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About 52% of American women 20-39 years old are at risk for type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other health conditions because they are overweight or obese. Pregnancy weight gain is a strong predictor of postpartum weight retention. The postpartum period is a critical time when weight retention and weight gain can lead to long-term increases in body mass index, exacerbating health problems related to overweight/obesity, such as diabetes and hyperlipidemia (high triglyceride and cholesterol, both of which are cardiovascular risk factors).

Dr. Chang’s program of research focuses on prevention of excessive gestational weight gain and obesity among young low-income mothers by promoting healthy eating, physical activity, and stress management. Her ultimate goal is to work closely with communities to design interventions that have the potential for implementation, adoption, dissemination, and long-term maintenance in major community-based programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Extension. She has collaborated with WIC in Michigan and Michigan State University-Extension to combat the prevalence of obesity by translating evidence into practice.

Dr. Chang has partnered with communities to deliver theory-based, culturally sensitive intervention messages via a combination of DVDs and peer support group teleconferences (PSGTs). The DVDs feature African American and white WIC mothers who participated in a healthy lifestyle intervention patterned after an intervention. The PSGTs are led by members of the communities.