



Feeding Health, Saving Costs: A Call to Fund What Works and Study What's Next

Food as Medicine (FAM), the practice of using food and nutrition to prevent and treat chronic disease, presents abundant opportunities for improving nutrition security and substantially reducing healthcare costs for thousands of New York residents and entities across the state.

FAM programs include produce prescription, medically tailored groceries (MTG), and medically tailored meals (MTM) and have a proven impact on nutrition security and supporting efforts to decrease healthcare use and costs. (Palar & Cox, 2025) FAM programs are well established in preventing and treating chronic disease, improving nutrition security and associated quality of life outcomes, promoting food safety, and supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes among participants. (Academy, 2025) For long-term health impacts, a variety of FAM programs need to be offered to meet the varying needs of participants.

Medically tailored grocery (MTG) programs are designed to more comprehensively meet the needs of a broad cross-section of participants in need of nutrition security, nutrition education, and chronic disease prevention or treatment from FAM interventions. While the benefit of MTG programs is apparent, there is not yet robust data to show the impact of this type of FAM program. The NYS Food as Medicine Coalition is currently working to capture feedback and health data from MTG program participants to further showcase the whole health and wellness impact on participants of this type of FAM intervention.

In New York State, Medicaid 1115 Demonstration Waiver dollars help expand access to FAM programs, enabling more New Yorkers who would otherwise be at risk of food insecurity to access these programs. Recent projection models show that eligible New Yorkers enrolled in a MTM program for at least 8 months have a net healthcare cost savings of over \$3,000 each year. (Deng et al., 2025) The resources invested in FAM can save Medicaid dollars and allow individuals to direct their financial resources to other needs such as housing and transportation. While 1115 waiver funding for NYS is currently operating under New York Health Equity Reform (NYHER), an extension of funding after 2027 is not guaranteed. A sustainable response from state, insurance, and philanthropic ventures will be needed to continue FAM work no matter the federal political landscape.

MTG programs specifically offer hands-on learning opportunities that are typically not part of other FAM interventions. With MTG programs, participants are provided with food that they use to create their own meals. This approach of providing groceries, not pre-made meals, supports participants through the opportunity to learn new cooking methods that meet their cultural, health, and economic needs. Pairing food resources with nutrition education offers the opportunity for sustainable long-term change. When reviewing feedback from the MTG program offered by The Food Pantries for the Capital District, it was noted that participants valued the opportunity to learn about the types of nutrient-dense food they could look for in their grocery stores, supporting their overall health even after the MTG program ended.

The evidence is clear: food as medicine improves health, lowers healthcare spending costs, and empowers healthy food choices. But without long-term funding, these programs are at risk. Sustainable funding for FAM programs and continued research on health outcomes from MTG programs are key components of reducing Medicaid spending and improving the health of New Yorkers.

Palar, K., & Cox, C. (2025). Modeling the value of 'food is medicine': Challenges and opportunities for scaling up medically tailored meals. *Health Affairs*, 44(4), 443–448. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2025.00161>

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation. *Food as medicine*. Food as Medicine - Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation. (2025). <https://www.eatrightfoundation.org/foundation/resources/food-as-medicine>

Deng, S., Hager, K., Wang, L., Cudhea, F. P., Wong, J. B., Kim, D. D., & Mozaffarian, D. (2025). Estimated impact of medically tailored meals on health care use and expenditures in 50 US states. *Health Affairs*, 44(4), 433–442. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2024.01307>