The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government today announced that Dr. Erika Martin, director of Health Policy Studies for the Institute and assistant professor at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs, University at Albany, has received a two-year career development award from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to undertake a major research initiative entitled Testing the Usability and Fitness of Open Health Data for Studying the Relationship Between Childhood Obesity and the Built Environment.

This study aims to facilitate the release of open data that are fit for research and to make recommendations on building a community of practice oriented towards using open data to support research on critical public health issues. Specific activities will be to systematically review the usability of federal, state, and local open health datasets; interview agency staff to assess their capabilities to release health data, challenges, and perceived value of releasing data to researchers; and to study the association between childhood obesity and the built environment using linked open data.

Dr. Guthrie Birkhead, deputy commissioner of the Office of Public Health in the New York State Department of Health, and Courtney Burke, deputy secretary for health to New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, will serve as her research and practice mentors. Dr. Theresa Pardo, director of the Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany, will provide guidance on digital government research. These mentors will work closely with Martin to provide feedback on research, translating findings, and leadership.

This award builds on the activities of the recent "Open Health Data: Open Opportunities Workshop" that Martin co-organized with Dr. Natalie Helbig at CTG. The interactive workshop, funded by the New York State Health Foundation through its support of the Rockefeller Institute, brought together researchers and practitioners to explore how open health data can be a viable resource for improving the health of New Yorkers. Additional details on the workshop can be found online at http://www.rockinst.org/ohdoo/.

The mentored research scientist development awards aim to strengthen the pool of researchers available to conduct public health services and systems research and to build on successful principles and models in the field. Awards support mentored, intensive career development experiences through funding, educational experiences, and protected time. Awards are administered through the National Coordinating Center for Public Health Services and Systems Research (http://www.publichealthsystems.org/) and are funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (http://www.rwjf.org/).

"I'd like to congratulate Dr. Martin on receiving this award, which demonstrates a commitment to using health data to impact the health of New Yorkers by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation," said Nirav R. Shah, MD, MPH, commissioner of health for New York State. "Her research will address a serious public health issue in New York State, and the findings have the potential to..."
influence the health of children in this state. Under the guidance of Dr. Birkhead, Ms. Burke, Dr. Pardo, and others, I am confident that Dr. Martin's work will add to the growing body of knowledge on how the built environment affects childhood obesity.

"We are thrilled that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has given Dr. Martin the opportunity to continue working on how open data initiatives can improve the quality, timing, and practicality of health research. I'm especially pleased that she'll work with such an excellent team of public servants and researchers — Courtney Burke, Gus Birkhead, Theresa Pardo, and Natalie Helbig. Together they have the talents and the positions to bridge data, research, and practice in ways that serve New Yorkers' health," stated Dr. Thomas Gais, director of the Rockefeller Institute.

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About the Rockefeller Institute of Government

The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government is the public policy research arm of the State University of New York. The Institute conducts fiscal and programmatic research on American state and local governments. Journalists can find useful information on the Newsroom page of the Website, [www.rockinst.org](http://www.rockinst.org).

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