

Food as Medicine

April 10, 2025

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Food as Medicine initiatives incorporate a multitude of supportive programs and services that bridge the connection between food, nutrition, health, and clinical care.
2. Utilizing Food as Medicine trainings for healthcare professionals, including physicians, medical students, and nurses can help patients prevent and manage chronic- and diet-related diseases.
3. Food as Medicine programs are a proven scalable solution to improving diet quality, health outcomes, and reducing healthcare costs.

Background

Poor diet is a major risk factor for many chronic conditions such as obesity and diabetes, and the risk for chronic disease is higher in people who experience food insecurity.¹

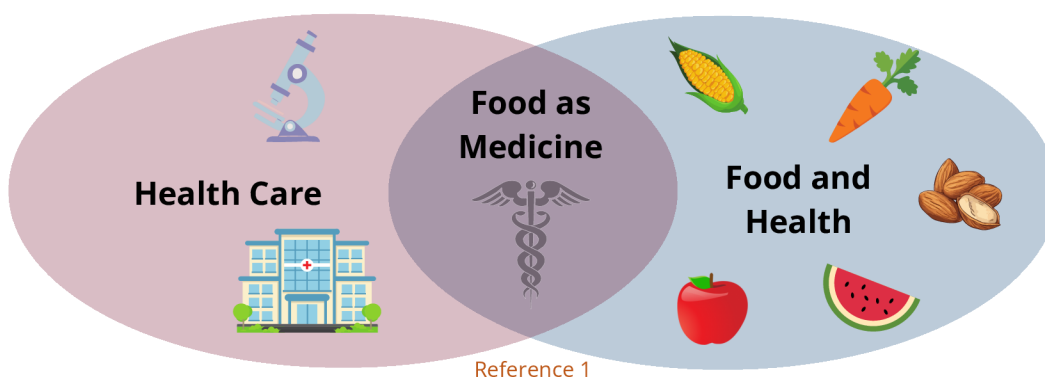


The U.S. spends approximately **\$4 trillion dollars per year in healthcare costs** for chronic and diet-related conditions.¹

- Most people in the U.S. do not consume a healthy diet due to several factors, including increased consumption of ultra-processed foods, lack of access to healthy foods, and increased food costs.¹
- Even small dietary changes can make a significant improvement in the development and severity of chronic diseases.¹

Food as Medicine

Food as Medicine refers to the provision of healthy food resources that are used to prevent, manage, and treat health conditions in collaboration with the healthcare sector to reduce the burgeoning healthcare costs.¹



Food as Medicine programs ⁴



prevent **6 million**
hospitalizations
annually



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

- Food as Medicine can be used to manage chronic and diet-related diseases through medically tailored meal programs and food packages, and nutritious food referrals like Produce Prescriptions from healthcare professionals.⁵
- Food as Medicine programs have shown to prevent almost 300,000 cardiovascular events in patients with diabetes.⁵
- Providing medically tailored meals and prescriptions, in addition to nutrition education for doctors and dietitian-led nutrition education programs covered by insurance can increase workforce productivity and decrease annual healthcare spending.⁵

Food as 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 screen positive for food insecurity.^{6,7}



FBM Evaluation

- Mothers enrolled in the program will receive fresh, nutritious meals for 8 weeks during the postpartum period.^{6,7}
- 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.^{6,7}



Enroll in the program
through local hospital



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

**Inadequate nutrition in
postpartum women is
associated with an
increased risk of:**



poor mental health



reduced
breastfeeding



higher infant
hospitalization rates

Reference 6

Produce Rx in High-Risk Pregnant Mothers at Harris Health

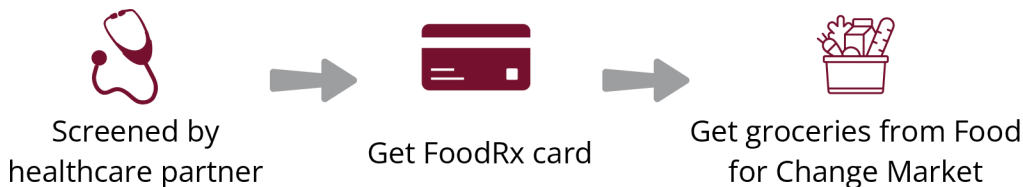
Pregnancy is a crucial time for eating **healthy foods** to improve the health of the mother and child, and prevent chronic disease in adulthood.⁸

- The Food Rx program will provide high-risk pregnant women with access to nutritious foods to help increase their healthy food intake.⁸
- The program will examine how healthy foods impact pregnant women's gestational weight gain, birth outcomes, and provided care.
 - The Food Rx program will follow women over the course of 24 months, through their pregnancy and postpartum.⁸

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.⁹

Houston Food Bank Food Rx Program*



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

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.⁹
- Those with a higher redemptions of food prescriptions were associated with greater improvement in glucose control.^{9,10}
- The program was found to be cost-saving and costs-effective, leading to increased quality-adjusted life years and medical cost savings.^{9,10}

Next Steps - Programs and Policies

- 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 or adjunct to traditional care.⁴
- Implement** Food is Medicine programs with leadership and guidance from Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs). Encourage and support clinical referrals to RDNs for food- and diet-related issues.⁴
- Increase** nutrition education among healthcare professionals and students to establish and support the capacity of the clinician workforce for the implementation of Food is Medicine programs.⁴
- Collaborate** with nonprofit organizations and research institutions to implement Food is Medicine programs.⁴
- Implement** screening for food insecurity in healthcare systems.⁴

In February 2025, the White House announced the Make American Healthy Again (MAHA) goal to develop strategies to improve health and reduce chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and mental health disorders, in U.S. children and adults.¹¹

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