Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

### **Intern at World Health Organization** — *Copenhagen, Denmark* Aug 2014 — Sept 2014

- Supported the consultation process for the WHO European Strategy on Physical Activity for Health at the WHO Regional Office for Europe. Contributed to policy mapping exercises for the 53 WHO Europe Member States, notably on policies to restrict food marketing to children.

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## Academic Publications

- Essman M**, Burgoine T, Huang Y, Jones A, Polden M, Robinson E, et al. Changes in energy content of menu items at out-of-home food outlets in England after calorie labelling policy implementation: a pre-post analysis (2021–2022). *BMJ Public Health*. 2025;3:e001905. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjph-2024-001905>.
- Essman M**, Parnham JC, Chang K, Etkind MP, Shah P, Smith D, Vasiljevic M, Boyland E, Cummins S, Vamos EP, White M, Adams J. Understandings of ultra-processed foods: a qualitative interview study of UK adults with responsibility for household food activities. *medRxiv preprint*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2025.08.18.25332943>
- Parnham JC, Chang K, **Essman M**, Smith D, Etkind MP, McKenzie M, Vasiljevic M, Petticrew M, White M, Lavery AA, Boyland E, Cummins S, Millett C, Adams J, Vamos EP. Framing of ultra-processed foods and associations with interests of actors quoted in UK news media, 2022-2023: a mixed-methods study. *medRxiv preprint*. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2025.08.15.25333779>.
- Essman M**, Burgoine T, Jones A, et al. Assessing the impact of a mandatory calorie labelling policy in out-of-home food outlets in England on consumer behaviour: a natural experimental study. *BMC Public Health* 25, 955 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-22150-3>.
- Essman M**, Bishop T, Burgoine T, Jones A, Polden M, Robinson E, et al. (2025) Implementation and enforcement of mandatory calorie labelling regulations for the out-of-home sector in England: Qualitative study of the experiences of business implementers and regulatory enforcers. *PLoS One* 20(7): e0323452. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0323452>.
- Karreman N, **Essman M**, Hawkins B, Adams J, & White M. (2025). Obesity and Lifestyle Drift: Framing Analysis of Calorie Menu Labelling in England in News Media. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.8649>.
- Polden M, Jones A, **Essman M**, Adams J, Bishop TRP, Burgoine T, Sharp SJ, White M, Smith R, Donohue A, Witkam R, Putra IGNE, Brealey J, Robinson E. Evaluating the association between the introduction of mandatory calorie labelling and energy consumed using observational data from the out-of-home food sector in England. *Nat Hum Behav*. 2025 Feb;9(2):277-286. doi: 10.1038/s41562-024-02032-1. Epub 2024 Nov 25. PMID: 39587333; PMCID: PMC11860223.
- Polden M, Jones A, **Essman M**, et al. Point-of-choice kilocalorie labelling practices in large, out-of-home food businesses: a preobservational versus post observational study of labelling practices following implementation of The Calorie Labelling (Out of Home Sector) (England) Regulations 2021. *BMJ Open* 2024;14:e080405. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2023-080405.
- Essman M**, Burgoine T, Cameron A, Jones A, Potvin Kent M, Polden M, Robinson E, Sacks G, Smith R, Vanderlee L, White C, White M, Hammond D, Adams J (2023) A multi-country comparison of jurisdictions with and without mandatory nutrition labelling policies in restaurants: analysis of behaviors associated with menu labelling in the 2019 International Food Policy Study. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2023;26(11):2595-2606. doi:10.1017/S1368980023001775.
- Polden M, Jones A, Adams J, Bishop T, Burgoine T, **Essman M**, Sharp SJ, Smith R, White M, Robinson E (2023) Kilocalorie labelling in the out-of-home sector: an observational study of business practices and consumer behaviour prior to implementation of the mandatory calorie labelling policy in England, 2022. *BMC Public Health* 23, 1088. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16033-8>
- Essman M**, Zimmer C, Carpentier FD et al. (2022) Are intentions to change, policy awareness, or health knowledge related to changes in dietary intake following a sugar-sweetened beverage tax in South Africa? A before-and-after study. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 19, 136. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-022-01370-5>.
- Huang Y, Burgoine T, **Essman M**, Theis DRZ, Bishop TRP, Adams J (2022) Monitoring the Nutrient Composition of Food Prepared Out-of-Home in the United Kingdom: Database Development and Case Study. *JMIR Public Health Surveill*;8(9):e39033. doi: [10.2196/39033](https://doi.org/10.2196/39033).
- Essman M**, Stoltze FM, Carpentier FD, Swart EC; Taillie LS (2022) Examining the news media reaction to a national sugary beverage tax in South Africa: a quantitative content analysis. *BMC Public Health*; 21: 454.
- Essman M**, Taillie LS, Frank T, Ng SW, Popkin BM, Swart EC (2021) Taxed and untaxed beverage intake by South African young adults after a national sugar-sweetened beverage tax: A before-and-after study. *PLoS Med* 18(5): e1003574. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003574>.
- Ly C, **Essman M**, Zimmer C, Ng SW (2020) Developing an index to estimate the association between the food environment and CVD mortality rates. *Health & Place*; 66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2020.102469>.
- Essman M** (2020) A Multimethod Approach to Evaluating a Threshold-Based Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax in South Africa: Changes in Dietary Intake, Behavioral Drivers, and the News Media. *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 28092079.

C Véliz, H Maslen, **M Essman**, LS Taillie, J Savulescu (2019) Sugar, taxes, & choice. *Hastings Center Report*; 49 (6), 22-31.

**Essman M**, Popkin BM, Corvalán C, Reyes M, Taillie LS (2018) Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Intake among Chilean Preschoolers and Adolescents in 2016: A Cross-Sectional Analysis. *Nutrients*; 10(11):1767.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/nu10111767>.

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### Selected Academic Presentations

**Poster:** Soto Díaz CR, **Essman M**, Ballesteros LCF, Mora M, Gómez LF, Taillie LS. Consumption of sugary beverages prior to the ultra-processed sugar-sweetened beverages tax in Colombia: an analysis of the National Nutrition Survey 2015. *American Society for Nutrition, NUTRITION 2024*, July 2024.

**Oral:** **Essman M**, Burgoine T, Huang Y, Jones A, Polden M, Robinson E, Sharp S, Smith R, White M, Adams J. Menu changes by large food businesses after England's calorie labelling policy. *World Public Health Nutrition Congress 2024*, June 2024.

**Oral:** **Essman M**, Bishop T, Burgoine T, Jones, A, Polden M, Robinson E, Sharp SJ, Smith R, White M, and Adams J. Experiences and process of implementation and enforcement of mandatory calorie labelling regulations for the out-of-home sector in England: a qualitative study. *Society for Social Medicine & Population Health, Annual Scientific Meeting 2023*, Sept 2023.

**Oral:** **Essman M**, Taillie LS, Jenkins, T, Ng SW, Popkin BM, Swart EC. Changes in Beverage Consumption by South African Young Adults One Year After a Sugary Beverage Tax. *ObesityWeek 2020, The Obesity Society*, Nov 2020.

**Poster:** **Essman M**, Stoltze FM, Carpentier FD, Swart EC, Taillie LS. Examining the News Media Reaction to a National Sugary Beverage Tax in South Africa: A Quantitative Content Analysis. *American Society for Nutrition: Nutrition 2020, June 2020* (conference conducted virtually due to COVID-19 concerns).

**Oral:** **Essman M**, Swart EC (presenting author), Popkin, BM, Ng SW, Taillie LS, Taxed and untaxed beverage consumption by young adults in Langa, South Africa before and one year after a national sugar-sweetened beverage tax. *South Africa National NCD Research Symposium*. Cape Town. March 2020.

**Poster:** **Essman M**, Popkin BM, Corvalán C, Reyes M, Taillie LS, Sugary beverage intake by Chilean children in context of marketing controls and warning labels: baseline results. *ObesityWeek 2017, The Obesity Society*, October 2017.

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### Published Abstracts

Soto Díaz CR, **Essman M**, Forero Ballesteros LC, Gómez LF, Mora M, Taillie LS. Consumption of Sugary Beverages Prior to the Ultra-Processed Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Tax in Colombia: An Analysis of the National Nutrition Survey 2015. *Current Developments in Nutrition*, Volume 8, 103596.

Karremans N, **Essman M**, Hawkins B, *et al.* (2023) OP82. Newspaper coverage of calorie menu labelling in England, 2017 - 2022: A framing analysis. *J Epidemiol Community Health* ;77:A40.

**Essman M**, Bishop T, Burgoine T, *et al.* (2023) OP81. Experiences and process of implementation and enforcement of mandatory calorie labelling regulations for the out-of-home sector in England: a qualitative study. *J Epidemiol Community Health*;77:A40.

Polden M, Jones A, **Essman M**, *et al.* (2023) OP80. Energy intake during restaurant visits pre vs. post implementation of mandatory calorie labelling in the English out-of-home food sector: a repeat cross-sectional study. *J Epidemiol Community Health*;77:A39.

**Essman M**, Stoltze FM, Carpentier FD, Swart EC, Taillie LS. (2020) Examining the News Media Reaction to a National Sugary Beverage Tax in South Africa: A Quantitative Content Analysis. *Current Developments in Nutrition*. Volume 4, Supplement 2. [https://doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzaa064\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzaa064_003).

Rayfield S, Mohamed-Ahmed O, Chilundika N, **Essman M**. PP19. Successful promotion of fruit consumption in the workplace: posters versus price "a comparison of two interventions. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2014;**68**:A54.

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### Research Methods Presentations

**Essman M**. Quantifying the effect of changing exposure in logistic regression: Should we consider more than just odds ratios? MRC Epidemiology Unit Work in Progress series. April 2023.

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### Invited Non-Conference Presentations

- Guest Lecturer, Introduction to Human Nutrition NUTR 240**, UNC-Chapel Hill October 2024
- Delivered lecture for undergraduate course with 80 students.
  - Developed and assessed content focused on key topics, including: describing the physical activity guidelines; explaining how muscles obtain energy from different nutrients; discussing the energy and nutritional needs of athletes; evaluating the use of ergogenic aids to improve physical activity performance.
- Guest Presenter, Calorie labelling in England: What has been the impact of mandatory calorie labelling on consumers and businesses?** University of Liverpool August 2024
- Assessing the impact of calorie labelling in the out-of-home food sector in England: insights from implementation and menu changes.
- Nutrition Society in South Africa**, Western Cape, South Africa May 2021
- The impact of the health promotion levy on sugary beverage intake in Langa, South Africa.
- Guest Lecturer, International Nutrition NUTR 745**, UNC-Chapel Hill Nov 2020
- Global food policies, with a focus on taxes and labeling to reduce the consumption of sugary beverages and junk food. Additional content on ethics of food policies.
- Fork Nutrition Counseling - Duke University Integrative Medicine, Durham, NC** Sept 2018
- Presented to Durham-Chapel Hill Dietetic Association: Sugar-sweetened beverage taxes across the world.
- Inaugural CrossFit Chapel Hill Nutrition Seminar**, Chapel Hill, NC July 2018
- Frameworks for understanding healthy food choices, including diet tracking.
- Exeter College, Oxford University** June 2015
- Presentation delivered at the Exeter College, Oxford 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the graduate student government. The purpose was a critical perspective of the current and future policies for obesity prevention in the United Kingdom.
  - Title: "Obesity: statistics, economics, politics"
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- ### Teaching & Mentoring
- Adjunct Faculty**, UNC-Chapel Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health Jan 2025 – Present
- MPH@UNC Online Program, teaching NUTR 751: Global Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems
  - Deliver a 3-credit graduate course on global food systems, key actors, and policies addressing nutrition, sustainability, and health.
  - Facilitate interactive discussions and applied assignments focused on program and policy design and evaluation.
- Master's student dissertation supervisor** December 2022 – Present
- Conceptualized MPhil dissertation proposals and guided master's students in developing and completing a dissertation thesis.
  - MPhil Population Health Sciences, University Cambridge, UK
- Advisor to Undergraduate** September 2017 – May 2019
- Mentorship and second reader for undergraduate honors thesis "Developing an index to estimate the association between the Food Environment and CVD mortality rate," supporting to successful publication.
  - Nutrition Department, Gillings School of Public Health, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Course Discussion Leader** August 2018 – December 2018
- NUTR 240 Introduction to Human Nutrition. Instructor: Melinda Beck.
  - Nutrition Department, Gillings School of Public Health, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Graduate Teaching Assistant** Jan 2018 – May 2018
- NUTR/EPID 813: Nutritional Epidemiology
  - Nutrition Department, Gillings School of Public Health, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Professional tutoring – Varsity Tutors** December 2015 – April 2017
- Working as an independent contracting tutor for students primarily in college math and science subjects. Also tutoring for SAT college prep and GRE graduate school prep.
- Professional tutoring – Match Corps: Lawrence** January 2013 – June 2013
- Full-time professional tutoring and mentoring program working with students from Lawrence, MA of low socioeconomic status to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and have the opportunities for college. Performed teaching instruction in Spanish.