

Gillings community mourns the loss of Dr. Dianne S. Ward

It is with profound grief that the Gillings School of Global Public Health shares the news of the untimely death of our colleague, [Dianne Stanton Ward, EdD](#).

Dr. Ward was a professor in the Gillings School's Department of Nutrition and was embedded with the [UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention](#) (HPDP), where she directed the [Children's Healthy Weight Research Group](#).

"Like a pebble cast into a pool, the concentric ripples of Dianne's career have influenced the lives of many people across UNC's campus, the state of North Carolina, our nation and the world," writes Dr. Alice Ammerman, who also is on faculty in the Department of Nutrition and is the director of HPDP. "Her life's work earned her a reputation that is international in scope. Professionals in the field of public health knew and respected her for her pioneering research in childhood nutrition and physical activity. Colleagues who worked with her knew her to be a synergistic leader who was dependable, forward-thinking and innovative. Students fortunate enough to have studied with her owe her a debt of gratitude for the inspirational teaching and mentorship that was instrumental in launching their careers."



Dr. Dianne S. Ward

Dr. Ward's career at UNC began in 1998 when she joined the Department of Nutrition and served as associate dean for administration at the Gillings School. In 2001, she found her research home at HPDP, and her fruitful collaboration with the center gave rise to the Children's Healthy Weight Research Group. Her research portfolio illustrates her intense passion for promoting the health and welfare of young children, whether in childcare settings, schools or communities.

Dr. Ward's signature contribution to the field is the creation of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAPSACC) program, which she developed in partnership with the North Carolina Division of Public Health and Prevention Partners with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The success of this program far exceeded its North Carolina roots; aspects of NAPSACC were included in Michelle Obama's Let's Move Child Care Initiative. Over time, the program evolved into [Go NAPSACC](#), a suite of online tools meant to build healthy eating and physical activity habits in children across the United States. By 2020, the program was widely implemented in more than 20 states. In North Carolina alone, the program is used by more than 900 childcare programs and has positively impacted over 54,000 children.

Most recently, Go NAPSACC was expanding to support childcare programs in Australia and Great Britain, and Dr. Ward was exploring how the program's core concepts could be used to benefit elderly populations.

"Dianne's generosity extended to the people she served, to her students and to her colleagues," Ammerman says. "Despite all her professional obligations, she was never too busy to participate in events, inquire about co-workers' personal lives, share book suggestions with a friend or clean out the communal refrigerator. She was a researcher with an international reputation, but she was also a member of our HPDP family. We were blessed to share in her life."

"The people most impacted by Dianne's visionary work are our nation's most precious resource — our children," Ammerman adds. "They would not recognize her name, be impressed by her weighty credentials or even understand the contribution she made to their well-being — but because of her, their healthier diets and increased physical activity will shape their lives in positive ways for years to come."