

# Salud America!

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Research  
Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

## ISSUE BRIEF

August 2013

## Healthier Marketing and Latino Kids

### Introduction

The food industry spends nearly \$2 billion per year to market to youths.

Latino kids are a particularly attractive target to food marketers because of their increasing population size, spending power, and media exposure.

However, the vast majority of food and drink products advertised to kids are unhealthy, and Latino kids are disproportionately targeted with unhealthy food ads.

In light of high obesity rates and increasing concerns about the role food marketing plays in Latino kids' diets, demand for industry regulation is growing and local communities are working to limit children's exposure to unhealthy marketing.

### The Evidence

#### **Food and beverage marketing influences Latino kids' diets and disproportionately focuses on unhealthy products.**

- Food and beverage marketing is a likely contributor to less healthful diets, according to a 2005 Institute of Medicine report.
- One study showed 84 percent of youth-targeted food and beverage advertisements on Spanish-language TV promote foods in the lowest nutritional category, compared to 72 percent on English-language channels.
- In one study, low-income Latino neighborhoods had up to nine times the density of outdoor advertising for high-calorie/low-nutrient foods like fast food and sugary drinks as did high-income White neighborhoods.

#### **The young Latino population is a key target market because of its high exposure to media, increasing population size, and increasing purchasing power.**

- Latino youths have higher overall levels of media exposure in a typical day than do their White counterparts (13 hours compared with 8.36 hours for White youths).
- Latino youths are among the fastest-growing population segment in the U.S.
- Latino teens spend 4 percent more than non-Latino teens.
- Marketers may use Latino-relevant ethnic symbols, linguistic styles, music, and spokespersons to link cultural values and norms with certain food brands/products.

#### **Industry self-regulation of marketing to youths is mixed and government regulation of food marketing to children has not reached fruition;**

- The food and beverage industry has begun some efforts to self-regulate advertising directed to children under age 12.
- For example, the Walt Disney Company in 2012 announced a plan to phase junk food advertising out of its TV and radio programming targeted at kids.



#### **ABOUT THIS ISSUE BRIEF**

*This issue brief is based on a research review prepared by Cristina Germond, Ph.D., Science Delivery, LLC, and Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H., and Kipling J. Gallion, M.A., University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The full research review, which includes citations, is available at [www.salud-america.org](http://www.salud-america.org).*

*For more information on Salud America!, visit [www.salud-america.org](http://www.salud-america.org).*



- However, several evaluations of industry progress found either mixed results or ongoing concerns.
- Governmental bodies have not yet put forth efforts to severely restrict children's exposure to food marketing, for a variety of reasons.

**Other avenues exist to potentially regulate marketing in Latino communities.**

- One study identified ways to improve local food and drink marketing practices at:
  - food retail markets (e.g., limiting the total amount of store window space dedicated to signs.);
  - restaurants (e.g., menu labeling laws);
  - schools (e.g., banning the sale and advertising of unhealthy foods on campus); and
  - communities (e.g., vending contracts that limit the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks in parks or other youth-friendly facilities).

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

### Conclusions

- Food and beverage marketing is a powerful influence on the diets of Latino youths.
- Food and beverage marketing to Latino youths disproportionately advertises unhealthy products.
- Latino youths are a key market segment for food and beverage manufacturers given their increasing population size, spending power, and media exposure.
- Self-regulation by the food and beverage industry and government regulation are not having a sizeable impact on marketing to youths, but options exist to improve marketing in local Latino communities.

### Policy Implications

- Policymakers and the public should take action in recognition of the fact that marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to youths is a public health problem in need of policy solutions. For example, the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Food Marketed to Children, a coalition of officials from several federal agencies, should finalize the guidelines it proposed in 2011 on nutritional standards and marketing definitions for food marketed to children.
- Additional voluntary industry self-regulation is needed.
- States and municipalities should consider public hearings at the state and local levels to raise awareness and initiate community action to reduce community-based exposure of food marketing to youths, particularly to eliminate exposure to campaigns for unhealthy products that specifically target Latino youths. For instance, schools should consider limiting such advertising on school grounds.