New Website: How to Grow a Healthy Change for Latino Kids in Your Area and Beyond

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (Feb. 5, 2014)—Want to fight Latino childhood obesity, but don’t know where to start, or how you can make a change? Start at Salud America! Growing Healthy Change.

The new website is a first-of-its-kind clearinghouse of Latino-focused resources and stories to promote changes—healthier marketing, improved access to healthy food, and physical activity options—for Latino kids in your neighborhood and across the nation.

Right now at the site, you can:

- Create maps at the level of school, city, county, state, or nation to see what changes are growing for Latino kids, or search by topic (e.g., healthier school snacks, active spaces);
- Find resources to start a change;
- Watch and read about real-life “Salud Heroes” of change; and
- Become a “Salud Hero” by uploading your own stories.

The site was created by Salud America!, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation based at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio. The site is part of the Community Commons platform.

“We believe this website is a critical tool to showcase the latest healthy changes for Latino kids that are popping up across the country, and also to educate and motivate people to start creating changes of their own, like opening playgrounds to the public after school hours or starting up a community garden,” said Amelie G. Ramirez, DrPH, director of Salud America! and the IHPR. “What’s great is that you can find what changes are happening in your own backyard, or see what’s happening 1,000 miles away and how you might be able to make that happen in your area.”

Latino kids suffer disproportionately from weight problems: 39.1 percent of Latino kids ages 2-19 are overweight or obese, compared to 31.8 percent for U.S. children overall.

Research also indicates that Latino kids tend to have more limited access to physical activity options and healthy food, and are increasingly the target of unhealthy food and drink marketing.

The new website offers three steps on how to address these issues.

**Step 1: Find Changes**
The website features the latest Latino-focused healthy changes taking place across the country in six areas: healthier school snacks, better food in the neighborhood, active play, active spaces, sugary drinks, and healthier marketing.

Maps show activities happening in school districts, cities, counties, states and the nation—such as farmer’s markets, marketing campaigns, more fruits and veggies, and more.

**Step 2: Learn to Make Change**
The website has continuously updated feeds of evidence-based reports, toolkits, and other resources to learn or model how to make healthier changes.

“Salud Heroes” stories—articles often accompanied by original videos—highlight the steps people have taken to successfully spark a healthy community change.

Stories follow one change, from idea development through implementation.

Salud Heroes include:

- **San Antonio school district cooks up healthier concession stand menus**: In a mostly Latino school district in San Antonio, a school board president drove a policy change to implement healthier menu options—such as grilled chicken wraps—at concession stands during after-school events, like football games, for students and parents.

- **San Antonio Latina sisters start a neighborhood fitness program**: Makayla, 9, and Alyssa Esparza, 8, saw a weight-loss contest on TV and decided to get active and help others get active, but they didn’t know of any afterschool programs to join and they didn’t have anyone to be active with. This led to their big idea: Make a Craigslist ad and invite local kids for a 90-day get fit challenge.

- **Houston mom helps send Latino students home with fresh produce**: One mom, determined to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to folks in inner-city Houston, teamed up with a food pantry and found a unique way to distribute fresh produce to families in need: Send students home from school with a free bag fresh produce each week.

- **Houston doctor helps open a farmer’s market at her clinic’s front door**: In a mostly Latino neighborhood in Houston that lacked access to fresh fruits and vegetables, a doctor worked with community members to create a unique method to bring healthy, affordable foods to clinic patients: A farmers’ market right at the door of the doctor’s office lobby.

- **California high school uses “aquaponics” to grow fresh veggies for the community**: In Santa Ana, Calif., a high school that serves at-risk youth offers a first-period gardening class that started as a campus beautification project but ended in students growing healthy food for their community in a unique, sustainable way, called “aquaponics.”

- **Virginia parents help remove sugary drinks from schools**: In Fairfax, Va., sugary drinks were stocked in vending machines. Several parents banded together and, with the support of school district leaders and students alike, made a change to remove sugary drinks and replace them with healthier options in vending machines at seven schools.

**Step 3: Be a Salud Hero**
Upload stories, photos, and more about a new, in-progress, or successful change to your community, and *Salud America!* may write up your story, possibly film it, and share it with our national audience.

“This is really a one-stop shop to catalyze efforts, from the grassroots level up to the federal level, to reduce and prevent Latino childhood obesity,” Dr. Ramirez said.

The website was conceptualized by *Salud America!* and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The site was developed in collaboration by *Salud America!* and the team behind
Community Commons, a free data-sharing initiative for healthy communities powered by the Institute for People, Place and Possibilities (a partnership including the University of Missouri’s Center for Applied Research and Environmental Systems [CARES]).

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For current news from Salud America! and the IHPR at the UT Health Science Center San Antonio, please visit our SaludToday blog or follow @SaludToday on Twitter and Facebook.

**Salud America!** is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The program aims to unite and increase the number of Latino researchers and stakeholders engaged in research and community change to reduce and prevent Latino childhood obesity. The network is directed by the Institute for Health Promotion Research at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio. Visit Salud America! online at [www.salud-america.org](http://www.salud-america.org).

**The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio** investigates the causes and solutions to the unequal impact of cancer and chronic disease among certain populations, including Latinos, in South Texas and the nation. The IHPR was founded in 2006. Visit the IHPR online at [http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu](http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu).