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## **California’s “Food Is Medicine” Pilot Project Delivers Encouraging First-Year Observations**

*Three-year nutrition intervention project aims to save taxpayer dollars by reducing hospital admissions.*

San Francisco, CA – The California Food Is Medicine Coalition reports that preliminary observations of a state-funded Medically Tailored Meals pilot project align with the goal of using food and nutrition therapy to improve the health of low-income Californians living with chronic illnesses, and heart failure in particular. Heart failure is a substantial burden on the US healthcare system, affecting 5.7 million Americans at an annual cost of \$30.7 billion.<sup>1</sup> Of these costs, 68% are attributed to direct medical expenditures, a large portion because of hospitalizations for decompensated heart failure.<sup>2</sup>

The three-year, \$6 million project targets Medi-Cal (Medicaid) patients who suffer from ongoing congestive heart failure and provides 12 weeks of meals at no charge that adhere to evidence-based nutrition guidelines. During the Medically Tailored Meal Intervention, a registered dietitian administers a CalFIMC-approved nutrition education curriculum, in-home, virtual, and telephonic nutrition education, wellness checks, and an assessment of program participants.

Paul Hepfer, chief executive officer of lead pilot agency Project Open Hand stated, “early insights are consistent with what Project Open Hand has demonstrated in our earliest evidence-based research studies; medical nutrition interventions improve health outcomes for our patients and will decrease re-admission rates and hospitalization costs for high utilizers of health care services.”

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<sup>1</sup> Mozaffarian D, Benjamin EJ, Go AS, Arnett DK, Blaha MJ, Cushman M, de Ferranti S, Després JP, Fullerton HJ, Howard VJ, Huffman MD, Judd SE, Kissela BM, Lackland DT, Lichtman JH, Lisabeth LD, Liu S, Mackey RH, Matchar DB, McGuire DK, Mohler ER, Moy CS, Muntner P, Mussolino ME, Nasir K, Neumar RW, Nichol G, Palaniappan L, Pandey DK, Reeves MJ, Rodriguez CJ, Sorlie PD, Stein J, Towfighi A, Turan TN, Virani SS, Willey JZ, Woo D, Yeh RW, Turner MB; American Heart Association Statistics Committee and Stroke Statistics Subcommittee. Heart disease and stroke statistics—2015 update: a report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2015; 131:e29–322. doi: 10.1161/CIR.000000000000152.

<sup>2</sup> Jencks SF, Williams MV, Coleman EA. Rehospitalizations among patients in the Medicare fee-for-service program. *N Engl J Med*. 2009; 360:1418–1428. doi: 10.1056/NEJMs0803563.

Richard Ayoub, chair of CalFIMC and executive director of Project Angel Food in Los Angeles, explains the program concluded its first 12 months April 30, 2019. “Participants who completed the program during its first year reported hospital re-admission rates consistent with reduced re-admission rates of similar intervention programs across the country.”

CalFIMC is comprised of six community-based non-profit organizations: **Project Open Hand** in San Francisco, **Ceres Community Project** and **Food For Thought** in the San Francisco North Bay area, **The Health Trust** in San Jose, **Project Angel Food** in Los Angeles, and **Mama’s Kitchen** in San Diego. Each organization is implementing the pilot in its local area.

CalFIMC is part of a national movement to employ medically tailored nutrition and food interventions as a way to improve health outcomes, decrease hospitalizations, and impact healthcare costs. A study recently published in [JAMA Internal Medicine](#) adds to a growing body of evidence tying medically tailored meals to reduced healthcare utilization.

Funded through California Senate Bill (SB) 97, the program allocates \$6 million dollars to the CalFIMC pilot project over a three-year period culminating in 2021. The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) oversees and will evaluate final results.

To learn more or refer patients, visit [CalFIMC](#) for information on local pilot programs.

**ABOUT PROJECT OPEN HAND (POH):** Founded in 1985, Project Open Hand’s mission is to improve health outcomes and quality of life by providing nutritious meals to the sick and vulnerable, caring for and educating our community. What began as a grassroots response to the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco, today POH is an innovative, outcome-driven, client-centered partner in the public health and medical arenas. A leader in the "Food is Medicine" movement in California and nationwide, POH prepares 2,500 medically tailored nutritious meals daily and provides 200 bags of healthy groceries to help sustain clients in San Francisco and Oakland. It is the largest provider of nutritious daily meals for seniors and adults with disabilities in San Francisco.

Headquartered in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood with a second location in Oakland, California, Project Open Hand employs a staff of 125, relies on the support of nearly 125 volunteers every day, and is governed by a 14-member Board of Directors.

**ABOUT THE FOOD IS MEDICINE COALITION (FIMC):** The [Food is Medicine Coalition \(FIMC\)](#) is an association of nonprofit, medically tailored food and nutrition services (FNS) providers from across the country. The FIMC advances public policy that supports access to food and nutrition services for people with severe and/or chronic illnesses; promotes research on the efficacy of food and nutrition services on health outcomes and cost of care; and shares best practices in the provision of medically tailored meals and of nutrition education and counseling. [Project Open Hand](#), [Ceres Community Project](#), [Project Angel Food](#), [Mama’s Kitchen](#), [Food For Thought](#) and [The Health Trust](#) represent a California contingency of the Food Is Medicine Coalition.

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