

# Salud America!

The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

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## Using Research to Move Policy in Highly Obese South Texas

*Salud America!* pilot researcher Dr. Nelda Mier documented a lack of sidewalks, street lights and parks along the poverty-stricken Texas-Mexico border—an environment that she found contributes to obesity and sedentary behavior among Latino children.

But this story doesn't end with just research results.

To change the local environment to make it easier to engage in physical activity, Dr. Mier—armed with lessons from *Salud America!* on how to promote research-based policy change—brought her project research [results](#) to community leader and policy advocate Anne Williams Cass.

The research helped guide advocacy efforts of local organizations dedicated to affordable housing, including Cass' Proyecto Azteca, which plans to communicate with Texas legislators about the need for sidewalks, street lights and garbage collection along the Mexico-Texas border.

Dr. Mier's research also prompted changes in the design of an affordable-housing neighborhood, where Proyecto Azteca is working with planners to add trails for hiking and biking, a recreation center and outdoor exercise areas.

"These are things that we more than likely would have neglected in our planning had it not been for the research



*Salud America!* Pilot Researcher Dr. Nelda Mier documented safety problems and a lack of sidewalks and parks in South Texas. But now her research is poised to impact policy changes that could remedy these built-environment issues.

Dr. Mier shared with us," Cass said.

This is one example of how the 20 *Salud America!* pilot investigators are using their research to stimulate policy changes to reverse Latino childhood obesity. Other *Salud America!* researchers are using their research to change policies in communities across the country.

Dr. Robert Dudley empowered Latina teens to advocate for physical activity options in their Connecticut community. The teens helped install a P.E. credit recovery class (for girls who were initially unable to get P.E. credit)

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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

I'm excited to say that I'm joining a panel of external advisors for the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR).

NCCOR brings together four of the nation's leading research funders—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—to accelerate progress to reduce the problem of childhood obesity in America.

The organization seeks to maximize research outcomes, build capacity for research, support mechanisms for research translation and dissemination, and more.

The new NCCOR External Scientific Panel will advise NCCOR and provide guidance and assistance on specific projects and initiatives, including:

- informing on new science and ideas;
- informing on connections to extramural research,



Amelie Ramirez



practice, and policy; and

- contributing to ongoing refinement of NCCOR's strategic plan.

I was chosen because of my leadership of *Salud America!*

Through my work on the panel, I hope to raise awareness of obesity among Latino children, who are part of the largest and fastest-growing racial/ethnic minority group in the country and struggle with disproportionately high rates of obesity and related health problems.

I am also looking forward to helping to increase NCCOR's benefits to the public.

Be sure to visit NCCOR [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! Membership Drive

*Salud America!* now has 1,940 members in its network of Latino childhood obesity researchers, academics, advocates, community leaders, policymakers and the public. We're excited to have so many people dedicated to fighting the epidemic, and we'd love to reach 2,000 members soon. Please help us spread the word! Join the network [here](#).

### 20 Studies Tackle Latino Childhood Obesity Epidemic

If you haven't yet, please check out new research by the 20 pilot investigators of *Salud America!*. The group recently issued a collection of research [briefs](#) that analyze a wide array 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. You can also check out the 20-part series summarizing the briefs at the [SaludToday Blog](#).



## 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

## 'Feeding Minds': Tackling Hunger, Obesity Across Texas

Check out the new PBS Texas TV series, "Feeding Minds: Texas Takes on Hunger and Obesity," which premiered Feb. 23, 2012.

The series aims to bring awareness to these overlapping issues and to share what government, community organizations and individuals are doing to combat them. Video segments tackle these epidemics in San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, El Paso and more.

Watch the full program in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

For more information, follow this effort on [Facebook](#).



San Antonio's Effort to Increase Access to Healthy Food



Houston Deals with Hunger, Obesity



Dallas Combats Obesity



Growing Healthy in El Paso



Hunger in the South Plains



Education/Nutrition in Corpus Christi

## 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](#).*



### **Cristina Barroso**

#### **Study: Latino Youth Perceive Their Weight Problems; Parents Don't**

In her *Salud America!* pilot research project, Dr. Cristina Barroso of The University of Texas School of Public Health, Brownsville Regional Campus, examined body image perceptions across three generations of low-income Latinos in South Texas, and used that

data to study the association between body image and physical activity in the same population.

For the study, families viewed sketches of body shapes and body sizes and selected images they perceived as healthy, as well as the image that most resembled their own body. Parents and grandparents also selected the image that most resembled their child/grandchild.

Key preliminary findings include:

- most youth in this group believe they have a weight problem: underweight or overweight; and
- most parents in this group do not believe their children have a weight problem.

This study suggests that Mexican-American youth have very different perceptions of overweight and obesity than their parents and grandparents.



### **Emma Sanchez**

#### **Study: Schools' Compliance with P.E. Policies Matters for Children's Fitness**

In her *Salud America!* pilot research project, Dr. Emma Sanchez of San Francisco State University used existing data to investigate whether school district compliance with California physical education (P.E.)

requirements influenced fitness among Latino children.

Key preliminary findings include:

- most Latino students attended school in districts that did not comply with P.E. policies; and
- compared with Latino children in non-policy compliant districts, those in districts that complied with P.E. policies were significantly less likely to be overweight or obese.

These results suggest that school district compliance with P.E. policies may be an important determinant of fitness among Latino children. The findings also imply that population-level approaches, including policy mandates for P.E. in schools, may contribute to overall improvements, and reduced disparities, in children's physical activity and fitness levels.



### **Rebecca London**

#### **Study: After-School Fitness Programs Can Improve Children's Health**

In her *Salud America!* pilot research project, Dr. Rebecca London of Stanford University examined the fitness of 1,105 5th and 7th grade students in California.

Researchers analyzed whether participating in after-school programs had an effect on whether a student was physically fit or overweight two years later.

Key preliminary findings include:

- Latino students and "initially unfit" students were less likely to participate in primarily fitness-focused programs after school; and
- participation in primarily fitness-focused after-school programs—but not other types of enrichment programs—increased the likelihood of being physically fit.

Findings from this study point to the importance of identifying and engaging youth in fitness-focused activities after school, and if possible, focusing on student populations less likely to participate.



### **Shari Barkin**

#### **Study: Exposure to Recreation Center Increases Use by Latino Families**

In her *Salud America!* pilot research project, Dr. Shari Barkin of Vanderbilt University Medical Center assessed how exposure to a community recreation center affects

whether Latino families with young children use the center for physical activity.

This assessment was conducted one year after families participated in a culturally-relevant healthy-lifestyles program at the center.

Key preliminary findings include:

- programmed exposure to a community recreation center led to self-reported increases in physical activity use one year later by Latino families.

This study suggests that direct exposure to a recreation center can be an effective, low-cost approach to promoting Latino families' use of these facilities for increased physical activity. Policymakers should be aware that creating programs that encourage families to "walk through the door" and learn how to use a community recreation center can lead to sustainable behavior change to support improved health through routine physical activity.

## Research

### Study: How Do Latino and Non-Latino Grocery Stores Differ in Healthy Food Options?

Barriers remain in Latinos' ability to purchase healthier dairy and meat options in *tiendas*—Latino-focused grocery stores—according to a new study.

The [study](#), published recently in *Public Health Nutrition*, compared the availability, quality and cost of healthy and unhealthy foods in 10 *tiendas* and 15 supermarkets in San Diego County, Calif.

Researchers found that *tiendas* were smaller, charged more for a gallon of skim milk, and offered less lean ground beef than supermarkets.

However, they also found that *tiendas* had similar fresh produce offerings at lower prices.

“These results highlight the potential that *tiendas* have in improving access to quality, fresh produce within



lower-income communities,” the researchers concluded. “However, efforts are needed to increase the access and affordability of healthy dairy and meat products.”

► Continued from page 1

## Policy Change

at their high school and had bus routes modified to allow girls to attend the recovery class.

Dr. Dina Castro's demonstration of how community gardens improved Latino family health spurred her town to designate areas in planned parks for community gardens.



Nelda Mier

Dr. Zan Gao's finding that Latino kids who participated in a structured exercise program at school were more likely to improve their math and reading scores earned him the support of school districts in Utah and Texas, who are adopting and implementing the program.

“We're excited to see these pilots using their research to inform policy changes for healthier lifestyles among Latinos,” said *Salud America!* director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez.

Ramirez said the pilot researchers are positioned to impact long-term policy development.

That's because the pilots not only received training in message communication from RWJF experts, but also worked with evaluation consultant and *Salud America!* advisor Dr. Judith Ottoson to see how their research contributes to policy development.

Ottoson charted the pilots on the new Policy Contribution Spectra model.

The model visually illustrates how researchers can have an impact at various stages of the policy development process, and measures the effect of their policy contribution.

Some *Salud America!* pilots contribute to policy formation by examining causes of and trends in Latino childhood obesity. Others focus on raising awareness, mobilizing people or reframing issues for the Latino population. Still others assess policy to advise whether policies should continue, change or end.

“Policy is not a point in time...policy is a process,” Ottoson said.

Before spending time with Ottoson, it was hard for Mier of the Texas A&M Health Science Center to envision how her research on the South Texas environment could impact policy. Now the connection is clear.

And now that Dr. Mier has put her research results in the hands of advocates like Cass, change is happening.

“Dr. Mier's research has helped us articulate what kind of policy changes we want to work for this legislative session in Texas, at the regional level, and in the country,” said Cass of her group of affordable housing organizations in South Texas. “The research gives out efforts credibility as we work for policy changes to make our community sustainable and healthy.”

## Policy & Built Environment Corner

### Making the Connection: Linking Policies that Prevent Hunger and Childhood Obesity

In the past, food insecurity and obesity were viewed as separate public health problems. yet new research shows that people with unreliable access to food are also more likely to be obese.

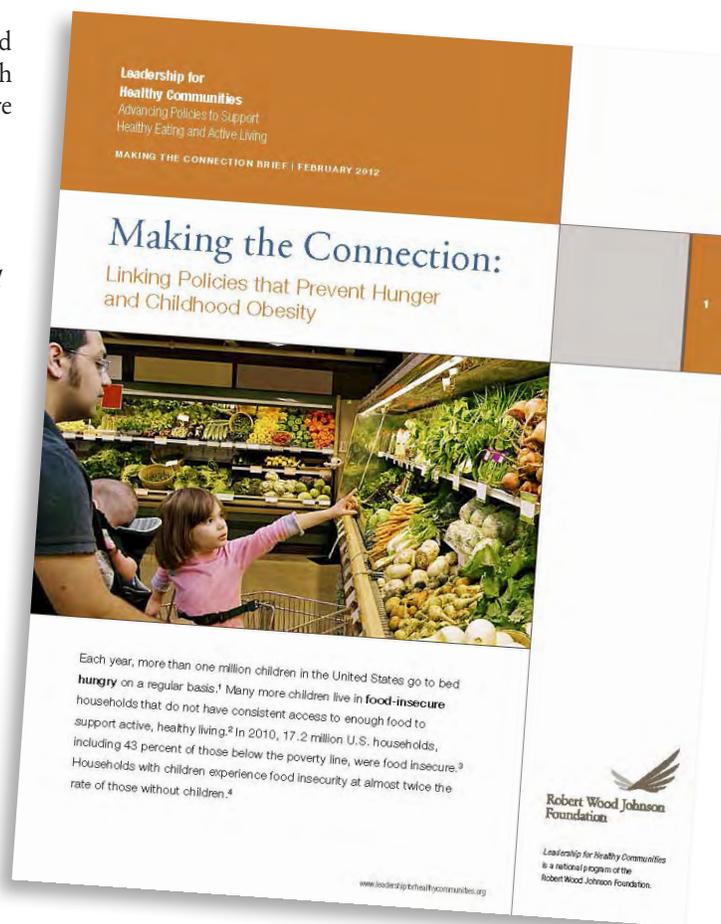
Leadership for Healthy Communities, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has released a new [brief](#), *Making the Connection: Linking Policies that Prevent Hunger and Childhood Obesity*, to provide policymakers seeking to address hunger in their communities with policy options that can also contribute significantly to reversing the childhood obesity epidemic.

The brief outlines opportunities for policymakers to address both food insecurity and childhood obesity by promoting policies that make it easier for individuals to access affordable and nutritious foods needed for a healthy lifestyle.

Some of the policy strategies outlined in the brief include:

- establishing healthy food financing initiatives to increase access to nutritious foods;
- supporting farm-to-institution, farm-to-school and school garden programs;
- increasing free and reduced-price school meals; and
- partnering with the private sector to increase the value of federal nutrition assistance benefits for healthful foods through double-coupon initiatives.

“We hope that you will find the brief helpful as you



continue in your efforts to support healthy eating and active living policies,” Dr. Maya Rockey Moore, president and CEO of Global Policy Solutions and Director of Leadership for Healthy Communities, wrote in an email.

View the full brief [here](#).



### Policy Brief

#### Food Security for All: Report of Two Workshops

Check out this new [report](#) from the National Academies Press about food security for all people. The report summarizes results from two recent food security workshops hosted by the National Research Council’s Science and Technology for Sustainability Program.

The first workshop, Measuring Food Insecurity and Assessing

the Sustainability of Global Food Systems, explored the availability and quality of commonly used indicators for food security and malnutrition; poverty; and natural resources and agricultural productivity.

The second workshop, Exploring Sustainable Solutions for Increasing Global Food Supplies, focused specifically on assuring the availability of adequate food supplies, addressing the question of how food production can be increased to meet the needs

of a population expected to reach over 9 billion by 2050. Workshop objectives included identifying the major challenges and opportunities associated with achieving sustainable food security and identifying needed policy, science, and governance interventions. Workshop participants discussed long term natural-resource constraints, specifically water, land and forests, soils, biodiversity and fisheries. They also examined the role of knowledge and technology in addressing global food issues.

## Video Roundup

Click on the images to see the associated video.



**Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: Illinois**



**Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: California**



**Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: Kentucky**



**Immigrants Pushing Apples in the Big Apple**



**The Risks of Consuming Sugary Drinks**



**Latino Child Obesity: Did You Know?**

### 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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## 10 Tips to Make Lunch Fun and Healthy

Teach kids how to eat healthy with the lunches you pack.

Healthy eating can be exciting and adventurous when you explore different flavors and designs for nutritious foods. Here are 10 tips from the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#).

- 1. Substafruit:** Make your child's lunch more nutritious by replacing junk food with fresh fruits and vegetables.
- 2. Explore:** Pack a healthy dish from a different cuisine once a week to broaden your child's nutritional horizons.
- 3. Farmers' Market:** Take a family adventure to a farmers' market and give your kids the reins. You may be surprised at the innovative culinary delights they can whip up.
- 4. Break the Habit:** Instead of packing a soda or sugary juice drink, send your child to school with water or 100-percent fruit juice.
- 5. Freshen it up:** Avoid pre-packaged foods and incorporate fresh ingredients into your child's diet.
- 6. Make a Weekly Lunch Plan:** Before the school week, sit down with your kids and plan meals that



can be both enjoyable and healthy.

- 7. Think Outside the Box:** Use cookie cutters to make interesting shapes out of sandwiches.
- 8. Grab and Go:** To ensure your child eats a variety of whole grains, pack a homemade snack mix that'll help them avoid the vending machines.
- 9. Out with the Old, in with the New:** Revisit old favorites by creating healthier renditions. Swap white bread for whole wheat and chips for nuts.
- 10. Eat the Rainbow:** Introduce foods of every color into your child's diet. Try packing a different colored fruit or vegetable every day for a week.