New Research Highlights Ways to Tackle Latino Childhood Obesity

Each package includes a research review with the latest science on a topic, a brief summary of the scientific review, an animated video narrated by Latino children, and an infographic.

“Salud America! has released six new packages of research materials to highlight obesity issues and how to address them among Latino children. The research packages focus on the following topics:

- **Healthier School Snacks, May 2013**
- **Better Food in the Neighborhood, June 2013**
- **Active Spaces, July 2013**
- **Active Play, July 2013**
- **Healthier Marketing, August 2013**
- **Sugary Drinks, September 2013**

We believe researchers, decision-makers, community leaders, school officials, parents and youths can use these research materials to learn about the problems related to Latino childhood obesity, and what can be done about them,” said Amelie G. Ramirez, director of Salud America!, which is based at the Institute for Health Promotion Research at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.
Letter to members from Dr. Amelie Ramirez

Obesity threatens the health of Latino children.

But progress is being made, and there's a good chance you are behind it.

As part of our effort to tackle obesity through our Salud America! network, we're learning fascinating stories of change.

We're seeing Latino individuals and communities join together to open playgrounds after school, help corner stores offer fresh produce, find ways to market healthier snacks, or change school lunch menus across the nation.

We want to help tell those—and your—stories.

If you have a story of healthy community change, Salud America! can:

• Interview you
• Write your story into a professional case study
• Possibly film your story

Then we'll promote your story on our national platform to inspire others to improve Latino child health in their areas. You can also use the story in your own networks.

Best part? It’s no cost to you!

To see an example of what we can do for you, read the story or watch the video we did about folks in Alice, Texas, who teamed up to open some school facilities up to the public for physical activity after school hours.

If you have a story, please e-mail us!

Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H.
Director, Salud America!
Director, Institute for Health Promotion Research
UT Health Science Center at San Antonio

News Briefs

Panel: From the Front Lines in the Fight against Latino Obesity

Salud America! Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez joined the “Weight of the Latino Nation” web forum series on Aug. 29, 2013, in which a panel of experts highlighted the latest research on the obesity epidemic and factors impacting Latino communities. Presenters also discussed various program and policy actions being undertaken—or still needed—to tackle the epidemic. The forum was sponsored by The California Endowment, Latino Coalition for a Healthy California, and the Public Health Institute. Listen to the panel here or read a blog post about it by MomsRising.

Ramirez Wins Faculty Senate Award

Salud America! Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez was given the Faculty Leadership Award by the Faculty Senate at the UT Health Science Center San Antonio on Sept. 11, 2013. Dr. Ramirez “has devoted every fiber in her being three decades of research, community outreach, speaking engagements and training to reducing/eliminating health disparities and promoting the goals of the Health Science Center and its faculty,” said her nominator, IHPR researcher Dr. Alan Holden. At the IHPR, Dr. Ramirez recruited and developed a faculty dedicated to resolving Latino cancer and chronic disease health disparities. She also has designed, developed and implemented more than 100 studies focused on human and organizational communication to help reduce chronic disease and cancer health disparities among Latinos.
Stepping Up Against Latino Childhood Obesity

Midy Aponte: On a Mission to Increase Hispanic Presence in U.S. National Parks

Editor’s Note: This original story is used with permission from NBC Latino.

By Kristina Puga

Midy Aponte has one mission—ensuring that Latinos are an integral part of America’s national parks and historic sites. She was appointed as the Founding Executive Director of the American Latino Heritage Fund of the National Park Foundation in the Fall of 2011.

Established by former Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, the mission of the American Latino Heritage Fund is to assist the National Park Service, and communities across the country, to ensure that our national parks and historic sites preserve, reflect and engage the diverse stories and communities of American Latinos throughout American History and for future generations.

For the past two years, Aponte has been spearheading the Fund’s strategic direction and overseen management of programs and development to establish the Fund’s national presence.

Speaking about Salazar, Aponte says, “He saw an opportunity to make a change that is going to have a lasting legacy, not only for him, but for all of us.”

“I think that when you are in a position of leadership, and you see an opportunity, you take it,” she adds.

Where were you born, and raised? Where is your family from?

Both of my parents are from Cuba. I was born in Washington Heights, New York but was raised in Miami, Florida. I now live in Washington, D.C.

With a background in communications and business, what attracted you to the world of national parks?

I was about to enter three years building my business The Sánchez Ricardo Agency, a Hispanic Communications and Digital Media Consultancy in Washington, D.C. I was continuing my career in public relations, when I was approached by a former colleague about joining American Latino Heritage Fund of the National Park Foundation. I first turned it down, because I wanted to continue to build my business…but the mission and the vision and the call to action was way too large, and so I wanted to be a part of it. It felt deeply we needed to do this at the right time and right moment to change the national dialogue — so I went with it full force and haven’t looked back. I put a full pause on the agency, and I am focused entirely on the Fund for now.

What is the main reason studies show that only 9 percent of Latinos currently visit national parks?

What we’ve heard from our bloggers is that we don’t see our history reflected in the parks. I’ve heard people say that they’re too expensive, that you need a special membership, that it’s too far away, or camping is not a part of the Latino cultural fabric. We are little by little deconstructing that. Entries are usually $9 or $17, and no, you don’t have to camp or need a membership. There are hotels and resorts. I think it’s just not knowing. It hasn’t been part of our experience.

What do you find to be the best method so far to getting more Latinos to go to national parks?

Just informing. We held an expedition in August where we took nine bloggers to get to know the parks — go on a hike with the park rangers, go for a drive and see the waterfalls and the mountains and the canyons.

I didn’t grow up going to parks, but the first time I went to a real national park (besides the Everglades), was the Fall of 2011—Big Bend National Park. Once you visit one, there is a bug that gets inside you, and you want to go back. First you have to get them there, and that’s why the expedition was so critical.

I think the Latino community, in general, is very hungry and thirsty for knowledge about our own history. With the increase of Hispanics, they are wanting to revisit that history, and explore it, and understand it. I think it’s important for us to know our own stories.

What do you love most about your job?

I think it’s the people, the community that’s on social media, on the ground, and the encouragement I feel — the love I feel from people wanting to see the Fund grow and succeed. I also love doing research and finding out things like there was a community of Cubans in Philadelphia in the 1700’s, also talking to the park rangers, doing work to reach multicultural audiences, and going to visit the parks.

What’s the one piece of advice as you rose in your career you will never forget?

Something that was told to me very early on — “If you don’t have a seat at the table, bring your own chair.” You have to fight for it to be heard and instill change. We’re all empowered and equipped to be that voice.
Study: Sugary Drink Consumption on Rise among Hispanic, Black Kids in California

Consumption of soda and other sugary drinks among young children in California is starting to decline overall, according to a new study.

But there’s bad news, too.

There was an alarming 8 percent spike in sugary drink consumption among adolescents ages 12-17, and consumption also rose significantly among Latino and African American adolescents.

The study, Still Bubbling Over: California Adolescents Drinking More Soda and Other Sugar-Sweetened Beverages, provides a comprehensive look at youth (ages 2-17) consumption of sugary drinks, charting consumption patterns from 2005-2007 to 2011-2012. The study was produced collaboratively by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA).

Sugary drink consumption decreased by 30 percent among kids ages 2-5 and 26 percent among kids ages 6-11 in California.

But among kids ages 12-17, 65 percent drink sugary beverages daily, an 8 percent climb since 2005-2007.

And major disparities exist between races/ethnicities.

About 74 percent of African American and 73 percent of Latino adolescents drink at least one sugary drink each day, compared to 63 percent of Asians and 56 percent of whites.

Adolescents in all ethnic groups, except whites, consumed more sugary drinks in 2011-12 than in 2005-07.

The report ends with a recommendation: “With nearly 40 percent of California children overweight or obese, it is vital that parents, educators, health professionals, businesses and policymakers work together to identify and implement public policies and other programs and strategies to reduce sugary drink consumption and protect children, especially teens.”

ChangeLab Solutions developed the Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Playbook to provide 10 step-by-step strategies for communities and states to consider. In general, communities and states begin with public education campaigns and work their way up to restrictions on the availability of SSBs. According to ChangeLab Solutions: “It is important to remember that no single policy will substantially reduce SSB consumption or radically improve health. A collection of strategies, such as those listed in the playbook, will create environments that promote health.” Download the playbook and other materials here.
Making Healthier Communities

California District Helps Latino Kids Make Healthier Choices at School

The El Monte City School District in California is educating students on making healthier food and exercise choices.

The district, which has been spotlighted in a new video by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, designates a lead teacher at each campus as a “wellness champion” who helps teachers include wellness as part of their daily curriculum.

They also made healthier school lunch menus, using more whole grains and lean proteins. They make foods themselves to control sodium levels.

El Monte has about a 69% Latino population.

Resources

Spanish Resources: ‘MiPlato’ Food Prep Tips, Recipes, Coloring Pages

To increase awareness about MiPlato, the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion is launching resources for Spanish-speaking audiences, according to a USDA blog post.

MiPlato is the USDA’s icon for the five food groups to remind Spanish-speakers to make healthier choices at each meal.

Visit ChooseMyPlate.gov and click on En Español to find the latest addition to the 10 Tips Nutrition Education Series, Disfrute Comidas de Varías Culturas (Enjoy Food from Many Cultures), about how to prepare healthier ethnic/cultural foods.

Educators and health professionals can integrate the En Español section of ChooseMyPlate.gov into program and education efforts. The new Spanish-language resources include general information about weight management and counting calories to help adults think about their food and beverages choices.

New recipes are also available in Spanish.

Kids can find activity sheets and coloring pages that promote healthy eating at school and home.

Teachers and parents can invite young people to become MyPlate Champions by sharing the MyPlate Champions Pledge in Spanish.
Video Roundup
Click on the images to see the associated video.

Campaign: Drink More Water (Spanish)
Preventing Obesity in Latino Kids
Trainer Helps Teach Healthy Lifestyles to Latino Kids (Spanish)
Health Economics 101
The Effect of Food Portion Sizes on Health (Spanish)
Report: Half of Hispanics Kids Will Develop Diabetes
Examining the Latino Health Paradox
Improving Access to Healthy Food in a Latino City

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This E-newsletter is produced quarterly by Salud America!
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Salud America! 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, click here. To learn more about the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s efforts to combat childhood obesity, click here.