



# RISE HEALTHIER

Through the Institute for Hispanic Health (IHH), NCLR aims to reduce the incidence, burden, and impact of health disparities among Hispanic Americans and to promote their well-being. IHH protects the health of a diverse Latino community by fostering leadership and advocacy on critical health issues, engaging the community first-hand, and investing in social services that support healthy, resilient behaviors, and promote equal access to health care.

*A mother kisses her healthy newborn.  
Photo credit: Spina Bifida Association.*

## a healthy and **STRONG START**

The corn flour used to make tortillas has been in our kitchens for generations. It means a hearty meal and a full belly. Now, it'll even help future generations before they're born.

For far too long, Latina mothers have had higher risk of having a baby with neural tube defects like a brain or backbone that didn't develop completely. These birth defects mean a lifetime of medical treatments, bills, and the daily pressure of caring for a child with special needs.

Fortunately, the risk of neural tube defects can be reduced significantly when expecting mothers consume enough folic acid while they're pregnant. Since the 1990s, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has allowed companies to enrich wheat flour and certain cereals with folic acid, which eventually lead to far fewer babies having neural tube problems. However, Latino families continued to suffer disproportionately.

In 2006, the link was made between a Latino preference for corn products,

and the lack of folic acid in the corn flour used to make them. Over the course of nearly eight years, **NCLR, with the March of Dimes and other partners—Walmart, the Spina Bifida Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Royal DSM, and Gruma Corporation—took on the challenge of proving to the FDA that the fortification of corn masa with folic acid was safe and was needed in order to reduce birth defects among Hispanic babies.**

By working closely with the FDA, coalition partners designed a study that gathered the information needed to prove folic acid could safely be added to corn flour. When the FDA approved the fortification of corn masa in April 2016, we worked with manufacturers to act quickly on this win. Through this long-fought victory, we expect an additional 40 Latino babies will be born without a devastating defect each year. For years to come, untold numbers of Latino children will begin life with a stronger, healthier start.

**THANKS TO NCLR'S LEADERSHIP, THE FDA AGREED TO ALLOW THE FORTIFICATION OF CORN MASA WITH FOLIC ACID. AN ESTIMATED 450,000 MORE MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WILL HAVE ENOUGH FOLIC ACID TO PREVENT NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS.**

**200,000** people learned about affordable nutrition through *Comprando Rico y Sano*

**229** community health workers led nutrition programs for parents

**40,000** Latinos enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

*To learn more about how NCLR is building healthier communities, or visit [www.nclr.org/issues/health](http://www.nclr.org/issues/health).*