

Since 2003, Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! (Your Health Matters), a Community-Wide Campaign sponsored by UTHealth School of Public Health, Brownsville Regional Campus, has focused on increasing physical activity and healthy food choices to improve, prevent and control diabetes and other chronic conditions in Rio Grande Valley (RGV). Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! works with 10 cities, municipalities and county precincts in Cameron and Hidalgo County to implement Community Health Worker (CHW) led policy and environmental changes to improve the health of those communities. This evidence-based model includes creating safe and accessible access to physical activity, health food choices and health screenings. The CHWs go to homes and community spaces, provide education and motivation to individuals and families, and offer over 200 free exercise and healthy cooking classes every week.

The Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! initiative also includes a media campaign that features role models from the local communities who have made lifestyle changes to improve their health. They are featured on a weekly Spanish language TV segment (Televisa), local newspaper column, radio and social media.

UTHealth has also supported infrastructure and environmental change to support health in the ten communities through the Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! campaign, including hike and bike trails, community gardens, farmers' market, hydration stations and park infrastructure. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) being active makes your body more sensitive to insulin and helps prevent type 2 diabetes, - a common goal Unidos Contra La Diabetes (UCD) actively strives to achieve.

In a recent interview, Letty Gomez, a Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! Community Health Worker (CHW) from the city of San Benito, shared how type 2 diabetes led to the passing of her father. This influenced Letty's desire to promote awareness about diabetes prevention; she later joined UTHealth's Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! (Your Health Matters).



As a CHW, she is responsible for the facilitation of a variety of exercise groups including Zumba, Yoga, Pilates, Bootcamp, Step & Toning, and Full Body Workout (online and in person). She also coordinates UTHealth and Brownsville Wellness Coalition's Happy Kitchen cooking classes, UTHealth's Diabetes Prevention Program and other screening events/initiatives. Having worked nine years with the campaign, Letty has borne witness to the remarkable health improvements physical activity can have in her community members' lives. Letty revealed she frequently receives praises about the impact and success the free exercise groups have on the attendees. Remarks include positive results on weight loss, lower blood sugar levels, and controlled cholesterol. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be part of a movement to improve health outcomes and prevent type 2 diabetes.

UCD was excited to witness the energetic Zumba class held at Stookey Park in San Benito, Texas. Our Project Coordinator, Susana Arizmendi visited the afternoon exercise group and gifted each attendee a reusable water bottle to promote health and hydration. For Unidos Contra La Diabetes it is both encouraging and rewarding to learn about engaging campaigns focused on improving RGV health outcomes like the UTHealth School of Public Health campaign. We are proud of the individuals and families who make the daily effort and serve as role models for others to combat the type two diabetes crisis. UTHealth's Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! program has shown positive outcomes among participants, including increased rates of physical activity, reduced blood pressure, and increased fruit and vegetable consumption among the thousands of participants over the last several years. For more information about the campaign, free classes and impact, check out the Tu Salud ¡Si Cuenta! website and social media pages.

If you are interested in joining a free exercise group in San Benito, you can also contact Letty Gomez directly at 956-357-4564 or visit www.tusaludsicuenta.org/free-exercise-classes/