

Salud America!

The RWJF Research Network to
Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

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Creating Policy Change Agents to Reduce Latino Childhood Obesity



In its effort to reduce the Latino childhood obesity epidemic, *Salud America!* funded 20 pilot research projects to build the field of Latino researchers and increase evidence to fight Latino childhood obesity.

The 20 *Salud America!* pilot grantees have conducted innovative interventions and evaluations in Latino childhood nutrition, fitness, and policy.

The grants help grantees leverage their data to advance their careers and embark on larger-scale work based off their successful pilot results. Grantees have already accrued more than \$30 million in new funding, and more proposals are in review and development.

Grantees also are sharing research [briefs](#) describing preliminary results and policy implications at the local, regional, and national level.

Grantees have also helped develop the Policy Contribution Spectra model, which visually illustrates how researchers can work in, and between, different levels in the policy development process. Grantees worked with an expert in spectra models to see how their work contributes to policy development, making them more aware of innovative ways they can continue to influence policy even after their pilot project is complete.

[Watch](#) how the grantees have become policy change agents.



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. The *Salud America!* E-newsletter is distributed quarterly to its national membership network.



Director's Corner

Letter to members from Dr. Amelie Ramirez

Mexican-American children ages 2-19 are more likely to be obese or overweight than their peers.

That's why I'm excited to announce that *Salud America!* The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children has received a two-year, \$2.1 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) for its ongoing pursuit of policy and environmental solutions to the epidemic of Latino childhood obesity across the nation.

Salud America! will expand its 2,000-member network and develop an innovative system to support, inform, and empower advocates to prevent Latino childhood obesity.

This Web-based advocacy support system will unite science and multimedia experts to produce a continuous stream of evidence-based news, research, training, and education on Latino childhood obesity to empower researchers, policymakers, and the public to advocate for policy change.

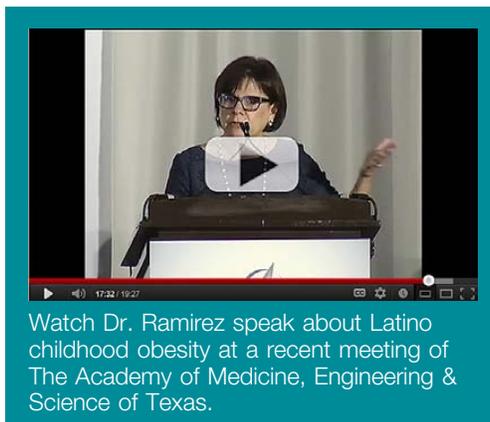
Please join our network [here](#).

Salud America! was launched in 2007 to build the research

base needed in order to reverse the obesity epidemic among Latino children and adolescents.

Over the next two years, *Salud America!* plans to:

- expand its national brand as an information resource on Latino childhood obesity;
- add new members and advocates to its network;
- develop an online advocacy platform specific to the needs and concerns of advocates working to prevent Latino childhood obesity;
- develop a scientific research expert team to interpret and build evidence, and identify relevant content and calls to action;
- produce dynamic multimedia products to feed the network and advocacy platform; and
- monitor and evaluate the impact of these activities.



Watch Dr. Ramirez speak about Latino childhood obesity at a recent meeting of The Academy of Medicine, Engineering & Science of Texas.

Salud America!'s innovative, online advocacy support platform will empower Latino advocates, providers, and other stakeholders with both nationally and locally relevant content.

Read more about this first-of-its-kind platform [here](#).

Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H.

Director, *Salud America!*

Director, Institute for Health Promotion Research
UT Health Science Center at San Antonio



News Brief

Salud America! Grantee Gets Grant to Expand Study

Salud America! grantee Dr. Emma Sanchez received a five-year, \$697,000 grant from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute to expand her work on childhood obesity research. The grant will allow her to investigate the causes of disparities in obesity rates among groups at the county, community, and school level. Specifically, Dr. Sanchez will investigate whether trends in disparities of children's levels of physical fitness explain changing patterns of obesity disparities, and whether the interactions between children's behavior and environment affect disparities in obesity rates.



Emma Sanchez

Funding

Grant Listings

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR), have obesity-related funding opportunities that are seeking applications, or compile lists of funding opportunities.

[RWJF](#)

[NIH](#)

[NCCOR](#)

Stepping Up Against Latino Childhood Obesity

Latino Students, Families Urged to Join ‘No-Soda’ Challenge

Latino kids: Don't drink sodas during the school week.

This is the challenge being given to students and their families in Austin, Texas, by [Manantial de Salud](#), a federally-funded grassroots health network sponsored by the Latino Healthcare Forum in Austin's Dove Springs neighborhood. The project is one of two being funded by a five-year Community Transformation Grant awarded to the Austin/Travis County Department of Health and Human Services by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The pledge, which asks students and their families to not “do the Dew” (or any other soda) from Monday to Friday during the school year, is now being promoted citywide by the Austin Independent School District (ISD), Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, and other local groups as a small-but-serious step toward curbing childhood obesity.

Families who accept the challenge are urged to text “nosodas” to 84444 or email nosodatx@gmail.com, and to share their stories [here](#).

Spanish-speaking families can also text “sinsoda” to 84444 or send an [email](#).

Dr. Stephen Pont, medical director for Austin ISD and pediatrician at Dell Children's Medical Center, is leading the initiative.

“Obesity is a terrible affliction for Latinos in Austin. We need to do many things to fight obesity, and one of the easiest and most important things we can do is to not give our children sodas or other sugary drinks,” Pont said in a statement to Manantial de Salud. “I ask Latino families to accept this challenge and promise to not drink sodas during the school week. This will help your children's health and education.”

No-Soda Challenge: About



No-Soda Challenge: In the News



The idea for this challenge originated among two parent groups in Austin's Dove Springs neighborhood and in East Austin, where childhood obesity is a particular concern.

“We're making this promise for our families and urging all families here to do the same,” said Edgar Chacon, a parent and member of Manantial de Salud, in a statement. “Our children's health is at stake and every small step like this will help in the fight against obesity.”

[Watch](#) a video on one Latino family that has already accepted the challenge.

Watch Spanish-language [commentary](#) from Dr. Pont, or check out news [coverage](#) on the no-soda challenge.

Grantee Corner

Editor's Note: This is a five-part series that will feature new research briefs on Latino childhood obesity issues by Salud America! grantees. These briefs analyze a wide range of issues, from the impact of menu labeling in small restaurants in Los Angeles, to how after-school programs can help Latino youth be active, to how community gardens can help lower-income Latino families eat healthier. Grantees are currently discussing their findings in their communities to influence healthy changes. Find all grantee briefs [here](#).

Javier Rosado – Study: Doctors Give Less Attention to Overweight Children than Obese Children



In his *Salud America!* pilot research project, Dr. Javier Rosado of Florida State University assessed how much weight-related medical attention children get during well-child checkups at a pediatric community health center in a rural, migrant farm-worker community in Florida.

Key preliminary findings include:

- some parents are not concerned about their child's weight;
- obesity among girls raised the highest parental concern;
- in the healthy-weight and overweight groups, weight was documented more frequently for boys than girls,

while in the obese group, physicians were likelier to document weight-related information for girls; and

- physicians give little attention to children who are overweight but not obese.

These findings highlight the need for programs that facilitate parental interest, concern and confidence in influencing their child's health and weight—particularly when parents, like many in our study, are unaware of their child's weight status.

Physicians also need to be equipped with guidelines and tools that facilitate accurate diagnosis and treatment of childhood obesity, and any such guidelines must address parent and child motivation to engage in treatment.

Robert Dudley – Study: 'Photovoice' Can Empower Latino Youth to Spark Health Policy Change



In his *Salud America!* pilot research project, Dr. Robert Dudley of Community Health Center, Inc., evaluated Health Tomorrows for Latina Teens, a five-year, federally-funded obesity prevention and advocacy training program for adolescent girls in New Britain, Conn.

To identify factors that promote or prevent physical activity among Latina teens, Dr.

Dudley's team used a research method called "Photovoice." The girls used cameras to assess both problems and assets in the community, and the researchers then helped them engage with policymakers to pursue change.

Key preliminary findings include:

- barriers preventing Latina teen activity include stressors such as unsafe neighborhoods, isolation from family, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and

inadequate social support systems;

- Photovoice can help catalog these barriers; and
- Photovoice can expedite policy change by facilitating direct, informal dialogue between policymakers and Latino youth.

The project spurred the local school district to add a program giving students who failed physical education the chance to recover course credit through an independent study curriculum. Two of the project's participating teen girls also made a [presentation](#) to their city council asking to clean and reopen pools at local parks to serve as activity options in town, which prompted an action plan to reopen the pools.

Results indicate that Photovoice is a viable, low-cost means of empowering Latina teens to develop leadership and advocacy skills.

Myriam Torres – Study: Latino Children Face Many Barriers to Healthy Eating, Physical Activity



In her *Salud America!* pilot research project, Dr. Myriam Torres of the University of South Carolina brought together public health researchers, community leaders, and Latino families to study and develop effective policy recommendations regarding physical activity among Latino children living in a growing immigrant settlement in West Columbia, S.C.

Key preliminary findings include:

- barriers to healthy eating and physical activity among Latino children include lack of infrastructure that

supports walking and biking, and unhealthy school lunches; and

- community stakeholders and school staff agreed that lack of transportation, language barriers for parents, and the cost of out-of-school sports were the main barriers that keep Latino children from participating in organized sports.

The study also suggests that Latina mothers understand the variety of factors that impact their children's diets and levels of physical activity. The barriers to healthy choices that researchers observed demonstrate the need to develop policies that support healthy environments and schools.

Research

Salud America! Grantee Study: Mexican Immigrant Moms Happier, Less Tense

Mexican-American immigrant mothers, especially those who have been in the U.S. for five years or less, show significantly fewer depressive symptoms and have less conflict and tension with their partners than Chinese or non-Latino white mothers, according to a study in *Child Development*, [NBC Latino reports](#).

The study indicates that Mexican immigrant mothers' strong mental health levels have positive outcomes for the children including supportive family settings.

"One of the things we found is that Latino kids arrived in school with strong social and emotional development skills," said Dr. Claudia Galindo, a study co-author, assistant professor at the University of Maryland, and a *Salud America!* grantee, told *NBC Latino*.

But the mothers had room for improvement. According to the report:

One area where Mexican immigrant mothers did not do as well was in reading to their children and encouraging cognitive skills. The study's authors say that this is partly due to the differences in maternal education. Sixty seven percent of Mexican immigrant mothers had either a high school diploma or less, compared with only six percent of Chinese immigrant mothers. The study looked at over 5,000 mothers with children aged nine to 48 months.

So what can parents do?

A mother can open a book and talk to a child about the pictures, or talk to the children while they cook and go to the supermarket, which can build language and math skills.

"There are always ways parents can reinforce cognitive development," Galindo adds. "We don't need to be high school graduates to share the importance of learning and empowering Latina immigrant moms is very important," she says. At the same time, the study's co-author says the results show there are resources Latino immigrant children bring to the classroom; not only social and emotional development skills, but bilingual skills as well.

Read more [here](#).



Claudia Galindo



Research Briefs

Bilingual *Fotonovela* Teaches Latinas How to Reduce Their Diabetes Risk

The National Diabetes Education Program's new bilingual *fotonovela*, *Do it for them! But also for yourself (Hazlo por ellos! Pero por ti también)*, helps Latinas at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes to reduce that risk.

The *fotonovela* uses role models to demonstrate how women can reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes, through increased physical activity, healthy food choices, and weight loss.

The *fotonovela* tells the story of three friends, Elisa, Raquel, and Lourdes, who work at a local laundry facility. All of them have children, but the three women have varied backgrounds. Elisa is Mexican, married, and has two small children, and her mother gives her lots of



advice about how to be healthy. Raquel, from Puerto Rico, is single and raising her 13-year-old sister. Lourdes, from Guatemala, is married, has two children and had gestational diabetes in her last pregnancy.

Read more [here](#).

Policy & Built Environment Corner

Op-Ed: Why is an Unhealthy Cereal Being Pushed to Latinos as ‘Heart Healthy’?

Editor’s Note: This post is part of an ongoing series that will highlight the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s work in Latino communities across the country.

SaludToday Guest Blogger: Dr. Jennifer Harris

Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

Obesity continues to hit the Latino community the hardest.

About 39 percent of Hispanic adults are overweight, compared with 33 percent of non-Hispanic whites. As obesity increases, so does the risk for chronic diseases like diabetes and heart failure.

Food marketers see the Latino community as an important target because it is a large, young and growing segment that is sure to yield lots of future sales.

The barrage of food marketing to Latinos—particularly when the pitch is for unhealthy cereals, fast foods, and sugary drinks—poses a significant challenge to reversing this epidemic and the related chronic diseases.

Just recently, General Mills partnered with actor Juan Soler in a Spanish-language campaign to promote the consumption of Honey Nut Cheerios as a way to lead a heart-healthy life. “*Cuidate, Corazón*” (“Take Care, Heart”) is described as a multi-market education campaign to help reduce the incidence of heart disease, the leading cause of death among Hispanics.

But in touting Honey Nut Cheerios as a healthy option, the campaign is another example of a misleading marketing tactic for an unhealthy food product.

The [Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity](#) recently examined cereal nutrition and marketing in its *Cereal FACTS 2012 report*. My colleagues and I evaluated the nutritional quality of more than 100 brands and nearly 300 individual varieties of cereal marketed to children, families, and adults. Honey Nut Cheerios isn’t one of the healthy options.

One serving of Honey Nut Cheerios contains nine grams of sugar, compared with just one gram in regular Cheerios. We created a [video](#) to show just how much sugar a single serving of this cereal contains.

In its press release announcing the new campaign, General Mills suggests eating four servings of the cereal daily to take in three grams of fiber, an amount that has been shown to reduce cholesterol. Although soluble fiber is a beneficial part of a healthy diet, it can be easily obtained in many foods, including oats, beans, peas and citrus fruits, which do not contain large quantities of added sugar.

If a person followed the four-servings-a-day advice given by General Mills, he or she would consume 144 calories a day from added sugar. Over a year, that’s the equivalent of eating 29 pounds of sugar. It would add about 15 pounds of weight, if other calorie intake were not controlled.



Considering the amount of sugar consumed from all other food sources, the Honey Nut Cheerios recommendation is risky at best.

The cereal’s benefits of soluble fiber are far outweighed by the sugar it contains; the American Heart Association recommends increasing fiber intake but also recommends decreasing added sugar in light of the link between [added sugar consumption and heart disease](#).

In fact, the association recommends that no more than half of discretionary calories come from added sugar, which is only 15 grams per day for a 4- to 8-year-old child.

Reducing the incidence of heart disease in the Latino community must be accomplished by reducing the intake of saturated fat, added sugar, and sodium while increasing soluble fiber. Honey Nut Cheerios is simply not the right food for success.

Not only is General Mills promoting one of its less healthy products, it is disguising advertising as a socially responsible campaign. And while this campaign does not target Latino children directly, Honey Nut Cheerios is the

second most frequently advertised cereal to children.

By using the leading man of a Spanish-language program to endorse a cereal and its implied benefits for heart health, General Mills is trying to build brand loyalty and trust among parents who will think they’re doing right by their children by serving Honey Nut Cheerios.

In 2006, General Mills and other major companies promised to improve the nutritional value of their children’s cereals and strengthen their standards for child-directed advertising. The “*Cuidate, Corazón*” campaign demonstrates a way that General Mills is skirting its promise.

General Mills has healthy products in its portfolio, such as regular Cheerios and Chex.

Why doesn’t it use celebrities to promote those to the Latino community instead?

Videos on Sugary Cereals



Video Roundup

Click on the images to see the associated video.



Latino Teen's Weight-Loss Story



Latino Family Makes Lifestyle Changes: Alejandra



Latino Family Makes Lifestyle Changes: Maya



How Often Youth Drink Soda



Why Is P.E. Important? (Spanish)



Excess Weight Associated with Increased Cancer Risk



How You Spend Your Free Time Can Lower Risk for Heart Disease



Latino Child Obesity: Did You Know?



Policy Briefs

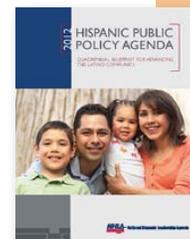
Research Review: Influence of Competitive Food and Beverage Policies

The term “competitive foods” describes foods and beverages that are sold through vending machines, à la carte cafeteria lines, school stores and other venues that “compete” with the school meals program. Some of these foods and beverages are high in fat, cholesterol, calories, sugar and/or salt. Given the high rates of obesity among children and adolescents nationwide, it is important to understand how competitive foods and beverages are sold and consumed by students in school, as well as to identify effective strategies for improving the nutritional quality of those products.

A new research [review](#) from Healthy Eating Research examines the emerging evidence about the influence of competitive food and beverage policies on children's diets and childhood obesity. The research clearly shows a need for comprehensive policies that govern the sale and consumption of these foods and beverages in the school environment.

Latino Leadership Group Issues 'National Latino Policy Agenda'

The National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA), a coalition of 31 of the leading Latino civic organizations in the U.S., has released its [agenda](#) of national policy and legislative priorities on Latino issues. The document covers education, civil rights, immigration, economic security and improvement, health, and government accountability to give candidates an understanding of policies needed to advance the social and economic status of the Latino community in 2012 and beyond.



About the E-newsletter

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

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