

Salud America!

The RWJF Research Network to
Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

Volume 2, Issue 2, Fall, 2009

Inside This Issue

Page 2: Director's Corner,
News & Funding

Page 3: Stepping Up
Against Latino Childhood
Obesity

Page 4: Research

Page 5: Policy & Built
Environment Corner

Page 6: Kids' Health Corner

Coming Next Issue

A "Grantee Corner" will feature stories about the 20 *Salud America!* pilot investigators and their efforts to prevent and reduce Latino childhood obesity.

Got a News Item?

We welcome your news items, story ideas and suggestions. Please send them to despres@uthscsa.edu to be featured in the E-newsletter.

Salud America! conducts Inaugural Scientific Summit

Former Surgeon General, NBA star and 175 others gather for San Antonio event



Dr. Richard H. Carmona, 17th Surgeon General of the United States, called for greater research and policy action to prevent obesity among Latino children in a keynote address at the Inaugural Scientific Summit of *Salud America!*

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

The **summit**, from September 9-11, 2009, in San Antonio, united 200 national researchers and community leaders to address this critical health issue.

Dr. Carmona said that, with three-fourths of every health-care dollar being spent on preventable chronic diseases, more investment is needed in culturally sensitive and health literate public health campaigns to prevent obesity.

"We need more innovation. Things like *promotoras*, health care extenders, smart shoppers, increasing health literacy so we can read the labels and understand what to buy, urban gardens, push carts of fresh fruit, early teaching of health habits," he said. "Eliminate obesogenic environments—very important."

The *Salud America!* Scientific Summit featured panels with top researchers,

Salud America! Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez poses with Dr. Richard H. Carmona after Dr. Carmona's keynote address at the program's inaugural Scientific Summit on Sept. 10, 2009.

policy-makers and others with expertise in policy, nutrition and more.

Champion cyclist Lance Armstrong delivered a personal video greeting.

"As a parent myself and somebody who deals with the challenges of parenthood...and trying to create great habits, encourage exercise, encourage healthy lifestyles—we know what this means," Armstrong said. "We know that it prevents issues like cancer, issues like heart disease, and most importantly, it promotes a healthy lifestyle."

Latino youths suffer disproportionately from obesity and are at greater risk of related health problems.

In 2007, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) established *Salud America!* to build a national network of Latino researchers focused on remedying the lack of research on effective interventions on Latino childhood obesity.

Continued on page 6 ►



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

We asked. You answered.

Thank you to the 209 *Salud America!* network members who took our survey on the effectiveness of our communications and how we can improve our service to you.

Participants from 32 states were mainly Latino (44 percent) or white (47 percent) and have spent between one and nine years working or focusing on childhood obesity.

About 90 percent of you sometimes, often or always read our quarterly E-newsletter and monthly E-alert. More than 73 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the content.

Many of you reported using the E-alert or E-newsletter to get information about new events, funding opportunities, stories about people working in childhood obesity and people to call or connect with.

We are excited by your usage!

You also stated your desire for new communications, with a listserv/member directory and Web-site message board being the most-sought-after, according to our survey. We hope to produce such features in the near future, and



Amelie Ramirez

we're nearing completion on our blog, which will systematically link with Facebook and Twitter.

And, because 80 percent of you are interested in a second call for proposals, we plan to explore that possibility with RWJF leadership.

You also gave us valuable suggestions on how to improve our network as a whole. We greatly appreciate your feedback, and I'm happy to say that we're going to use your suggestions to bolster our network and expand our current communications efforts

into the social media realm.

Through these efforts, we hope to reach one of our goals: To bring you closer to resources and research that can help reverse high obesity rates among Latino children.

As always, please be sure to frequently check our [Web site](#) 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

Two *Salud America!* survey takers win iPods

Sandra Balderrama and Anna Maria Patino-Fernandez were randomly drawn from a basket of 209 names to win an Apple iPod Touch, the participation incentive offered to respondents to the recent *Salud America!* network survey. Balderrama is part of the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) and Patino-Fernandez is with the University of Miami. Everyone who completed the survey had their name entered into the drawing, which took place September 28, 2009, at the Institute for Health Promotion Research at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, the headquarters of *Salud America!* The drawing followed university procedures and a notary public was present to document the drawing and ensure fairness.



Sandra Balderrama



Anna Maria Patino-Fernandez



Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez (left), alongside notary public Jessica Sanchez, drew the winners of the *Salud America!* survey participation incentive.

Funding Opportunities

Ladder to Leadership

Ladder to Leadership: Developing the Next Generation of Community Health Leaders seeks to help early- to mid-career professionals in community-based, nonprofit health groups serving vulnerable populations develop critical leadership skills in nine priority [communities](#) at different time throughout the year.

Fellowship in Minority Health Policy

The Commonwealth Fund/Harvard University Fellowship in Minority Health Policy (CFHUF) aims to prepare minority physicians for leadership roles in formulating and implementing public health policy and practice on different levels. Five one-year, degree-granting [fellowships](#) will be awarded per year. The application deadline is January 4, 2010.

Stepping Up Against Latino Childhood Obesity

San Antonio youth delivers healthy eating, active living messages to his peers

Jacob Vasquez loves to dance, skateboard and play soccer, football and basketball.

One day, the San Antonio sixth-grader hopes to play for the San Antonio Spurs. He knows it won't be easy, but he already has healthy habits—eating right and staying active—that will help him to follow his dreams.

And he wants to help other kids learn healthy habits, too.

He touted healthy living in a recent speech to 50 kids at a local YMCA, part of his new role on the Youth Advisory Board of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, which selects youth role models to speak to peers about eating right and staying fit.

“I want to share what I've learned because being healthy helps us learn better in school and gives us energy to be strong and live a long healthy life,” said Jacob, 11, of Hector Garcia Middle School in San Antonio. “We need to keep talking about healthy eating and activity and looking at real examples and pictures of how obesity can affect us.”

The 25-member Youth Advisory Board helps guide the Alliance's EmpowerME **Movement**, which aims to educate and activate kids across the nation and motivate friends and family to “Go Healthy!”

Jacob, described by the Alliance as having “a genuine heart for serving the community,” volunteers at his school and church to work with kids and coordinate food drives. He is on the student council, anchors his school's morning announcements and plays sports.

He attended a Youth Advisory Board training session in Little Rock, Ark., this summer and will attend another in January. He is excited about the chance to share his experiences with other students.

Why is health so important to him?

Jacob's father, Robert, who has a family history of heart disease and diabetes, recently found out he had high cholesterol and abnormal blood sugar. Robert has since started eating healthy and exercising.

“My family members struggle with their health and have to work hard to take care of themselves. I want to be in my best health and live a long and healthy life,” Jacob said. “I stay healthy by enjoying new foods and finding creative ways to stay active every day.”



Jacob Vasquez

Salud America! NAC

Elva Arredondo

Marice Ashe

Laura Brennan

Nancy Butte

Anna Diez-Roux

Robert Garcia

Lawrence Green

Robin Hamre

Terry Huang

Barbara Israel

Laura Kettel Khan

Judith Ottoson

Frank Penedo

► Charlotte Pratt

Maya Rockeymoore

James Sallis

Randy Schwartz

Mary Story

Elsie Taveras

Mildred Thompson

Amy Lazarus Yaroch

Meet the National Advisory Committee (NAC)

In the summer of her second year in college, Charlotte Pratt assessed the nutritional status of children in a small village in Ghana.

The next year, she analyzed typical Ghanaian food combinations, such as rice and beans in different quantities, for their nutrient and energy contents.

That taste of nutrition research left her craving more.

Pratt went on to earn a doctorate in nutritional sciences and ascended to program director for the Division of Prevention and Population Sciences at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), where she's a nutrition researcher.

“We have health disparities in the U.S., with Latino children being among minority children with high prevalence of obesity and a

high risk of developing cardiovascular diseases,” Pratt said. “We need to take bold action to curtail the obesity epidemic, including obesity research that target Latinos and their children.”

After getting her doctoral degree from the University of Minnesota, Pratt worked at universities and the U.S. Department of Agriculture before joining the NHLBI in 2000. She has expertise in environmental and community interventions for diet, activity and obesity reduction; and health disparities research.

In 2007, NHLBI helped convene a working group to suggest research priorities to stimulate knowledge about effective obesity prevention and treatment in childhood.

The working group, which included



Charlotte Pratt

Salud America! Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez and several National Advisory Committee (NAC) members, published their recommendations in an **article** authored by Pratt. One of the top priorities identified was

obesity prevention interventions in young children—especially among high-risk populations such as Latinos—using multi-component and multilevel approaches.

“Latino researchers and clinicians see many Latino children. Doctors are among those most respected to bring health messages to the public, especially to the Latino mother, father and child,” Pratt said. “Therefore, we need more Latinos to be in the health professions to reach out to other Latinos.”

Activity helps Latino children develop accurate perception of their weight

Increasing physical activity helps Latino children develop a more accurate self-perception of weight, according to a [new study](#) by researchers at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt.

The study, published in a recent online edition of *Clinical Pediatrics*, showed that increasing activity levels among Latino children could double the proportion of children who recognize they are dangerously overweight.

Obesity is an epidemic among Latinos. Recent reports indicate that 38 percent of Mexican-American children and adolescents are overweight or obese.

"Previous studies show both adults and children in the Latino population often underestimate their own body size, and can fail to see a link between obesity and poor health," said Dr. Sabina Gesell, a research professor in pediatrics at Vanderbilt and study first author, told the *Vanderbilt Reporter*.



Shari Barkin



Sabrina Gesell

Gesell and Dr. Shari Barkin, a *Salud America!* [grantee](#) and director of general pediatrics at Vanderbilt, examined 61 children whose family or pediatric physician had determined they were overweight. The children were asked to look at a series of seven drawings representing children of different body sizes.

At first, only about 20 percent of children correctly selected the overweight drawings as depictions of themselves.

"This may be because being overweight is so common among Latino children that it is normalized. They become blind to it," Gesell said. "Also, there is a strong cultural tendency for parents to prefer heavier children. They are seen as cherubic. Their weight is evidence that the parents have the resources to provide for their children."

After the initial study, a randomized subgroup of children participated in a six-month, culturally appropriate exercise and skill-building program.

Members of the control group, who weren't any more active than normal, were accurate only 20 percent of the time when selecting the body-size sketch that best depicted them. The group that participated in the exercise program was twice as accurate.



Research Briefs

Photo project aims to empower youths

Arizona State University researchers created the South Phoenix Photovoice [project](#) to draw attention to the obesity epidemic and to empower fifth- and sixth-graders through digital photography. The program taught youths to capture pictures from their community, of everything from dangerous streets to childhood obesity, resulting in more than 1,000 images. "Everybody was talking about childhood obesity, but we wanted to know what the kids think, what are they eating and why," said Seline Szkupinski Quiroga of the Department of Transborder Chicana/o and Latina/o studies. One student, Albert Longoria, 10, has sworn off junk food since the photography project.

Brief: Physical activity can enhance students' academic performance

Regular physical activity breaks during the school day may enhance academic performance, academic focus and/or classroom behavior, according to a research [brief](#) by Active Living Research. The brief summarizes evidence about the relationship between physical activity and academic performance among children and teens. Teachers reported better classroom behavior for students who had more than 15 minutes of daily recess, according to one analysis. Yet only 7 percent to 14 percent of black, Hispanic and low-income students had daily recess, compared with 54 percent to 67 percent of white and affluent students. Additional research is needed to determine the impact of physical activity on academic performance among those at highest risk for obesity, including Latinos.

Policy & Built Environment Corner

IOM releases action steps for local governments to prevent childhood obesity

Recognizing that local government officials are eager to address the childhood obesity epidemic, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) has released *Local Government Action to Prevent Childhood Obesity*, a [report](#) that serves as a practical guide for government officials at the city, town, township or county level who want to take action to address healthy eating and active living.

The new report recommends 58 action steps organized under 15 broad strategies.

The IOM also highlighted 12 of the most promising “action strategies” for healthy eating and three “for increasing physical activities.”

Several strategies include enacting zoning and land-use regulations that would “restrict fast food establishments near school grounds and public playgrounds,” according to [CNSNews.com](#).

The report also advises local governments to impose higher taxes “to discourage consumption of foods and beverages that have minimal nutritional value.”

When asked by CNSNews.com if regulating where restaurants can be built could harm communities by taking away jobs, IOM committee members said the report presents “options” and that studies show that fast food restaurants are disproportionately located in low-income and minority neighborhoods.

“We tried to provide a broad menu of options in this report,” said Eduardo J. Sanchez, chairman of the committee and vice president and chief medical officer with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas. “A menu that local communities can have a look at and determine what



Eduardo Sanchez

might work best in their community.

“We also realized that there is a balance to be achieved in the food environment side of this discussion,” Sanchez said. “Making sure that healthy foods are available and are consumed and thinking about how to reduce consumption of less healthy foods.”

Across the nation, studies show that certain types of restaurants proliferate in certain neighborhoods, said Adewale Troutman, director of the Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness.

“If you look at areas where the socio-economic status is a bit low or predominately African American and Latino and you compare it to other communities that are more affluent, with different racial and ethnic mix,” Troutman said, “you’ll find that there is an overwhelming propensity for the location of fast food restaurants in those communities.”

The IOM also released [recommendations](#) for new nutrition standards for student meals.

Policy & Built Environment News Briefs

Op-Ed: Soda tax can help raise revenues to pay for health care

In an *L.A. Times* opinion [piece](#) and a *New England Journal of Medicine* [article](#), Kelly D. Brownell, director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University, said taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages could raise billions over the next few years for health care costs. Such beverages contribute to childhood obesity, diabetes and heart disease, Brownell said. In California, which has a large Latino population,

41 percent of children drink soda daily, one study found. The Rudd Center has [researched](#) the impact of a soda tax, and created a [soda tax revenue calculator](#).

Studies: State, local policies helping create healthier school environments

A recently-released [special supplement](#) of the *Journal of Adolescent Health* presents research documenting trends toward healthier foods and more physical activity

in schools. The authors say policy and environment solutions may be the key to reversing the childhood obesity trend. The studies are among the first to document how well state and local policies, enacted to enhance student wellness and address childhood obesity, are being implemented and whether they are making a difference. Collectively, they suggest that the stronger the standards, the more likely that a policy will be effectively implemented and have a real impact.

Salud America! Inaugural Scientific Summit

► Continued from page 1

Since its inception, *Salud America!* has recruited more than 1,450 researchers, community leaders and policy-makers to its network. In July 2009, the program selected 20 pilot research grants to reduce and prevent obesity among Latino youths.

To showcase their innovative projects, the 20 pilot investigators participated in a poster session and made individual presentations at the summit.

Several top RWJF officials also participated: Drs. James S. Marks, senior vice president, Laura Leviton, special advisor for evaluation, and John Govea, senior program officer.

Other special guests included: Texas Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr.; Sean Elliott, a former San Antonio Spur; and his wife Claudia Zapata, a *San Antonio Express-News* health columnist.

"It all goes back to dealing with this situation as a family," Zapata said. "It's a good idea to change the family's habits and attitudes toward diet and exercise."

Elliott agreed, adding: "For me, it's tough to really stay active and stay in shape. But I get after it, and I get after it at home and try to be a great role model for my kids... sometimes that lesson doesn't necessarily rub off, but 90 percent of the time it will."

The summit helped increase awareness of the challenge



Former San Antonio Spur Sean Elliott and his wife, nutrition expert Claudia Zapata, spoke about building healthy families at the Inaugural *Salud America!* Scientific Summit on Sept. 10, 2009.

of childhood obesity among Latinos, said Dr. Amelie Ramirez, director of *Salud America!* and the Institute for Health Promotion Research at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

"We also helped enhance knowledge of the work being done to reduce the epidemic and created opportunities for collaboration," she said. "I think we inspired and motivated people to make change."

A full conference report can be found [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.

Editor: Cliff Despres

Contributor: Cliff Despres

Design: Jeffrey Heinke Design

Salud America! The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

Principal Investigator, Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez

The Institute for Health Promotion Research

The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

(210) 562-6500 • IHPR.uthscsa.edu

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](#).

Kids' Health Q&A

Question: Just how important is a good breakfast for kids?

Eating breakfast is a vital part of powering-up your body for the day. Eating a balanced breakfast can help keep your family alert, improve mood and reduce mid-morning food cravings, according to the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#).

But how helpful is a balanced breakfast?

Those who eat breakfast...

- Are significantly less likely to be obese/diabetic than those who usually don't.
- Are more likely to have

better concentration, problem-solving skills and hand-eye coordination.

- Had an "increase in math grades and reading scores, increased student attention, reduced nurse visits and improved student behaviors," one study found.

Eating only sugary foods may cause a child to have erratic energy levels, so avoid frosted and chocolate cereals, donuts, white bread and high-sugar breakfast bars. Eating a balanced breakfast will help get kids going and sustain their energy until lunch time.