

A RESOURCE FOR IMPROVING MEASURABLE IMPACT

Produce Prescription (Rx) Programs

Produce Prescription (Rx) Programs allow healthcare providers to write prescriptions for patients experiencing food insecurity or patients with diet-related health conditions to receive free or subsidized produce to increase their fruit and vegetable intake. (1)



Food insecurity is associated with an unhealthy diet and poor nutrition intake, which increases an individual's risk of developing diet-related diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. (2)



Each year in the United States, approximately 678,000 deaths are due to nutrition-related diseases. (2)



A recent Texas study found that people on food prescription programs had decreased emergency room visits and fewer medical costs related to dietary complications. (3)

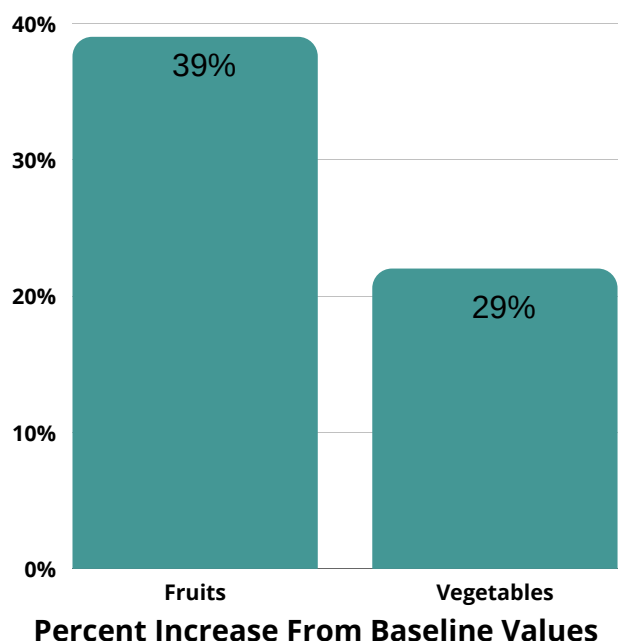
Food insecurity is defined as the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle and is associated with low consumption of fruits, vegetables, and other nutrient-dense foods. (4)

In 2020, an estimated 14.8% of U.S. households with children under the age of 18 experienced food insecurity. This equals approximately 38.3 million people, including 11.7 million children who live in food insecure households. (4-7)

As of August 2022, approximately 27.3% of families with children in Texas are experiencing food insecurity. (8)

A recent meta-analysis study examining food prescription programs on dietary behaviors found an increase in daily fruit (39%) and vegetable (29%) consumption from baseline. Pooled results found a decrease in Body Mass Index (BMI) and blood sugar levels among program participants. (9)

Impact of Produce Rx Programs on Fruit and Vegetable Consumption (Meta-Analysis)



How Do Produce Prescriptions (Rx) Programs Work? (1)



Healthcare providers screen patients for food insecurity or diet-related health conditions.



Patients who meet the requirements receive a written "prescription" for fruits and vegetables from their doctor.



Patients take their prescriptions to qualified participating farmers' markets or grocery stores.



Depending on the program and prescription, patients can receive money or coupons for fruit and vegetable purchases at participating food retailers.

Produce Prescription Programs in Texas



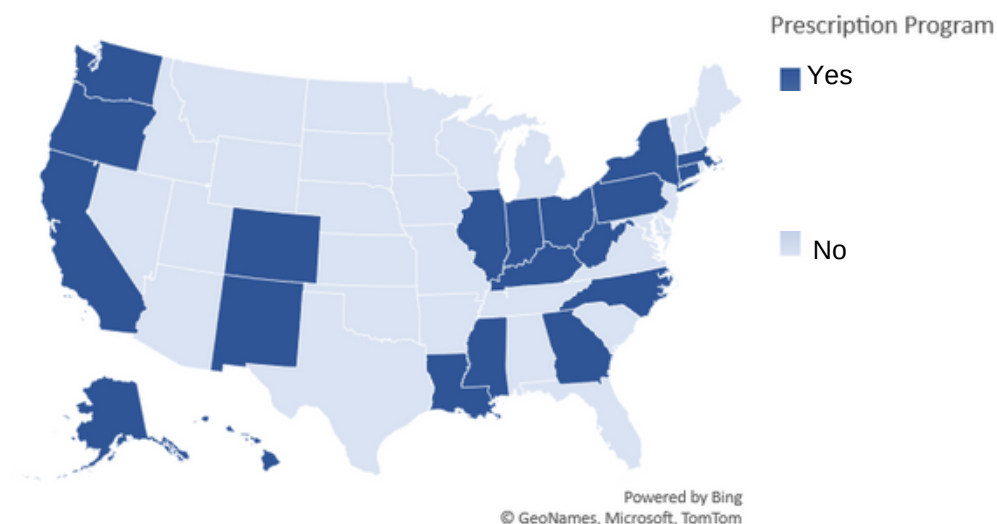
Food Rx Program - Houston (10)

- A 9-month pilot program was implemented across clinics to assist food insecure adults experiencing food insecurity that lived in specific lower-income zip codes.
- Approximately 99% of participants reported eating all or most fruits and vegetables provided by the food pantry.
- Following the program, 91.4% of participants reported decreased food insecurity.
- Results of the program found that cost of participation was \$12 per person, which included produce costs, educational materials, and personnel costs to implement the program.
- Participants in the program reported saving an average of \$57 per week on groceries.

Produce Prescription Programs Across the United States

Between 2019 and 2021, 44 produce prescription programs across 20 states and the District of Columbia were awarded grants from the USDA. (11)

States with USDA-Funded Produce Prescription Programs



Non-USDA Funded Produce Rx Programs Across the United States

Fruit & Vegetable Prescription Program (FVRx) - Navajo Nation (12)

- In children, fruit and vegetable consumption increased from 5.2 servings per day at baseline to 6.8 servings per day at follow-up.
- At baseline, only 66% of children met the American Academy of Pediatrics daily fruit and vegetable consumption recommendations, compared to 82% meeting recommendations at follow-up.
- Food insecurity decreased from baseline (82%) to program completion (65%) among Native families enrolled in the program.

Fresh Prescription Program - Michigan (13,14)

- The Fresh Rx Program aimed to help participants manage their Type 2 diabetes through fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Eligible participants were given \$10 per week for four weeks to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from federally qualified Health Centers (FWHC) at identified farmers' markets.
- By the end of the program, 93% of participants reported better control of their diabetes.
- Additionally, 88% of participants reported eating more fruits and vegetables per day.

Produce Prescription Program for Patients with Hypertension (PRxHTN) - Ohio (15)

- Around 95% of participants who completed the program had decreased hypertension levels.
- As a result of the program, 88% of participants reported that they felt eating fruits and vegetables was important, compared to baseline data.
- Participation in the program reported two main barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption: (1) financial constraints and (2) lack of access to fruits and vegetables in their neighborhoods.

Farmbox Rx - Online Program (16)

- This program partnered with healthcare providers and insurance companies to provide boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables to individuals and families.
- Through the partnership, participants had higher engagement rates with doctor's office visits, lab completions, and vaccinations.

Summary

- Food prescription programs are just one strategy proven to be effective in providing healthy foods and increasing food insecurity among people who are experiencing food insecurity. (3,13,14,17)
- Produce Rx programs are based on diet-related conditions and food insecurity status; therefore, eligible participants do not need to be enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). (2,16)
- Food prescription programs increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables within communities with lower access to fresh produce. (10) These programs have also been shown to increase the affordability of fresh produce among communities in need.
- Food prescription programs help connect healthcare to food systems by providing individuals with the necessary resources to eat healthy foods. (16)

Recommendations

1. To improve food insecurity and diet-related conditions, more investments in local-, state-, and federal-level policies and programs that support healthy food choices are needed. (10)
2. Food prescription programs should be incentivized or required in routine healthcare discussions between providers and eligible patients. (10)
3. Produce Prescription Programs can partner with Texas farmers to promote locally-grown fruits and vegetables and support Texas agriculture.

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