

# Salud America!

The RWJF Research Network to  
Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

Volume 2, Issue 1, Summer, 2009

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## 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.

## Thanks for Being a Member!

Thanks for being a part of *Salud America!*, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) national program that supports research on environmental and policy solutions to the epidemic of obesity among Latino children.

We're on the lookout for new members, so please let your colleagues [know about us!](#)

## Salud America! awards 20 grants for research on Latino childhood obesity

Research will evaluate, inform policies and programs aimed at reversing obesity among Latino youths

*Salud America!* has announced the recipients of 20 pilot grants, each up to \$75,000, for research on reducing and preventing obesity among Latino youths.

*Salud America!* grantees are a mix of well-established and junior-level researchers from universities, health institutes and community health groups in 12 states.

Among many other issues, the grants will examine:

- The impact of an effort by the Los Angeles County Public Health Department, restaurants and community-based organizations to provide South Los Angeles residents with more access to healthy foods and nutrition information;
- The early outcomes of Healthy Tomorrow for Teens, a five-year program in Connecticut that aims to increase healthy eating, physical activity and leadership skills among Latino adolescent girls; and
- The efficacy of two community-based exercise programs—BOUNCE and ReBOUNCE—for physical activity and weight control among Latina mothers and their “tween” daughters in Houston.

“These researchers will work closely with Latino populations to make a meaningful impact on policy and environmental changes that can help reverse childhood obesity,” said Dr. Amelie Ramirez,

### Salud America! 20 grantees:

Dr. Dharma Cortes, The University of Massachusetts Boston  
Dr. Rebecca London, Stanford University  
Dr. Alexy Arauz Boudreau, Massachusetts General Hospital  
Dr. Norma Olvera, University of Houston  
Dr. Zan Gao, University of Utah  
Dr. Shari Barkin, Vanderbilt University Medical Center  
Dr. Emma Sanchez, University of California, San Francisco  
Dr. Harris Huberman, The State University of New York  
Dr. Meizi He, University of Texas at San Antonio  
Dr. Nelda Mier, Texas A&M Health Science Center  
Dr. Javier Rosado, Florida State University  
Dr. Dina Castro, University of North Carolina  
Dr. Monika Stodolska, University of Illinois  
Dr. Carmen Nevarez, Public Health Institute, California  
Dr. Angela Wiley, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Dr. Cristina Barroso, UT School of Public Health, Brownsville  
Dr. Claudia Galindo, University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
Dr. Robert Dudley, Community Health Center, Inc., Connecticut  
Dr. Miriam Vega, Latino Commission on AIDS, New York  
Dr. Myriam Torres, University of South Carolina Research Foundation

View details about grantee projects [here](#).

director of *Salud America!* and the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the Health Science Center. “This is critical work given the alarming prevalence of obesity and overweight among Latino children and adolescents.”

Latino youths suffer disproportionately from obesity. Data show that 38 percent of Mexican-American children and adolescents are overweight or obese—more than whites or African Americans.

But research is lacking on effective interventions that focus on Latino communities.

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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

As mentioned at the beginning of this E-newsletter, each of our 20 pilot grantees will receive \$75,000 to conduct research to address Latino childhood obesity.

That's a total of \$1.5 million, not exactly a staggering amount.

But what if fewer grantees could turn a smaller total—\$925,000—into \$91 million?

*Redes En Acción*, the other national research network I direct, achieved exactly that. Since 2000, the National Cancer Institute has awarded 18 pilot investigators a total of \$925,000 through *Redes* to conduct Latino-focused cancer research, funds the researchers then leveraged into 91 million more cancer research dollars.

Talk about a ripple effect.

And that enormous ripple effect is exactly what we aim to achieve with our *Salud America!* pilot investigators, too.



Amelie Ramirez

For the seven junior-level *Salud America!* investigators, a pilot grant like this could serve as a vital stepping stone, to help them get their foot in the door on efforts to help reduce obesity rates among Latino children. For the 13 senior-level researchers, this pilot grant could open up altogether new doors of research on Latino childhood obesity.

So the \$75,000 individual grants may look small now, but, in the coming years, we expect the ripple effect to swell—while the rates of obesity among Latino children shrink.

As always, please be sure to check our [Web site](#) frequently for updates on our and others' efforts to address Latino childhood obesity.

#### 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 number rises

The number of *Salud America!* members has grown to 1,374 as of June 15, 2009, nearly double the number of members from a year ago. We are gaining new members every day, and we urge you to invite colleagues and others you may know to join. Join the network by clicking [here](#).

### *Salud America!* NAC reviews prospective grantees

The *Salud America!* National Advisory Committee (NAC) met with *Salud America!* and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation leaders on April 6-7, 2009, in San Antonio, Texas, to review applicants for the Call



NAC member Dr. Larry Green and *Salud America!* Director Dr. Amelie Ramirez at the review meeting.

for Proposals (CFP) for pilot research projects. Following pre-screening, the NAC reviewed the top-ranked tier of projects from the pool of 90 applicants, and recommended 20 for funding by RWJF to produce beneficial interventions and policies on behalf of Latino children.

Meeting attendees were NAC members (Elva Arredondo, Laura Brennan, Nancy Butte,

Robert Garcia, Larry Green, Robin Hamre, Terry Huang, Judith Ottoson, Charlotte Pratt, James Sallis, Randy Schwartz, Elsie Taveras, Mildred Thompson and Amy Yaroch), *Salud America!* staff (Amelie Ramirez, Kip Gallion, Patricia Chalela, Cliff Despres and Kay Haverlah), an RWJF leader (Laura Leviton), and consultants from SRA International, Inc.

## Funding Opportunities

### CFP: Active Living Research

Though its national program Active Living Research, RWJF has [issued a CFP](#) for New Connections research or publication grants for new investigators from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. Two types of grants will be funded under this call for proposals: research grants and publication grants. The application deadline is July 29, 2009.

### NHLBI, NICHD grants on childhood obesity

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) seek cooperative agreement [grant](#) applications from institutions to conduct randomized, controlled trials to test innovative interventions addressing childhood obesity. The grant runs parallel with a separate funding [opportunity](#) soliciting applications for a research coordinating unit. Letters of intent are due Sept. 8, 2009, and applications are due Oct. 6, 2009.

## Stepping Up Against Latino Childhood Obesity

### *Salsa, Sabor Y Salud* program promoting health among Latino youths across nation

Alina Cortez' children didn't always eat fruits and veggies, and the Miami family's meals often were full of excess calories. They weren't always active, either.

*Salsa, Sabor Y Salud* changed all that.

The program, developed in partnership by the National Latino Children's Institute (NLCI) and Kraft Foods, supplies a culturally relevant curriculum to community groups to promote healthy eating and physical activity choices in the daily lives of Latino families.

The Cortez family is one of 20,000 families in 100 communities across the nation that has partaken in *Salsa, Sabor Y Salud*.

"My children learned how to eat fruits and vegetables that they had not liked previously. We also learned that, to

have a good time, we can go together to the park, or go for a walk," Cortez said in a program testimonial. "With respect to myself, I learned to cook with less fat, and how to combine the five food groups."



To counter surging rates of Latino obesity, *Salsa, Sabor Y Salud* employs an eight-week curriculum with interactive games, songs, and educational materials to teach children ages 3-12 and their families about healthy living.

The curriculum focuses on achieving change in four areas:

- Eat foods from the five major food groups every day
- Be sensible about portions
- Be physically active every day
- Take small steps for success



Children select healthy foods at a recent *Salsa, Sabor Y Salud* session in Miami.

Community-based children's groups in Chicago, New York, Denver; Los Angeles, Phoenix, Miami, Houston, San Antonio, and many other cities have used an NLCI-developed training kit to implement the curriculum.

About 93 percent of *Salsa, Sabor Y Salud* families ate more nutritious meals and nearly doubled their amount of physical activity, according to a program evaluation.

"The program has integrated culturally

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### The National Advisory Committee

Elva Arredondo  
Marice Ashe  
Laura Brennan  
Nancy Butte  
Anna Diez-Roux  
Robert Garcia  
Lawrence Green  
Robin Hamre  
Terry Huang  
Barbara Israel  
Karen Kaphingst  
Laura Kettel Khan  
Catherine Marie Loria  
Judith Ottoson  
Frank Penedo  
Charlotte Pratt  
Maya Rockey Moore  
James Sallis  
Randy Schwartz  
Mary Story  
Elsie Taveras  
Mildred Thompson

E **Amy Lazarus Yaroch**

## Meet the National Advisory Committee

At age 11, Amy Yaroch found out she was allergic to dairy products.

To stay healthy, she modified her diet to restrict dairy—a change that sparked her interest in nutrition and ultimately led to a career in behavioral and nutritional research.

Since then, Dr. Yaroch has worked in the area of behavioral interventions and public health research related to diet, activity, and obesity prevention.

"Having to alter my diet to avoid dairy products led me to explore the field of nutrition," said Yaroch, who first began studying nutrition and obesity prevention in the early 1990s, before it was an "in vogue" research topic.

Today Dr. Yaroch, who received a PhD in nutrition and health sciences from Emory University, is

executive director of the Center for Human Nutrition, a non-profit nutrition research facility in Omaha, Neb.

Before that, she spent six years as a program director and behavioral scientist at the National Cancer Institute, where she led research and evaluation in diet and communication and survey design, including the Food Attitudes and Behaviors (FAB) survey. She also collaborated with others at the National Institutes of Health to promote obesity prevention research at the individual, environmental and policy levels.

Dr. Yaroch also helped direct the *Go Girls!* obesity prevention program for overweight African-



Amy Lazarus Yaroch

American girls in Atlanta housing developments and the *Gimme 5* school-based intervention to boost fruit and veggie consumption in Georgia fourth- and fifth-graders.

In her current roles at both the Center for Human Nutrition and as a member of the *Salud America!* National Advisory Committee, Dr. Yaroch is examining local food systems and diverse populations to find ways to prevent obesity.

"Information derived from *Salud America!* can help take us to a new level," she said. "It can inform us more specifically about Latino populations and how we can change the course in Latino childhood obesity."

## Hispanic kids eating too much fat, sugar

Mexican-American children and adolescents have the highest rates of obesity among U.S. population groups, and a new study found less than optimal diets in Hispanic children, according to a news [report](#).

The [study](#), published in the June 2009 issue of the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, was led by Baylor College of Medicine researcher Dr. Nancy Butte, who also is a member of the *Salud America!* National Advisory Committee.

In the study, Dr. Butte analyzed the nutrition quality of diets among more than 1,000 Hispanic children ages 4-19 and found that the children met many nutritional guidelines.



Nancy Butte

However, they often surpassed guidelines for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and added sugar and salt. About 68 percent of the children's



Photo from the Associated Press in the Los Angeles Times

calories came primarily from soda, desserts, pizza, chips, fruit drinks, fruit juice, processed meats and burgers.

All kids came up short on fruits and vegetables—the average number of servings they ate was lower than the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendation. They also fell below standards on consumption of vitamins E and D, calcium, and fiber.

Researchers wrote that, “Although

energy intake was higher in overweight children, food sources, diet quality, and macro- and micronutrient composition were similar between non-overweight and overweight siblings.

“Knowledge of the dietary intake of children from low-[socioeconomic] Hispanic families at high risk for obesity will provide a basis on which to build nutritional interventions and policy that are appropriately tailored to population sub-groups.”



### Research Briefs

Article: Addressing childhood obesity through a systems-oriented, multilevel approach

A systems-oriented, multilevel framework encompassing science and research capacity-building is the way to generate solutions that deal with the complex system in which obesity arises, according to a recent journal [article](#). The article, in the July 2009 issue of *Preventing Chronic Disease*, was led by National Institutes of Health researcher Dr. Terry Huang, who also is a member of the *Salud America!* National Advisory Committee. A multilevel research agenda is cross-disciplinary, bringing together expertise in traditionally disparate fields to pose cross-disciplinary hypotheses and to test those hypotheses collectively. Given the continued lack of effective and sustainable prevention strategies, there is a critical need to



implement this multilevel approach. Researchers wrote that, “We can do this by extending the boundaries of biomedical research to fill the gaps across all the disciplines relevant to obesity, from biological and behavioral sciences to social and policy research.”

Report: Latino youth a marketing target

Soda companies are increasingly focusing marketing efforts on Latino youth, according to a news [report](#) that also explores various opinions on the effectiveness of taxing non-diet sodas. Eating and drinking unhealthy foods and beverages has become a huge U.S. health concern, according to the report, contributing to high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes among adults and children. About 10.4 percent of U.S. Hispanics already have been diagnosed with diabetes.

## Policy & Built Environment Corner

### RWJF commission makes recommendations to improve children's, nation's health

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Commission to Build a Healthier America has released 10 [recommendations](#) for improving the nation's health.

The recommendations focus on establishing policies that promote healthy choices and remove the obstacles individuals face when making such choices.

Among the commission's key recommendations are:

- Give kids a healthy start. Ensure that all children, especially very young children in low-income families, have high-quality education and child care. This means increasing federal government spending to support early childhood development for young children in low-income families.
- Ban junk food from schools. Feed children only nutritious foods in schools. Federal funds should be used exclusively for healthful meals.
- Get kids moving. All schools (K-12) should include at least 30 minutes every day for all children to be physically active. Although children should be active at least one hour each day, only one

third of high school students currently meet this goal.

- Help all families follow healthy diets. More than one in every 10 American households lacks reliable access to enough nutritious food. Federal supplemental nutrition programs should be fully funded and designed to meet the needs of hungry families with nutritious food.



Mark McClellan



Risa Lavizzo-Mourey

- Eliminate so-called nutrition deserts. Create public-private partnerships to open grocery stores in communities without access to healthful foods. Many inner-city and rural families lack this access.

Noting that "today's children are at greater risk for a lifetime of poor health," commission co-chair Mark McClellan says that building a healthier America will require putting efforts to improve health "front and center on the nation's agenda"

The commission plans to meet with federal lawmakers and push to have their recommendations made into public policies.

"For too long we have focused on medical care as the solution to our health problems, when the evidence tells us the opposite," said RWJF President and CEO Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A. "We must make it possible for more people to make healthy decisions and avoid getting sick in the first place. The Commission

has provided us with a principled, sensible and experience-driven blueprint. We cannot afford to wait to implement these recommendations."

## Policy & Built Environment News Briefs

[Obama administration to focus on public health, childhood obesity prevention](#)

President Barack Obama and his administration are expected to try to bring public health issues, including nutrition, physical activity and childhood obesity prevention, to the forefront of health reform efforts, according to a news [report](#). Any health care reform plan that Obama signs could call for nutrition counseling, obesity screenings and wellness programs at workplaces and community centers, more school time for physical activity, more nutritious school lunches and more activity areas and grocery stores in underserved areas.

[Toolkit offers resources for policy-makers working to prevent childhood obesity](#)

Leadership for Healthy Communities, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has released the *Action Strategies Toolkit* to help provide guidance on the best approaches policymakers can use to make their states, communities and schools healthier places. The [toolkit](#) offers practical examples of policy approaches and resources covering a wide range of issues, including increasing access to parks and recreation centers, improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians, offering healthier foods in schools, and attracting grocery stores that provide healthy, affordable foods to lower-income communities.

[Collection of articles examine ways to encourage active living](#)

A recently released special [supplement](#) to the *Journal of Public Health Policy* examines how better environments can encourage people, especially children, to be more active on a daily basis. The 13 research papers in the supplement cover three broad categories: transportation, schools and youth, and built and social environments. Researchers evaluated policy interventions on federal transportation funding and school policies related to active commuting to school. A review paper compiles the available evidence on disparities in physical activity and sedentary behavior among U.S. children and adolescents.

## Salud America! awards 20 grants

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The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) established *Salud America!* in 2007 to bridge this research gap. The program aims to increase the number of researchers seeking policy and environmental solutions to childhood obesity among Latinos.

“There must be real urgency in addressing the obesity epidemic among Latino children, who are part of the largest, youngest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States,” said James S. Marks, RWJF senior vice president

and health group director. “This new research will inform our work and accelerate the momentum needed for Latino children to lead healthier lives.”

Since its inception, *Salud America!* has formed a national advisory committee consisting of 23 nationally recognized experts on the issue and has recruited more than 1,375 academics, researchers, community leaders and policy-makers for its network. In summer 2008, more than 300 of those members participated in the process that helped establish the program’s [research agenda](#) and led

to the pilot-grant funding.

RWJF awarded the two-year grants following the national advisory committee’s rigorous review of 90 applications. They begin July 1.

“These grants are a vital step in the advancement of scientific knowledge about obesity among Latino children,” Dr. Ramirez said. “We’re excited to be able to generate research and groom researchers on such an acute health issue.”

More details, including project titles and descriptions of all 20 pilot grants, are available [here](#).

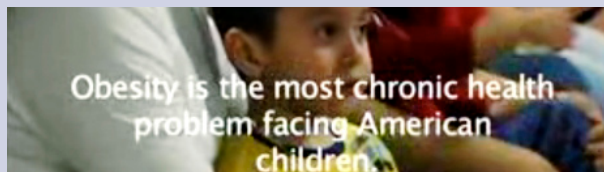
## Stepping Up Against Latino Childhood Obesity

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relevant games and traditions to promote hands-on learning about making nutritious food choices and increasing physical activity,” said Josie Garza, NLCI executive director, who noted that the program is expanding to after-school programs and hopes to use community health workers

(*promotores*) to increase its reach. “It’s really helping kids across the nation.”

The NLCI offers a two-day training workshop to build capacity for program implementation. For more information, or to find an existing program near you, visit the [NLCI](#) or e-mail [salsa@nlci.org](mailto:salsa@nlci.org).



To watch videos of the *Salsa, Sabor Y Salud* in action, click [here](#) and [here](#).

### 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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### Kids’ Health Q&A

**Question:** Teens need to eat fruits and veggies, but exactly how much?

Fruits and vegetables are a big part of a teen’s well-balanced and nutritious eating plan.

Teens who are consuming 2,000 calories a day should aim for 2 cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables every day, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases’ *Take Charge of Your Health! A Guide for Teenagers!*, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Some teens may need fewer or more servings depending on their individual

calorie needs, which a health care provider can help determine.

To see what actually is a “serving” of a fruit or veggie, check out this chart. For more helpful tips on healthy eating and physical activity, go [here](#).

#### Fruit and Vegetable Servings

What counts as a serving?	1 serving* equals
Fruits like apples, oranges, bananas, and pears	1 medium fruit
Raw leafy vegetables like romaine lettuce or spinach	1 cup
Cooked or raw vegetables	1/2 cup
Chopped fruit	1/2 cup
Dried fruits (raisins or apricots)	1/4 cup

\* Note: All serving size information is based on *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* ([www.healthicus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthicus.gov/dietaryguidelines)).