

# Food is Medicine

March 8, 2024

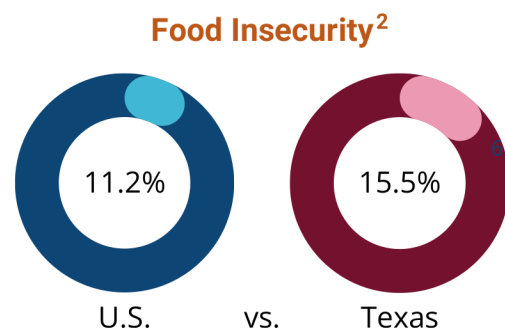
## KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Food insecurity is associated with higher rates of chronic and diet-related conditions and diseases (e.g., obesity, diabetes).
2. Food is Medicine initiatives incorporate a multitude of supportive programs and services that bridge the connection between food, nutrition, and health.
3. Food is Medicine programs have been shown to help individuals and families experiencing food insecurity increase access to nutritious foods and decrease and manage chronic and diet-related diseases.

## Background

**Food insecurity is defined as the lack of consistent access to adequate food in order to live an active and healthy lifestyle.<sup>1</sup>**

- Food insecurity is **higher among households with children** and **higher in Texas** compared to the national average.<sup>2</sup>
- According to a report by the United States Department of Agriculture, Texas has the second-highest rate of food insecurity (15.5%) in the nation.<sup>2,3</sup>
- Approximately 1 in 6 Texas households report experiencing food insecurity, equaling approximately 4.6 million Texans.<sup>3</sup>
- In the United States, households with children, especially those headed by a single mother are more likely to report experiencing food insecurity.<sup>4</sup>
- Around \$3.87 trillion is spent annually in the United States on healthcare costs related to chronic and diet-related disease.<sup>5</sup>



**The 2022 White House's National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health announced its goals of ending hunger and increasing nutrition security, healthy eating, and physical activity across the country by 2030 to reduce the number of health-related chronic diseases experienced by Americans.<sup>6</sup>**

**Nutrition security is the access to culturally appropriate, affordable, and healthy foods that are essential to living a healthy lifestyle.<sup>7</sup>**

**1 in 6** Texas households report experiencing food insecurity

# Food is Medicine

Food is Medicine refers to an array of supportive programs and services that recognize and respond to the critical link between nutrition and health.<sup>8</sup>



\*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants and Children (WIC); Healthy Incentives Programs (HIP)

## Food is Medicine programs can:<sup>9</sup>



prevent **6 million** hospitalizations annually



lead to **saving \$13.6 billion** per year

## Food is Medicine Programs in Texas

### Food is the Best Medicine

Food is the Best Medicine (FBM) is a program to support birthing mothers at Ascension Seton Medical Center Austin who identify as food insecure.<sup>10,11</sup>



FBM Evaluation

- Mothers enrolled in the program will receive fresh, nutritious meals for 8 weeks during the postpartum period.<sup>10,11</sup>
- FBM will also work to decrease the high rate of maternal deaths and morbidity cases in Central Texas, which are higher among minority populations who struggle to access healthy, nutritious foods.<sup>10,11</sup>



Enroll in the program through local hospital



Healthy, nutritious meals delivered to your home for 8 weeks postpartum

Food insecurity among postpartum women is associated with an increased risk of:



poor mental health



reduced breastfeeding



higher infant hospitalization rates

Reference 10

## Produce Rx in High-Risk Pregnant Mothers at Harris Health

The Produce Rx program will support pregnant mothers obtain healthy, nutritious foods through a Produce Prescription Program (Food Rx).<sup>12</sup>

- The Food Rx program will provide high-risk pregnant women with access to nutritious foods to help increase their healthy food intake.<sup>12</sup>
- The program will examine how healthy foods impact pregnant women's gestational weight gain, birth outcomes, and provided care.<sup>12</sup>
  - The Food Rx program will follow women over the course of 24 months, through their pregnancy and postpartum.

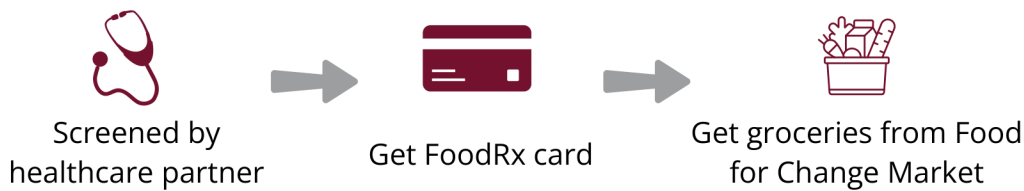
**Pregnancy**  
is a crucial time for  
eating **nutritious,**  
healthy meals

Reference 12

## Examples of Food Prescription Programs in Texas

**Produce Prescription (Rx) Programs** utilize vouchers or debit cards to be used to purchase food at a discount or no cost at farmers' markets or participating grocery stores.<sup>13</sup>

### Houston Food Bank Food Rx Program\*



### Client Choice Model

- 2 or more fruits
- 2 or more vegetables
- 4 other healthy items

Among individuals who participated in the Houston Food Bank Food Rx Program:

- Those who redeemed produce prescriptions had decreased HbA1c, a marker of long-term diabetic glucose control, compared to those who did not.<sup>14</sup>
- Those with a higher redemptions of food prescriptions were associated with greater improvement in glucose control.<sup>14</sup>



The program was found to be cost-saving and cost-effective, which leads to increased quality-adjusted life years and averted medical costs.<sup>14</sup>

*\*Can be redeemed twice per month for six months (or up to 12 times) at food pantry or trailer locations*

## Next Steps - Programs and Policies

1. **Incorporate** coverage for Food is Medicine programs into state Medicaid waivers and Medicaid managed care organizations with quality improvement services. States can utilize the "in lieu of services" to support and cover Food is Medicine services as a cost-effective substitute to traditional care.<sup>8</sup>
2. **Collaborate** with nonprofit organizations and research institutions to implement Food is Medicine programs.<sup>8</sup>
3. **Implement** screening for food insecurity in all federal healthcare systems.<sup>8</sup>
4. **Utilize** the American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Lifestyle Medicine trainings for physicians on Food is Medicine.<sup>8</sup>
5. **Increase** nutrition education among medical students and physicians to establish and support the capacity of the clinician workforce for the successful implementation of Food is Medicine programs.<sup>8</sup>

## Experts

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