PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN LATIN AMERICA
AN AGENDA FOR REGIONAL RESEARCH & STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The rise in childhood obesity in Latin America poses a major public health challenge. Limited scientific evidence inhibits development and implementation of new, effective interventions across the region. To address this gap, the NIH Fogarty International Center engaged researchers to analyze the knowledge translation needed for evidence-based policy initiatives, review the research agenda, and evaluate research capacity in the region.

NUTRITION STATUS OF CHILDREN IN LATIN AMERICA

1 in 5 children are overweight or obese and this proportion is increasing rapidly.

Latin America faces the dual burden of undernutrition & overweight.

WHAT ARE THE RESEARCH NEEDS IN LATIN AMERICA?

Latin American researchers should...

- Build evidence for effective dietary and physical activity policies
- Evaluate childhood obesity prevention policies and regulatory actions
- Implement comprehensive, multilevel interventions to promote healthy child growth
- Improve collection of public health data and the infrastructure related to obesity prevention
- Enhance dissemination of proven approaches
- Understand the biological challenges to healthy growth across the life cycle and the role of diet and physical activity

WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS LEARNED FROM DEVELOPING EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES?

- Mexico: Through the cooperation of academia, civil society, and the legislative and executive branches of government, approval of a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages and nonessential energy-dense food was possible.
- Argentina: Evidence that almost all food in Argentina contains high levels of trans fatty acids (TFAs) led to the decision to significantly reduce TFAs from the food supply.
- Chile: Public health researchers and advocates were key to passing front-of-package labeling legislation.
- Ecuador: Motivated by data from a national nutrition survey, the Ministry of Health and Government of Ecuador demonstrated strong political will to enact a traffic light label regulation.

Across Latin America, because of the documented success of Ciclovías (open streets) in Bogotá, the initiative has spread to 461 cities in Latin America.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADVANCE CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICA?

- Invest in research capacity, training Latin American researchers to pursue locally relevant research and maintaining a career pipeline for scientists
- Develop research networks within and among countries in the region
- Promote a research environment that fosters multidisciplinary collaboration

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