New TV Series: ‘Making Awesome Changes’ in San Antonio to Fight Obesity

Childhood obesity is a big problem in San Antonio.

That’s why Salud America! and KSAT-TV are teaming up for a new TV series, “Making Awesome Changes,” which features Salud Heroes—Latino youth and leaders who are improving physical activity and nutrition—on the local evening news.

“We hope people will watch these stories of Salud Heroes, and say, ‘That’s something I want to do and can do in my neighborhood or my school,’” said Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, director of Salud America!, a Latino childhood obesity research network supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and based at the Institute for Health Promotion Research at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

“We want to create a wave of healthy change across San Antonio.”

So far, KSAT-TV has shared these stories:

Cecil Whisenton, a Salud America! Salud Hero, helped bring healthy vending machines to give students nutritious snack options at South San High School (KSAT-TV video).

Cesar Valdillez, a Salud America! Salud Hero, worked with neighbors and the city to start a community garden in San Antonio’s Southtown community (KSAT-TV video).

Dante Jones, a Salud America! Salud Hero, started the Roll Models bike club to mentor youth and take them on regular bike rides across San Antonio (KSAT-TV video).

Michaelie Love, a Salud America! Salud Hero, helped bring a breakfast cart with fast, low-fat, low-sugar, and whole-grain options to her school (KSAT-TV video).

Stay tuned for more stories from Salud America! and KSAT-TV!
**Director’s Corner**

**From IHPR Director Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez**

**K** SAT-TV knows it. The American Public Health Association (APHA) and film critics know it. Do you know it?

Our *Salud America*! *Salud Heroes* video series is making a big impact in educating and inspiring people to make healthy changes in their communities.

The series, which is featured on KSAT-TV and earned more than 40 awards from the APHA and the film industry, tells the stories of real people who have pushed for healthy policies in their neighborhoods, schools, and cities for Latino kids.

The series is rooted in our Policy Contribution Spectrum, a scientific model that breaks down the important steps that contribute to policy development and change.

Each *Salud* Heroes video shows steps toward change made by kids, parents, teachers, city leaders, activists—how they learned about a problem, had an idea for a change, mobilized support, got a change enacted or implemented, and monitored it for equity, and so on.

But human interest is really the driving force.

**Rick Carrillo**, *Salud America!* TV producer/director, captures the passion of each *Salud* Hero to create a story that can motivate viewers to mimic healthy changes.

Carrillo himself was recently named a finalist for the “Best in Show: YouTube” award from WEGO Health, which recognizes “exceptional health activists who make a difference in the lives of patients and caregivers.”

We humbled by all this recognition, and hope people continue to watch and learn from *Salud* Heroes and begin to make healthy changes in their communities.

Learn more at our [website](#), and watch the [Salud Heroes videos](#)!

**Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez**

**Director, IHPR**

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**Staff Profile: Carlos Valenzuela**

Carlos Valenzuela, with dreams of becoming the next Jorge Ramos, got a degree in broadcast journalism and worked as a community affairs TV reporter.

But he soon found a way to use his skills to improve people’s lives.

Impressed by the passionate health advocacy of his mentor, Floyd Robinson, who directs health and wellness at the University of Houston, Valenzuela started developing health prevention campaigns for the city of Houston's health department.

“I learned the big impact health campaigns can have in minority communities in areas like obesity, diabetes, and sexually transmitted infections,” he said.

Today Valenzuela is taking health communications to a new level as social media coordinator at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

He develops content for *SaludToday*, the IHPR’s social media campaign for Latino health, which includes a [blog](#) and [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) pages.

Latinos are very active on social media, using it more than whites or blacks. Latinos also tend to be populous in some of the segments who use social media sites the most, including 18-29-year-olds, those with less than a high-school education or some college, and those making less than $30,000 a year, studies have shown.

“We know this is an opportunity to reach Latinos with health messages where they spend a large amount of time,” Valenzuela said. “This is especially significant because Latinos suffer from many health disparities, such as higher rates of obesity.”

*SaludToday* is becoming a go-to source of Latino health information, from cancer prevention to healthy lifestyles to demographic trends.

“It motivates me to know that, thanks to my work and the work of the communications team and the whole staff at the IHPR, we’re helping the Latino community and Latino children and families live a healthier and more active lifestyle,” Valenzuela said.

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**Fun Facts**

**Hometown:** San Diego, Calif.; Houston, Texas  
**Family:** Mother, father, step-father, sister, three dogs  
**Hobbies:** “Traveling, playing tennis, and social media.”  
**Favorite food(s):** Asian and Italian  
**Favorite movie(s):** *City of God*  
**Favorite book(s):** *Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
**Program Helps Hispanic Kids Adopt Healthier Lifestyle**

Hispanic children who participated in a unique weight-maintenance pilot intervention were more likely to adopt healthy lifestyles, resulting in healthier weights, than children who didn’t participate, according to a UT Health Science Center at San Antonio study in the June 2015 issue of the journal *Childhood Obesity*.

The pilot study, which paved the way for a new $2.9 million grant to test the intervention on a larger scale through 2019, targeted parent-child pairs in a New Braunfels clinic.

Children were Hispanic, ages 5-14, and obese/overweight.

“Comprehensive behavioral programs have been shown to help these children improve their weight status. However, more efficient interventions that can be done in primary care clinics must be developed for Hispanic children,” said Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina, study author and professor at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR).

The pilot study trained pediatric health care providers and staff to implement a “standard care” intervention with behavioral counseling.

Half of the randomized participants received additional behavioral intervention components, including a face-to-face counseling session with a health educator immediately after the participant’s first visit with the pediatrician and monthly telephone counseling and mailed newsletters for the four-month period. The also had to adopt two of 11 healthy lifestyle strategies.

The 59 families who received additional counseling and education did better than those that did not receive the additional behavioral intervention.

The standard-care children had a 90.2% weight gain while the intervention group had a 70.2% weight gain. The standard care participants had a 73.8% waist circumference increase while the intervention participants had a 50.9% increase.

“Children have the advantage of growing. We hope to slow down their weight gain so they can grow into their weight. We hope they will adopt these healthy lifestyle changes so they will not leave childhood overweight or obese and continue that trajectory into adulthood and become obese adults,” Parra-Medina said.

See details on the larger study [here](#).

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**Publications**


**Presentations**

- Carrillo, R. “Harnessing Media to Improve Individual and Community Health.” IT’S TIME TEXAS, June 15, 2015, Austin, Texas.
- Ramirez, A. “Update on Risk Factors and Screening for Cancer.” Hispanic Cancer Symposium, Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, April 18, 2015, Edinburg, Texas.
- Ramirez, A. “Historical Perspectives on Meaningful Inclusion.” IOM Roundtable on Obesity Solutions, April 9, 2015, Washington, D.C.
Inaugural Event Explores Women’s Cancer Survivorship

More than 200 cancer survivors and healthcare providers explored diet, spirituality, and more at the inaugural Women’s Survivorship Summit on June 13, 2015, in San Antonio.

The summit, which featured guest speakers and cancer resources, was organized by the San Antonio Cancer Education Collaborative, a coalition that includes the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

“The event was a huge success. We made great strides to increase awareness of the various issues faced by cancer survivors, and solutions to those issues” said Sandra San Miguel, summit co-chair and a researcher of Redes En Acción, a Latino cancer research network supported by the National Cancer Institute and led by the IHPR.

The summit featured keynote speaker Dr. Virginia G. Kaklamani, leader of the breast cancer program at the Cancer Therapy and Research Center at the UT Health Science Center, who spoke about the clinical and psychological challenges of being a cancer survivor and how to move ahead.

Other experts covered healing foods and the impact of cancer on survivors' mental health, personal relationships, spirituality, culture, and more.

The summit, sponsored by the Alamo Breast Cancer Foundation (ABCF) and AstraZeneca, was the first event organized by the San Antonio Cancer Education Collaborative, a coalition of groups developed by the ABCF to promote local cancer services and public education.

The collaborative includes the UT Health Science Center, Cancer Therapy and Research Center, the Breast Friends Forever Young Survivor support group led by San Miguel, Alamo City Cancer Council, National Inter-Organizational Collaborative (Indian and Asian Community), SLEW Wellness Center, Baptist Breast Center, the San Antonio affiliates of Susan G. Komen, American Cancer Society, and YWCA USA, and others.

“We hope to make this free community event an annual occurrence,” San Miguel said.

The IHPR was represented at the Women’s Survivorship Summit by Carlos Valenzuela, communications specialist, Sandra San Miguel, research instructor, and Astrid Roman, intern.

Join IHPR’s Weekly #SaludTues Tweetchats on Latino Health

You’re invited to join our #SaludTues (Salud Tuesday) Tweetchat series, which takes place at 1 p.m. ET every Tuesday to spotlight different aspects of Latino obesity and health.

#SaludTues tweetchats are hosted by the IHPR’s Latino health social media campaign, @SaludToday, and co-hosted by organizational or individual topic experts. Use your Twitter handle to join our chats and follow the conversation by using the hashtag #SaludTues.

You’re invited to join IHPR's Weekly #SaludTues Tweetchats on Latino Health

Please see upcoming Tweetchats and recaps of past chats.

IHPR Wins Communicator Awards

The IHPR recently won several Communicator Awards, the leading international awards program from the Academy of Interactive & Visual Arts to honor work that transcends innovation and craft in mobile, audio and new-cause marketing and communications.

The IHPR’s Salud America! program won a 2015 Gold Award of Excellence (given to those entrants whose ability to communicate positions them as the best in the field) for its Mud Run for Kids video, and 2015 Silver Award of Distinction for its Salud America! Growing Healthy Change website and Salud Heroes Latino cancer survivor interactive website.

Breast Friends Forever Young Survivors

Accolades for Leaders of IHPR’s Latino Cancer Research Network

The scientific spotlight is shining brightly on a pair researchers who are part of the IHPR’s Latino cancer research network, Redes En Acción. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently appointed Dr. Eliseo J. Pérez-Stable, co-principal investigator (Co-PI) of the Redes Northwest Region, to be the next director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). Dr. J. Emilio Carrillo, Co-PI of the Redes Northeast Region, is this year’s winner of the American Medical Association’s prestigious AMA Foundation Excellence in Medicine Award.
Èxito! Program Helps Latinos Seek Doctoral Degrees, Research Careers

Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training is the Institute for Health Promotion Research’s program that encourages Latino master’s-level students or health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a career studying how cancer affects Latinos differently. The program offers a five-day summer institute and internships. Read more [here](#).

With constant support from her Puerto Rican, police-officer father, Kaylee Rivera had the determination and ambition to succeed in her educational and career goals.

Rivera, who earned a bachelor’s degree in health science from California State University, Long Beach, and is pursuing a master’s degree in public health, has work experience in nutrition, obesity prevention, and behavioral health. She also is a graduate mentor Fellow for the H2OLA program funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). After giving her first scientific presentation—“The effects of language acculturation and time in U.S on selected nutrition recommendations”—at the Annual Health Disparities Conference, Rivera wanted to explore a doctoral degree and a career in research.

So Rivera applied to Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training program, which offers a five-day summer institute and internships to encourage master’s-level students and health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a cancer research career.

She said the Èxito! Summer Institute gave her encouragement, and she drew inspiration and from her fellow participants and the guest speakers.

“[Èxito!] has motivated me and shown me that it is possible to complete a PhD,” she said. “It has also helped me reduce self-doubt.”

Born in Mexico City, Beatriz Sosa Prado later immigrated with her family to Los Angeles.

Influenced by the many challenges that immigrants encounter once they come to the United States, Sosa Prado pursued educational degrees with aims of being an advocate for them.

Indeed, with the support of her family and husband, Sosa Prado earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of California, Irvine, and a master’s degree in health science from California State University, Long Beach.

She went on to become a bilingual nutritionist who helps Latina mothers in Los Angeles.

Now ready to become a public health researcher and develop community-based interventions meeting the needs of Latinos in Southern California, she was encouraged by her mentor (America Bracho) to apply for Èxito! Latino Cancer Research Leadership Training program, which offers a five-day summer institute and internships to encourage master’s-level students and health professionals to pursue a doctoral degree and a cancer research career.

During the Èxito! Summer Institute, Sosa Prado was exposed to doctoral education resources and networking opportunities with well-established Latino researchers.

“I am convinced I belong in a PhD program because I have what it takes,” she said. “I know I am needed in my community, and I need to represent them.”
Social Media Uproar Causes District to Remove ‘Taco Dog’ from School Menus

To get the most out of their school day, kids need healthy food options.

In the mostly Latino town of El Paso, Texas, the Socorro Independent School District is now striving to provide students with healthier foods at both breakfast and lunch time.

In late 2014, the district received complaints over a menu item they called the “taco dog”—a hybrid hot dog and crispy taco. Despite the district’s claims that the taco dog is part of a “balanced and nutritional” meal, in December 2014, when parents saw pictures of this menu item, they took to social media to protest, the El Paso Times reports.

Taco dog tweets even reached celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, according to Education News.

Within days of the taco dog’s debut, the district decided to remove it from the menu.

The district held a workshop in January 2015 to give the community more information on national guidelines for food items on the school’s menu.

At the workshop parents and board trustees expressed concerns about the nutritional value of some of the menu items served to students.

The district’s nutrition services, Shelley Chenausky, also announced that the district would be removing items like pan dulce (Mexican sweet bread), Pop Tarts, and donuts from the breakfast menu. At lunch time students will have healthier options such as chef salad and more fresh fruit.

Learn more about how to get healthy food at your school!

News Briefs

- San Antonio: Council Member Hosts Community Walk
- Austin: As Complete Streets Policies Continue to Spread, Latino Communities Can Benefit Greatly
- Dallas: Healthy Corner Stores Are on the Way
- Dallas: Elementary School Plants a Garden in a Food Desert
- Houston: Fly Movement’s 6-Week Fitness Challenge
- Houston: News Farmers’ Market Brings Fresh Produce and Community
- Fort Worth: Documentary Highlights Healthy Food Access Issues, Solutions
- El Paso: New Community Garden Coming
- Hutto: SHAC Members Want Candy Out of Schools
Report: Latino Kids Who Grow Up with Smokers Twice as Likely to Become Smokers

Latin kids who grow up in a house with a smoker are twice as likely to become smokers than those who grow up in non-smoking households, according to a new study in the journal Preventive Medicine.

The findings are based on data from the Hispanic Community Health Study (HCHS/SOL), the largest ongoing study of Hispanics in the United States.

“We know that exposure to cigarette smoking as a child is a risk factor for adult smoking because it’s a learned behavior, and our study results corroborate this theory,” Dr. Elena Navas-Nacher, a researcher in the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Institute for Minority Health Research and lead author on the paper.

The researchers looked at data collected through questionnaires from 13,231 adults ages 18-74 living in cities with large Hispanic populations, such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami and the Bronx, and who identified as being Central American, Mexican, Puerto Rican or from South American background.

The vast majority of participants (73%) had lived in the U.S. for 10 or more years. The groups with the highest prevalence of household smoking were Cubans (56%) and Puerto Ricans (47%). These groups also had the highest number of adult smokers, Cubans (26%) Puerto Ricans (32%).

According to Navas-Nacher, efforts to reduce exposure to smoking at home among children and adolescents are needed, both in the U.S. and in Latin America.
27,000+ People Tell Taco Bell: Quit Pushing Sugary Drinks

More than 27,000 people across the nation recently wrote letters to urge Taco Bell to quit pushing sugary drinks and add healthier drink options, like low- or no-fat milk.

The letters highlighted Taco Bell’s recent beverage rollout of sugar-filled drinks, like the Latin American favorite Manzanita Sol, and subsequent aggressive marketing of these drinks on social media.

Letters were collected by Salud America!, a Latino obesity research network funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and led by Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez of the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Salud America! leaders recently delivered the 27,748 letters to Taco Bell.

Why is this effort so important?

Studies find that Latino kids already drink more sugary drinks each day than their white peers, and have higher rates of obesity.

Additionally, marketing specifically for Taco Bell’s sugary drinks can be found all over Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, channels that research shows Latinos use more than their White peers—and at a younger age.

Latino families and all Taco Bell customers need healthy drink options—nearly all of Taco Bell’s new drinks contain more sugar in the smallest cup size available than the American Heart Association recommends for kids in a day.

Visit the Salud America! Growing Healthy Change website to get involved in fighting Latino childhood obesity, and enter your address to see healthy local changes and Salud Heroes.

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**Latino News Tweets**

Follow the IHPR’s Twitter feed, @SaludToday for all the latest news in Latino health, like:

- **Healthy Lifestyles**
  - Search #GrowingHealthyChange on Twitter to See Healthy Changes
  - Empowering Kansas City Youth with Physical Activity
  - UCSF Swaps Sugary Drinks for Healthier Drinks
  - Latinos at a Higher Risk of Suffering from Metabolic Syndrome
  - Graphics Find Similarities between Food, Tobacco
  - Latino Kids Are Junk Food Ad Targets

- **Care Issues**
  - Healthier Drinks on Kids Menus in California City
  - USDA Hotline Connects People to Nearby Emergency Food Providers

- **Demographics**
  - Report: Latinos Likely to Use Their Phones to Look Up Health, Education, Job Content
  - Only 1.5M Latinos Will Be Ready to Own a Home by 2020
5 Ways to Set the Stage for Success by Latino Youth

You’ve probably heard stories of how a Latino youth achieved success and overcame poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, discrimination, and other barriers.

But how can more youth find such success?

A new report by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) examines the personal, environmental, and cultural factors that help resilient youth to learn from adversity and excel.

The report mines several success stories and suggests these five steps:

Tap into the natural resiliency of Latino youth. These qualities include optimism, perseverance, social skills, empathy, a strong willingness to give back to their communities and family and cultural traits such as responsibility and family solidarity.

Help their families escape poverty through living wages and affordable housing. One-third of Latino children are in poverty today, which extends for generations and is the basis of many other problems.

Implement policies. Policies like the “REDEEM Act,” reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and support Common Core State Standards so schools will better meet the needs of Latino students and improve their graduation rate.

Fund culturally appropriate, holistic programs that support youth development, mental health and academic and workforce skills, and introduce students to new interests and technologies. For youth and families living in poor immigrant neighborhoods, community-based interventions such as the NCLR Escalera Program provide important support including career exploration, skills and leadership development, personal development, academic support and overall well-being.

Provide mentors who can help youth become ready for a successful future. Community-based organizations provide critical supports to help youth overcome adversity usually rooted in poverty, discrimination, inadequate education and violent neighborhoods.

“The guidance and support that adults can provide to young people at risk is literally lifesaving in helping them overcome challenges,” said report author Dr. Patricia Foxen of NCLR. “We must make sure that youth today have an after-school program or mentor looking out for them.”

Latino Resource Briefs

**Funding**

**Grant Roundup**
The following organizations have open research funding opportunities or lists:

- The U.S. Office of Minority Health
- Susan G. Komen for the Cure
- AACR
- NIH Obesity Grants
- NCCOR Obesity Grants
- RWJF
- CPRIT

**Ongoing Events**

**CancerCare Workshops**

CancerCare, in partnership with Redes En Acción, which is led by the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, will offer free workshops on a variety of issues. Register here.
WINNING VIDEO: See What Makes Kids Rap …about Salad!

What makes students rap about healthy eating?

Students created an original song because they were so happy with their cool new “fresh food station,” the brainchild of parents in Fairfax County, Va.

Now they’ve won the Salud America! #SaludHeroes voting contest!

Read their story or watch their winning video about the steps they took to plan, mobilize support for, and implement the new Statesman Station fresh food bar at Marshall High School, which not only has healthy options beyond just salads, it also has a dedicated line in the cafeteria, signs, and promotion by students to their peers.

“[Students] like the quality of the food that’s on the food bar, so we’re excited about that,” said JoAnne Hammermaster, the parent group Real Food for Kids (RFFK), which pushes for healthy changes in the Fairfax County Public School District (FCPSD), a 22% Latino district.

District leaders were so impressed by the station’s popularity that they’re adding similar stations at all middle and high schools over three years, Hammermaster said.

“Kids who may have never eaten at school are now eating in our cafeteria. I think that makes a big statement, because, as a parent, you would like to know, when your child goes to school, they choose something that’s a healthy option,” she said.

Salud America! is a Latino obesity research network funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and led by Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez of the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Visit Salud America! to learn how to make similar changes in your town!