Salud America!, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), conducted its 2nd Annual Scientific Summit on September 22-24, 2010, at the Hotel Contessa in San Antonio, Texas. This Summit Report is a description of the event.

Salud America! aims to unite, and increase the number of, Latino researchers engaged in research on environmental and policy solutions to the obesity epidemic among Latino children. The network is directed by the Institute for Health Promotion Research at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio. For more information, visit [www.salud-america.org](http://www.salud-america.org).

# Table of contents

## Executive Summary
- 3 Salud America! Makes Strides to Curb Latino Childhood Obesity
- 3 What’s Next for RWJF in Childhood Obesity?

## U.S. Childhood Obesity
- 4 The RWJF Center: Addressing U.S. Childhood Obesity
- 5 Panel: Funding Opportunities

## Salud America!: The Policy Task
- 6 A New Model for Assessing Policy Contributions

## Salud America!: Pilot Progress
- 7 Family Pilot Investigators
- 8 Community Pilot Investigators
- 9 School Pilot Investigators

## Summit Information
- 10 Meet the Experts
- 11 Fun
- 12 Agenda
- 13 Attendees
Executive Summary

Salud America! Makes Strides to Curb Latino Childhood Obesity

Over the last two years, Salud America! has created the first national research agenda to examine the causes and consequences of obesity among Latino children.

We built an online network of 1,700 people seeking to prevent it.

We launched e-communications, Web sites and videos to raise awareness about the severity of the problem.

And we’re starting to see some encouraging news. For the first time in three decades, obesity rates have leveled off among Latino kids in California, the San Francisco Chronicle reported in August.

But we’re just getting warmed up.

Case in point: Our 20 Salud America! pilot investigators, who are only halfway through their RWJF research projects, are making significant progress on a variety of nutrition, physical activity and policy issues affecting Latinos.

Our pilots’ work was on display at our 2nd Annual Scientific Summit, which was smaller in scale than last year’s but no less productive:

• Most pilots are on track with recruiting study participants;
• Several already have developed new surveys, tools and products;
• More than half have presented their project and results at a regional or national conference, or to a group of community leaders or policy-makers;
• Many have had abstracts or posters accepted for presentation; and
• Many have been featured in newspapers or Web sites.

Our 20 investigators are using their funding to get a foothold at their institutions and build up their careers in childhood obesity research. Many of them already are preparing to embark on larger-scale, and hopefully more influential, work.

For example, more than three quarters of our researchers have submitted grant applications based directly on their pilot work or other work in childhood obesity. That’s good news in the fight against Latino childhood obesity.

What’s Next for RWJF in Childhood Obesity?

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has a lofty goal: reversing the national childhood obesity epidemic by 2015.

To achieve its goal, RWJF is focusing on creating policy and environmental change that will help the population as a whole and those at highest risk, such as Latinos, said Dr. Laura Leviton, RWJF special advisor for evaluation, at the Summit.

What does this entail?

It will take three intertwined activities: producing targeted research to build evidence of what works; supporting specific action to change policies and environments so they support healthy living; and advocating for these strategies with leaders from all sectors at the national, state and local levels.

“Will we get there by 2015?” Leviton asked. “Not unless we focus. Not unless we shift from retail approach to wholesale. Not unless we address the situation of Latinos.”

RWJF’s efforts focus on six policy priorities:

• Increase the time, intensity and duration of physical activity during the school day and out-of-school programs.
• Increase physical activity by improving the built environment in communities.
• Use pricing strategies—both incentives and disincentives—to promote the purchase of healthier foods.
• Reduce youth exposure to unhealthy food marketing through regulation, policy and effective industry self-regulation.
• Ensure that all foods and beverages served and sold in schools meet or exceed the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
• Increase access to high-quality, affordable foods through new or improved grocery stores and healthier corner stores and bodegas.

RWJF is working on implementing these priorities in the context of federal-level changes, such as bills on nutrition and transportation currently pending in Congress.

Salud America! is playing a role too.

Leviton said the network should keep “doing what it is doing” to conduct research, build the field of researchers and raise awareness of the cultural specificity of obesity.

“Speed up the adoption of strategies in Latino communities,” she said, “and adapt what we know or that we discovered in Latino communities to the situation of Latinos.”

At that point, reversing the trend of childhood obesity becomes an attainable goal.
Obesity is taking its toll on U.S. children.

The number of kids hospitalized due to obesity has doubled in recent years and more suffer from early onset of adult diseases like diabetes, increasing the nation’s overall health care costs, said Mildred Thompson, deputy director of the RWJF Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity on Day 2 of the summit.

That’s why change is needed, Thompson said.

And that’s why the RWJF Center is working with Foundation grantees and federal policy-makers to create systemic, sustainable changes to reduce childhood obesity rates, especially in communities of color and lower-income areas.

“We can’t continue to let our children walk down this path of lifelong consequences,” said Thompson, also of PolicyLink. “To really address childhood obesity, we have got to take a look at the energy imbalance.”

The RWJF Center develops policy agendas at the national, state, regional, and local levels. They advance effective communications and media strategies.

They also support and provide technical assistance to RWJF grantees to build capacity to reverse the epidemic. Technical assistance includes: grantee outreach; promoting innovative practice models; support in advancing a policy agenda; providing training opportunities; developing tools, webinars, curricula, etc.; and more.

Opportunities abound for change at the federal level, too, Thompson said.

Some of the legislative and administrative actions that can have an impact on childhood obesity include:

- The Child Nutrition and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Reauthorization Act, which authorizes, and provides funding and regulation for, federal school meal and child nutrition programs;
- The Elementary & Secondary Education Act, which appropriates federal funding for school districts nationwide and sets education policy;
- The Federal Transportation Reauthorization, which authorizes federal programs for highways, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and public transportation;
- The Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI), a public-private partnership to attract fresh food retail investment in underserved communities by providing critical one-time loan and grant financing; and
- The Farm Bill, the primary federal agricultural and food policy legislation.

“We’ve got to make sure that we broaden the discussion and that we’re at the debates of all these legislative processes that are underway,” Thompson said. “This is a window that’s open right now. We don’t know how much longer it’s going to be open.”
How does a new researcher go about getting funding? The research idea is the key, said Dr. Charlotte Pratt, program director for the Division of Prevention and Population Sciences at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Pratt, who offered several tips for seeking funding, urged young investigators to get started by drafting an innovative research idea, getting familiar with existing literature but not rehashing prior work, and asking for feedback on your idea.

“Share your ideas with colleagues, mentors and NIH program directors,” said Pratt, who also touted the NIH’s new video that offers tips for applicants. “Also, use the NIH Project Reporter to find who has grants in your institution, and invite them to be on your research team.”

Several organizations offer their own grants or list other grants:

- RWJF Calls for Proposals
- NIH Obesity Grants
- National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) Obesity Grants
- Live Smart Texas

RWJF also funds research through Healthy Eating Research (HER), a national program that supports research on policy and environmental strategies with potential to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity.

HER has issued 10 calls for proposals (CFPs) over the past five years, funding 76 grants, said Dr. Melissa Nelson Laska, an HER faculty research associate.

Laska urged people to sign up for details on HER’s upcoming CFPs.

“We want to build a vibrant, multidisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers, and ensure that findings are effectively communicated to inform policies and guide the development of effective solutions,” Laska said.

Pratt, meanwhile, also touted several new training opportunities for young researchers, such as the NHLBI’s research training and career development efforts.
“I am not a policy person.”
This was the response from some Salud America! pilot investigators when asked about their role in policy contribution, said Dr. Judith Ottoson, an independent evaluation consultant and member of the Salud America! National Advisory Committee.

Yet every pilot investigator contributes to policy development at some level, Ottoson said.

“Policy permeates every one of your contexts,” Ottoson told researchers at the summit. “The difference is not that we’re policy people or not policy people, but that we’re all asked to think about policy and think beyond our own study.”

Ottoson interviewed all 20 Salud America! pilot investigators over the past year.

She sought to gauge their policy contributions and tell them about a new model, the Science-Policy-Public-Evaluation Spectra, which she and other experts developed to assess policy contribution and field-building.

The first spectrum is the “public”—the degree to which the public views an issue, such as obesity, as a problem. The next spectrum includes the multiple stages of “policy”—planning, developing policy, enacting it, and following up post-enactment. Each of these stages in turn includes specific tasks like creating awareness, framing the issue, and mobilization.

The last spectrum is “science” and “evaluation”—in which researchers determine factors that impact policy, assess needs, test interventions and evaluate.

The spectra illustrate how these levels are organized and interact with each other. For example, the outcomes of the science and evaluation spectrum can influence policy planning by describing the problem, or policy enactment by framing the action. Further, an engaged and interested public can influence policy as well.

“What we’re trying to do with the spectra is take this mystery of policy and policy contribution, and name it, frame it and see it, so that we can discuss it and figure out how we’re going to make contributions to it at some level,” Ottoson said.

Ottoson worked with pilots to see how their work fits on the spectra.

“It’s been a mutual learning process,” she said. “The pilots have helped shape the spectra.”

Some pilots are contributing to policy formation by examining causes of and trends in Latino childhood obesity. Others are interested in raising awareness, mobilizing people or reframing issues for the Latino population. Still others are assessing policy access and equity, to determine whether policies should continue, change or end.

Many are doing several of these things.

“Policy is not a point in time…policy is a process,” said Ottoson, noting that researchers can contribute through presentations, coalitions, media stories, reports, and publications at the national, state, regional or organizational level.

After her interviews and joint exploration with pilot investigators, Ottoson said they were far more attuned to the impact they were already having on policy. And although most pilots weren’t directly advocating for policy change, Ottoson said, they’re working, or have the potential to work, with organizations that are.

Pilots also were motivated to build on that impact.

“There are a lot of different points on this continuum where you have potential to make contributions to policy,” Ottoson told pilots. “And many of these balls need to be kept in the air at the same time…and you may need to move ahead on many points at one time.”
Pilot Investigators Making Progress in Latino Families

The 11 Salud America! “family” pilot investigators are making significant progress on a variety of nutrition, physical activity and policy issues affecting Latinos. Several already have developed new surveys or tools.

Nearly all have presented their project at a non-Salud America! scientific conference, or to a group of community leaders or policy-makers. Most have had abstracts or posters accepted for presentation or been featured in newspapers or on Web sites.

The pilots also are using their funding to get a foothold at their institutions and submit new grants in childhood obesity research.

All pilot investigators currently are writing research briefs about their project results and policy implications. Briefs will be available in early 2011.

Salud America! Family Pilot Investigators

Dr. Shari Barkin, Vanderbilt University Medical Center
“Increasing Access to Physical Activity and Use of Community Recreation Centers by Latino Families to Reduce Pediatric Obesity”

Dr. Nelda Mier, Texas A&M Health Science Center
“Assessing the Built Environment in Colonias to Influence Policy Promoting Physical Activity in Mexican-American Children and Families”

Dr. Angela Wiley, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
“Abrriendo Caminos—Clearing the Path”

Dr. Dina Castro, University of North Carolina
“Growing Healthy Kids”

Dr. Dharma Cortes, University of Massachusetts Boston
“Esto es Mejor: Improving Food Purchasing Selection Among Low-Income, Spanish-Speaking Latinos Through Social Marketing Messages”

Dr. Carmen Nevarez, Public Health Institute, California
“Evaluation of the Impact of a Menu-Labeling Program (Smart Menu/La Salud Tiene Sabor) in South Los Angeles”

Dr. Miriam Vega, Latino Commission on AIDS, New York
“La Familia en la Cocina”

Dr. Alexy Arauz Boudreau, Massachusetts General Hospital
“A Family Approach to Addressing Lifestyle Decision in Obesity and Diabetes”

Dr. Harris Huberman, SUNY Downstate Medical Center
“Primeros Pasos Parenting Newsletters: A Low-Intensity Approach to Prevent Obesity in Latino Children”

Dr. Javier Rosado, Florida State University
“A Measurement of Obesity: BMI Screenings Across Two Settings”

Dr. Myriam Torres, U. of South Carolina Research Foundation
“Juntas Podemos [Together We Can]: Empowering Latinas To Shape Policy To Prevent Childhood Obesity”
Pilot Investigators Making Progress in Latino Communities

The six Salud America! “community” pilot investigators are making significant progress on a variety of nutrition, physical activity and policy issues affecting Latinos.

Several already have developed new surveys or tools.

Nearly all have presented their project at a non-Salud America! scientific conference, or to a group of community leaders or policy-makers. Most have had abstracts or posters accepted for presentation or been featured in newspapers or on Web sites.

The pilots also are using their funding to get a foothold at their institutions and submit new grants in childhood obesity research.

All pilot investigators currently are writing research briefs about their project results and policy implications. Briefs will be available in early 2011.

Salud America! Community Pilot Investigators

Dr. Robert Dudley, Community Health Center, Connecticut
“Healthy Tomorrows for Latina Teens”

Dr. Norma Olvera, University of Houston
“From Mothers to Daughters: A Physical Activity Dosage Intervention to Impact Adiposity”

Dr. Cristina Barroso, University of Texas School of Public Health, Brownsville
“Body Image Perceptions Among Latinos”

Dr. Rebecca London, Stanford University School of Education
“Linking After-School Program Participation With Latino Youths’ Obesity and Physical Fitness Outcomes”

Dr. Meizi He, UT San Antonio
“Building a Healthy Temple—A Faith-Based Community Participatory Research Project for Preventing Childhood Obesity Among Latino Families”

Dr. Monika Stodolska, University of Illinois
“Crime, Physical Activity and Outdoor Recreation Among Latino Adolescents”
Pilot Investigators Making Progress in Latino Schools

The three Salud America! “school” pilot investigators are making significant progress on a variety of nutrition, physical activity and policy issues affecting Latinos.

Several already have developed new surveys or tools.

Nearly all have presented their project at a non-Salud America! scientific conference, or to a group of community leaders or policy-makers. Most have had abstracts or posters accepted for presentation or been featured in newspapers or on Web sites.

The pilots also are using their funding to get a foothold at their institutions and submit new grants in childhood obesity research.

All pilot investigators currently are writing research briefs about their project results and policy implications. Briefs will be available in early 2011.

Salud America! School Pilot Investigators

Dr. Zan Gao, Texas Tech University
“Integrating Dance Dance Revolution to Promote Urban Latino School Children’s Physical Health and Academic Achievement: Project GAME”

Dr. Emma Sanchez, San Francisco State University
“Informing Latino Childhood Obesity Prevention: The Role of Physical Education Policies in California”

Dr. Claudia Galindo, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
“Young Latino Children’s Weight Changes: Examination of Individual, Family and School Factors”
Meet the Experts

Rarely do you get a chance to “talk shop” with leaders in your field.

That’s why Salud America! conducted a “Meet the Experts” session before the official start of its 2nd Annual Scientific Summit.

Summit attendees—mainly pilot investigators and their colleagues—were able to meet, network with, and ask questions of some of the most influential researchers and evaluators in the childhood obesity prevention field.

The session featured these experts in these areas:

**Developing Policy**
- Larry Green, Dr.P.H., University of California, San Francisco
- Judith Ottoson, Ed.D., Independent Consultant

**Building Assessment Instruments**
- Nancy Butte, Ph.D., Baylor College of Medicine

**Federal-Level Perspectives**
- Charlotte Pratt, Ph.D., National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
- Robin Hamre, M.P.H., U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Technical Assistance and Resources**
- Mildred Thompson, M.S.W., RWJF Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity
- Melissa Nelson Laska, Ph.D., Healthy Eating Research

**Career Development**
- Frank Penedo, Ph.D., University of Miami
- Amy Yaroch, Ph.D., Center for Human Nutrition

“The opportunity to engage experts in active discussion was invaluable,” said Salud America! Pilot Investigator Dr. Shari Barkin. “Ideas were moved from the theoretical to the applied state, allowing action to result from discussion.”
Science, research and networking headlined this year’s Scientific Summit.

But we squeezed some fun in, too.

The summit launched with a boat ride along San Antonio’s scenic River Walk to a festive reception on September 22 at Club Giraud, a private dining club steeped in history where attendees were able to enjoy fine food and company.

Then, during the summit agenda on September 23-24, attendees were able to take a Salsa dance lesson or enjoy a scenic walking tour of San Antonio’s culturally rich downtown.

We even spiced up our between-panel breaks by playing a unique video that featured Latin dance moves and a catchy musical beat. The video spurred attendees to get out of their seats and move and dance together.

“We hope attendees enjoyed these unique activities while they also learned a lot about the latest efforts to reduce obesity among Latino children,” said Salud America! Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez. “We hope this was a memorable, motivating experience.”
**Agenda: 2nd Annual Salud America! Scientific Summit**

**Wednesday, September 22, 2010**

6–9 p.m. Summit Reception, Club Giraud, San Antonio

**Thursday, September 23, 2010**

8–9 a.m. Meet the Experts Session

9–9:15 a.m. Welcome/Introductions/Salud America! Report Card
   Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H., Director, Salud America!
   Laura Leviton, Ph.D., Special Advisor for Evaluation, RWJF

9:15–9:45 a.m. Keynote Speech
   Judith Ottoson, Ed.D., Independent Evaluation Consultant

9:45–10:35 a.m. Family Pilot Panel 1: “Policy Changes that Impact Latinos”
   Pilots: Shari Barkin, Nelda Mier and Angela Wiley
   Respondent: Robert Garcia, J.D., The City Project

10:35–11 a.m. Break

11 a.m.–Noon Family Pilot Panel 2: “Policy Changes that Impact Latinos”
   Pilots: Dina Castro, Dharma Cortes, Carmen Nevarez and Miriam Vega
   Respondent: Amy Yaroch, Ph.D., Center for Human Nutrition

Noon–1:30 p.m.
   Lunch and Activity/Exercise Sessions
   Activity 1: Salsa Dance Lesson by Laura Rubalcava
   Activity 2: Scenic Walk

1:30–2:30 p.m. Family Pilot Panel 3: “Policy Changes that Impact Latinos”
   Pilots: Alexy Arauz Boudreau, Harris Huberman, Javier Rosado and Myriam Torres
   Respondent: Nancy Butte, Ph.D., Baylor College of Medicine

2:30–3:20 p.m.
   Community Pilot Panel 1: “Policy Changes that Impact Latinos”
   Pilots: Robert Dudley, Norma Olvera and Cristina Barroso
   Respondent: Randy Schwartz, M.S.P.H., American Cancer Society

3:20–3:45 p.m. Break

3:45–4:35 p.m.
   Community Pilot Panel 2: “Policy Changes that Impact Latinos”
   Pilots: Rebecca London, Mei He and Monika Stodolska
   Respondent: Charlotte Pratt, Ph.D., National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

4:35–5:30 p.m.
   School Pilot Panel: “Policy Changes that Impact Latinos”
   Pilots: Zan Gao, Emma Sanchez and Claudia Galindo
   Respondent: Elva Arredondo, Ph.D., San Diego State University

**Friday, September 24, 2010**

8–8:15 a.m.
   Welcome Back
   Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H., Director, Salud America!

8:15–9 a.m.
   Mildred Thompson, M.S.W., RWJF Center to Reduce Childhood Obesity

9–9:45 a.m.
   Panel: “Looking Ahead: Identifying Funding Opportunities”
   Melissa Nelson Laska, Ph.D., Healthy Eating Research
   Charlotte Pratt, Ph.D., National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

9:45–10:15 a.m. Break

10:15–10:45 a.m.
   Presentation: “What’s Next for RWJF in Childhood Obesity”
   Laura Leviton, Ph.D., Special Advisor for Evaluation, RWJF

10:45–11:30 a.m.
   Town Hall: “Pilot Issues and Responsibilities”
   Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H., Director, Salud America!
Salud America! Scientific Summit Attendee List

Salud America! Staff
- Patricia Chalela
- Cliff Despres
- Kip Gallion
- Kay Haverlah
- Amelie G. Ramirez

Salud America! National Advisory Committee
- Elva M. Arredondo
- Nancy F. Butte
- Robert Garcia
- Lawrence W. Green
- Robin Hamre
- Judith Ottoson

Salud America! Pilot Investigators
- Frank J. Penedo
- Charlotte A. Pratt
- Randy Schwartz
- Mildred Thompson
- Amy Yaroch

Salud America! Pilot Co-Investigators
- Jayme Hannay
- Mariah Lafleur
- Elizabeth Perez-Ode
- Margaret Samuels
- Liz Schwarte
- Judith Shinogle
- Julie Smithwick-Leone
- Andrew Spieldenner
- Summer Wilmoth

Attendees
- Desiree Acosta
- Lesli Biediger-Friedman
- Alberto Cordova
- Laura Esparza
- Vince Fonseca
- Sandy Griffith
- Daniel C. Hughes
- Melissa Nelson Laska
- Laura Leviton
- Dorothy Long-Parma
- Cynthia Mojica
- Daisy Morales-Campos
- Deborah Parra-Medina
- Paul Ramirez
- Laura Rubalcava
- Sandra San Miguel
- Erica Sosa
- Celia Thompson
- Rebecca Vega
- Sylvie Whitehead
- Alice Yan
- Zenong Yin

About the Summit Report
The Summit Report was produced by Salud America! Please send comments to despres@uthscsa.edu. Visit Salud America! at www.salud-america.org.

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