

# Salud America!

The RWJF Research Network to  
Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

Volume 1, Issue 3, Winter, 2009

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## Happy New Year!

*Salud America!* would like to wish you the very best in 2009, and we thank you for your valuable membership in our program as we work together to pursue innovative avenues and efforts aimed at addressing obesity among Latino children. May you and your families enjoy happiness, peace and good health this coming year and beyond.

## CFP Released!

On December 5, 2008, a **call for proposals (CFP)** was released for up to 20 pilot research projects related to addressing obesity among Latino children. Join ***Salud America!*** to receive our E-newsletter and get the latest program updates and news about Latino childhood obesity research, training, education and other funding opportunities.

## Got a News Item?

We welcome your news items, story ideas and suggestions. Please send them to [despres@uthscsa.edu](mailto:despres@uthscsa.edu) to be featured in the E-newsletter.

## **Salud America! seeks proposals for projects to address Latino childhood obesity**

Obesity prevention is a rapidly expanding research field, but very little of that research focuses on Latino children, even though they have higher obesity rates than many of their peers and are part of the fastest-growing U.S. minority group.

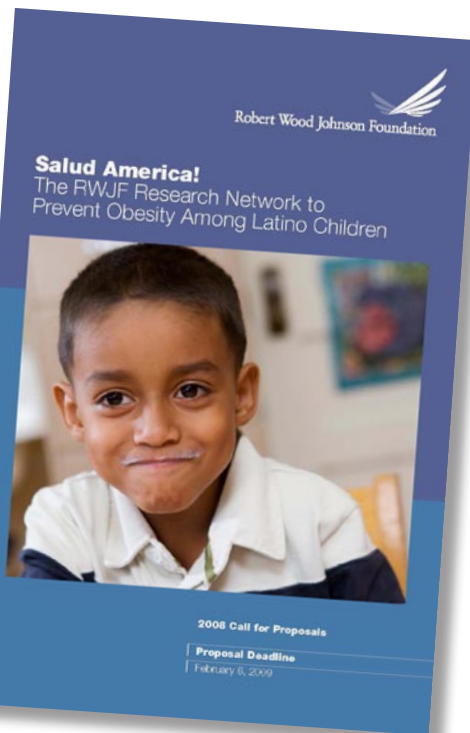
If you are looking for an opportunity to bridge this research gap and help Latino children, *Salud America!* invites you to apply for an exciting **new funding opportunity**.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is funding up to 20 pilot research projects, each up to \$75,000 for up to two years, through *Salud America!*, a national program that supports research on environmental and policy solutions to the epidemic of obesity among Latino children.

"This pilot research grant could help you advance your research career and serve as a vital stepping stone for taking on larger research projects, while helping to reverse the high obesity rates among Latino children," said Dr. Amelie Ramirez, who directs *Salud America!* and the Institute for Health Promotion Research at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Dr. Ramirez knows just how pilot research like this can benefit a career.

Her other national research network, a cancer-focused program called *Redes En Acci3n*, has coordinated pilot grant funding much like *Salud America!* is doing now. For example, Dr. Martin Perez received a National Cancer Institute grant, through *Redes*, to improve the



coping ability and quality of life among Latino cancer patients.

"Involvement in *Redes En Acci3n* and this pilot project has allowed me an opportunity to build an independent research program that focuses on Latino cancer patients," Dr. Perez said. "This in turn has given me more visibility in my institution and has helped me demonstrate my ability to independently get federal funds for research."

So, just as Dr. Perez advanced his research career with a *Redes* pilot project, you could advance your research career with a pilot project from RWJF and *Salud America!*

*Salud America!* CFP applications are due February 6, 2009.



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

**Salud America!** The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The program aims to unite and increase the number of Latino scientists engaged in research on childhood obesity among Latinos to seek environmental and policy solutions to the epidemic. 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). The *Salud America!* E-newsletter is distributed quarterly to its national membership network.

## Director's Corner

### Letter to members from Dr. Amelie Ramirez

More than 300 people participated in the *Salud America!* **Delphi survey** this past summer.

Survey participants represented a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. Most were Hispanic/Latino, but other groups were represented, too. They had diverse areas of expertise, institutional affiliations and geographical locations, representing 31 U.S. states and three other countries.

But they all share the desire to address obesity among Latino children.

And we hope that desire will be manifested in our recently released **call for proposals** for pilot research projects to address obesity among Latino children, which was based on the top-15 research priorities identified in the Delphi survey.

To give you a glimpse of the survey's top priorities, here are a few:

- Family-level: Engaging Latino families as advocates of childhood obesity prevention initiatives at the community and school levels



Ramirez

- Community-level: Built-environment policies involving collaborations with multiple stakeholders to promote physical activity
- School-level: Health, nutrition and active physical education classes as part of the school curriculum

We are working to publish full survey results in a scientific journal in early 2009, but the preliminary results are on our **Web site**.

Both the survey and CFP are vital steps in the advancement of scientific knowledge about contributing factors and effective

interventions and strategies to address the obesity epidemic among Latino children.

Thank you so much for your ongoing contributions to our effort.

As always, please be sure to frequently check our **Web site** for updates and news. We're looking forward to receiving many innovative CFP applications!

#### **Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H.**

Director, *Salud America!*

Director, Institute for Health Promotion Research at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio



## News Briefs

### **Salud America! membership rises**

The number of *Salud America!* members has grown to 1,280 as of December 22, 2008, up from about 785 members in July 2008 and 1,050 members in October 2008. We are gaining new members every day, and we urge you to invite colleagues to join, as well as others you may know who are interested in addressing the problem of obesity among Latino children. Join the network by **clicking here**.

### **Salud America! gearing up for 2009 conference on Latino childhood obesity**

The first *Salud America!* Scientific Summit will be held September 9-11, 2009, at the historic Gunter Hotel in downtown San Antonio, Texas. The summit will bring together experts and advocates from around the U.S. who are dedicated to preventing Latino childhood obesity, and will highlight pilot projects funded through the program's new **call for proposals**. Visit the program **Web site** for conference details.

### **Salud America! director gets grant to increase accrual in pediatric clinical trials**

On Sept. 15, 2008, *Salud America!* Director Dr. Amelie Ramirez was awarded a supplement grant to her National Cancer Institute-funded *Redes En Acción*: The National Latino Cancer Research Network. The new, one-year grant will extend the scope of patient navigation to increase recruitment of children from Texas' mostly Latino Lower Rio Grande Valley into clinical trials.

## Funding Opportunities

### **R21 grant on communication strategies on diet and health**

The National Cancer Institute and other health entities encourage applications for research projects focused on developing and implementing communication strategies on diet and health. Specifically, this grant aims to promote interdisciplinary research, which is conducted at multiple levels (e.g., individual, community/environment and policy) and across diverse populations, to evaluate effective communication approaches for changing dietary behaviors. For details and deadlines, **click here**.

### **Ladder to Leadership Training Program**

*Ladder to Leadership: Developing the Next Generation of Community Health Leaders*, a collaborative initiative of RWJF and the Center for Creative Leadership, seeks to develop critical leadership skills of 270 early- to mid-career professionals through an innovative 16-month curriculum. These newly trained professionals will enhance the leadership capacity of community-based, nonprofit health organizations serving vulnerable populations. The program will be delivered in nine priority communities on a staggered schedule over the next four years. For details and deadlines, **click here**.

## Physician-researcher tackling diabetes, obesity among Latino kids

Dr. Roberto Trevino, who emerged from a San Antonio housing project to become a doctor with clinics in the city's most disadvantaged neighborhoods, got tired of "waiting for diabetic people age 40 and older to walk into the clinic, going blind and losing limbs."

So, in 1994, he created *Bienestar*, a school-based diabetes prevention program to boost kids' fitness and healthy eating.

Today, 27 Texas school districts, many in low-income, Latino areas, use *Bienestar* to help 150,000 elementary- and middle-school students.

"I felt somebody had to go back into those poor



*Bienestar* features unique publications like these.

populations and reach out, and start changing behavior at an early age," said Dr. Trevino, a *Salud America!* member who runs the San Antonio-based Social & Health Research Center, a nonprofit that aims to prevent diabetes and obesity in communities and schools using health programs like *Bienestar*.



Trevino

About 91 percent of all causes of type 2 diabetes are attributed to a diet high in saturated fat and sugar, low dietary fiber intake, low physical activity and overweight, according to a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2001.

*Bienestar* uses social cognitive theory—the idea that an individual's knowledge acquisition can be related to observing others in the context of social interactions—to coordinate four social systems that influence children's health behaviors: health class, physical education, food service and home.

The program produces four types of bilingual materials: health curriculum for children and teachers in each grade

**Continued on page 6 ▶**

### The National Advisory Committee

Elva Arredondo  
Laura Brennan-Ramirez  
Nancy F. Butte  
Robert Garcia  
Lawrence Green  
Robin Hamre  
Terry Huang  
Catherine Loria  
Judith Ottoson  
Frank J. Penedo  
Charlotte Pratt

#### ▶ Maya Rockeymoore

James Sallis  
Mary Story  
Elsie M. Taveras  
Amy L. Yaroch

## Meet the National Advisory Committee

As a student writing her dissertation on the African-American political response to HIV/AIDS in the mid-1990s, Maya Rockeymoore wanted to get more exposure to what was happening at the community level.

So she went to work as an assistant to the director of the Marion County Health Department (MCHD) in Indiana.

"In addition to gaining a better understanding how the politics of HIV/AIDS was playing out at the local level, this experience gave me insight into what it takes to manage the public health needs of a sizable county population, as well as exposure to the politics and policy of public health," said Rockeymoore, who got her Ph.D. in political science and public policy from Purdue University. "Working at MCHD also allowed me to participate in a number

of activities, such as organizing community health events and writing federal grants, that helped enhance my skills and broaden my perspective on a range of environmental and population health issues."

Dr. Rockeymoore's time at the MCHD also affirmed her commitment to addressing health issues and health disparities, and she went on to become a respected policy analyst, researcher and advocate with expertise in an array of public policy issues.

Today, she directs the RWJF Leadership for Healthy Communities in Washington, D.C., which supports local and state government leaders



Rockeymoore

nationwide in their efforts to reduce childhood obesity through public policies that promote active living, healthy eating and access to healthy foods, especially among children at high risk for obesity, such as African Americans and Latinos.

As a member of the *Salud America!* National Advisory Committee, Dr. Rockeymoore recognizes that there is a dearth of research focused on Latino childhood obesity.

She hopes *Salud America!* can help bridge the gap.

"I hope that *Salud America!* will work with their partners to link their researchers and research findings to policymakers (Latino and non-Latino) that can use their findings to address barriers to healthy eating and active living," she said.



## Report: Location, income impact children's health

The state children live in and their family's income and education may help determine how healthy they are, and about 16 percent of children are in "less than optimal health," according to a new report.

The **report**, *America's Health Starts With Healthy Children: How Do States Compare?*, from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Commission to Build a Healthier America, examines the health of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds in every state to show how healthy children are now and how healthy they could be if the nation were realizing its full health potential.

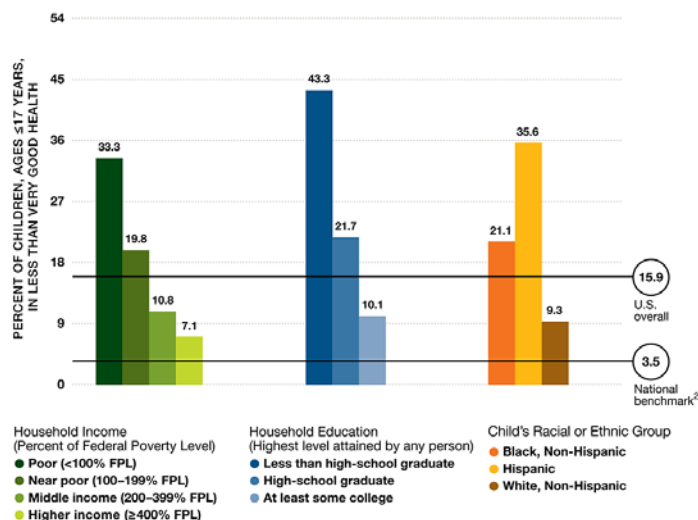
Research has consistently shown that brain, cognitive and behavioral development early in life are strongly linked to health outcomes later in life, including heart disease, diabetes, obesity and many other health problems. The right opportunities in early childhood can put a child on the path to good health, and the new report aims to identify areas where work can be done to improve outcomes.

Compared with children in higher-income families, children in poor, near-poor or middle-income families were 4.7, 2.8 and 1.5 times as likely to be in less than optimal health, according to the report.

Non-Hispanic white children also fare better than those who are Hispanic or non-Hispanic black.

Texas has the highest rate of children in less than optimal health. About 44 percent of the state's children in low-

UNITED STATES:  
Gaps in Children's General Health Status



Source: From the report, *America's Health Starts With Healthy Children: How Do States Compare?*

income families fall into that category, compared with only 6.7 percent of children in higher-income families. This is the largest income gap in children's health of all the states.

"The information presented should be used as a point of departure for a process of inquiry—stimulating an exploration of the most promising national and state policies to realize America's full health potential by shaping healthier conditions in which children and their families live, work, learn and play," according to the report.



### Research Briefs

#### California study:

#### Low-income teens more likely than peers to be overweight

Teenagers from low-income households are three times more likely to be obese than teens from higher-income families, according to a **new policy brief** released by the Center for Health Policy Research at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) reported by United Press International. According to the brief, 21 percent of teenagers residing in low-income households are obese, compared to only 8 percent of teens from higher-income families. The researchers suggest that barriers to healthy behaviors and food options, coupled with the high number of fast-food restaurants and fewer

opportunities for physical activity in low-income areas, are contributing to disparities in the obesity epidemic.

#### Report: Increased media exposure linked to decline in children's health

A **report** released in December by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and a nonprofit advocacy group reveals that prolonged exposure to mass media is associated with obesity and a range of other health problems among children and adolescents, the New York Times reports. Commissioned by Common Sense Media, researchers from NIH, Yale University and the California Pacific Medical Center reviewed 173 studies conducted since 1980 that assessed the impact of mass media on child health. In a majority of the studies, greater exposure to mass media was associated with an

increased risk of childhood obesity, tobacco use and early sexual activity.

#### Report: Foods offered to children in school do not meet dietary guidelines

A new Institute of Medicine (IOM) **review** of the nation's school breakfast and lunch programs finds that children are not consuming enough fruits and vegetables, Reuters reports. The children evaluated in the report consumed less than the recommended daily amount of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, meats, beans and milk and more than the recommended amount of calories from sugars and fats. Noting that the two school meal programs provide 40 million meals each day, and that many children consume as much as half of their daily calories at school, the report highlights the importance of nutritious school meals.

## Policy & Built Environment Corner

### Urban areas, like mainly minority Los Angeles, struggle to find grocers, fresh food

From the Associated Press, via the [Maryland Daily Record](#)

LOS ANGELES—Selma Lozoya is working to bring better food to one of the poorest communities in America, where neon lights illuminate a greasy fast-food vista and obesity and diabetes are rampant.

While grocery stores and healthy restaurants are scarce, corner stores are stocked with beer, cigarettes, fried snacks and fatty sweets.

“I can’t drive yet so I’m not gonna do anything extraordinary like jump on my bike and ride it for two or three miles and ride it back with tons of stuff on it, oh no,” said Lozoya.

The 17-year-old’s work with her high school classmates to urge bodegas to stock healthier options is part of a larger campaign nationwide by nutritionists and community activists to eradicate so-called food deserts.

“Deserts are naturally occurring things,” said Joanne Kim, chief operating officer of the Community Coalition of South Los Angeles. “We call this food apartheid because people have chosen to locate elsewhere even though there is substantial purchasing power here.”

There are only six supermarkets in South Los Angeles, serving a population of about 688,000. By comparison, 19 serve West Los Angeles’ population of about 395,000.

Retailers blame theft in urban supermarkets, high employment turnover and lack of space for choosing to locate their stores elsewhere.

Some cities are trying to get more supermarkets into urban areas. Pennsylvania invested \$30 million five years ago and got 61 supermarkets opened in rural and urban areas.

Chicago and New Orleans are considering similar programs, but legislation to bring the same assistance to California cities died in the Legislature in 2006.



From the Associated Press: Selma Lozoya, right, and friends check stocks of fresh produce at Los Compadres Market, which has a variety of healthful food available, in South Los Angeles Friday, Aug. 22, 2008.

The food disparity in South Los Angeles is an echo of the area’s history, marked by segregation and racial strife.

In the last decade, South Los Angeles has shifted to a mostly Hispanic community, with Latinos making up two-thirds of the population, Census figures show.

Today, fast food is king in South Los Angeles. Nearly three-quarters of restaurants offer food on the go, compared to 42 percent in pricier neighboring West Los Angeles.

The city’s Community Redevelopment Agency estimates the area could support 14 new grocery stores and 74 more restaurants. But few businesses are biting on incentives that include hiring tax credits and low interest loans.

Like many residents of Lozoya’s community, where 28 percent of households live below the federal poverty line, she relies on the small corner grocery a few blocks from her home for chicken, fruit and vegetables.

Until recently, Los Compadres Market and Restaurant looked like most others. But Lozoya and her classmates gave it a healthy makeover through a grant from The California Endowment, a private health foundation.

Chips and candy were removed from the front aisle of the store; a large cooler was stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables; milk and cheese chilled alongside beer.

## Policy & Built Environment News Brief



### New RWJF program seeks policy, environmental changes to improve kids’ health

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has awarded grants of up to \$400,000 to nine U.S. communities that will serve as leading sites for an ambitious new policy- and environment-related effort to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. **Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities** will support local action to increase opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy, affordable foods for children and families. The goal is to catalyze policy and environmental changes that can make a lasting difference and be replicated across the country. In the program’s current **call for proposals**, RWJF will award approximately 60 grants to help local community partnerships nationwide increase opportunities for physical activity and improve access to affordable, healthy foods for children and families. The application deadline is February 3, 2009.



## Researcher tackling obesity

► Continued from page 3

from kindergarten through eighth grade; booklets on physical education activities; a cafeteria manual for food service staff; and a curriculum for after-school caretakers. The program records children's measurements, including body mass index, before the school year starts and again when it ends.

"Students participating in the *Bienestar* program have reported increased dietary fiber intake, increased fitness levels and decreased blood glucose levels," said Dr. Trevino.

Outcomes like those, which were published in the *Archives of Pediatrics* in 2004, led to the development of *Bienestar* as an approved Texas Education Agency-coordinated school health curriculum that is now used across Texas.

The program's latest finding is quite surprising—overweight children aren't necessarily overeating.

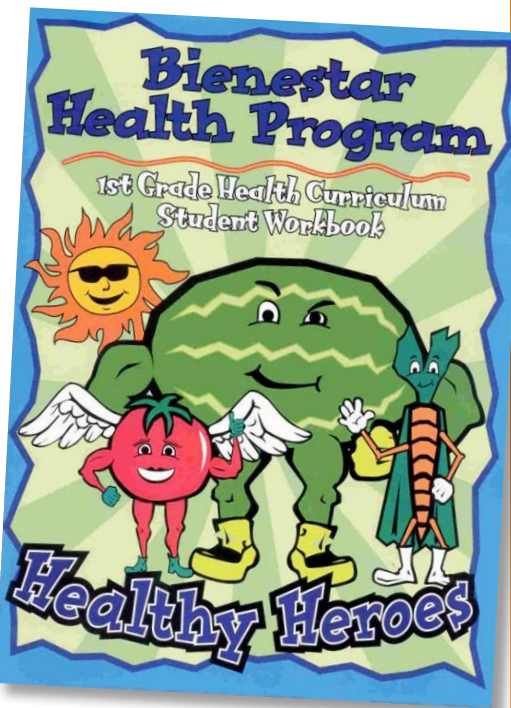
That **new study**, published in the November 2008 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, found that about one-third of 1,402 San Antonio fourth-graders, mainly from low-income, Latino families surveyed through the *Bienestar* program, were obese and highly sedentary. But 44 percent of these children actually

consumed fewer calories than minimum guidelines, and most of the other 56 percent were within the recommended calorie-intake guidelines.

It's just that what those children are eating is very unhealthy, such as foods high in saturated fat and sugar, and foods that lack essential nutrients like magnesium, calcium, phosphorus and potassium, said Dr. Trevino, who led the study.

A combination of low levels of physical activity and unhealthy food means that even when kids are eating the recommended number of calories daily, their health may still be at risk, the researchers concluded.

Now Dr. Trevino and his team are working, through *Bienestar*, to promote calcium-rich foods (milk, yogurt, cheese, white beans, almonds, broccoli, oranges and spinach), phosphorus-rich foods (baked beans, whole wheat bread, oranges, cauliflower and ham), potassium-rich foods (sweet potatoes, white beans, yogurt, tuna, bananas, spinach,



Dr. Roberto Trevino's school-based diabetes prevention program features publications like the one above, which is for first-grade students.

peaches, milk and squash) and magnesium-rich foods (bran cereal, oatmeal, spinach, bananas, mixed nuts, chicken and turkey).

Dr. Trevino also is working to extend the *Bienestar* program in schools in Mexico.

"There's no limit to where this program can have benefits," he said.

### About the E-newsletter

This E-newsletter is produced quarterly by *Salud America!* Please send news items or story ideas to [despres@uthscsa.edu](mailto:despres@uthscsa.edu).

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*Salud America!* The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

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### Kids' Health Q&A

**Question 1:** How can parents keep kids active during the winter?

With the weather cold, keeping kids active can take some creativity. Here are some ideas from the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#) for keeping your family moving all winter long:

- **Discover Indoor Facilities.** Visit an indoor pool, ice skating rink or basketball court at a local gym, school or community center.
- **Dance Your Heart Out.** Encourage your child to pick the music, crank it up and dance away.
- **Take it Outside.** If there is snow where you live, get the whole family outside to do some sledding.
- **Walk the Mall.** When it's too cold to venture outdoors, take the family for a brisk walk around the nearest mall.
- **Keep it Clean.** Recruit your kids to help

with the house cleaning.

- **Visit the Library.** Libraries are a great resource for children's fitness videos and books, which you can use to teach your child about indoor exercises.
- **Hit the Trails.** Go snow trekking, skiing or snowboarding with the kids for a fun aerobic workout.
- **Visit a Zoo or a Farm.** Zoos and farms are fun winter destinations for learning how life changes through the seasons.
- **Sign 'Em Up.** Enroll your child in an instructional group class, such as dancing, gymnastics or other activities that get kids moving.
- **Find Middle Ground.** If it's impossible to pry kids away from the TV, encourage them to do jumping jacks, sit-ups and push-ups during commercial breaks.