



Health Care  Food



February 2026 Newsletter

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Healthy Food, Healthy Hearts

Every February, during American Heart Month, the [American Heart Association](#) shines a spotlight on the steps we can all take to prevent heart disease and support lifelong cardiovascular health. The Heart Association's [Health Care by Food™](#) initiative elevates one of the most powerful—and often overlooked—tools available to patients and clinicians alike: food is medicine (FIM).

The HCXF team is committed to advancing a future in which evidence-based, culturally appropriate nutrition interventions are fully integrated into clinical care for the treatment, management and prevention of chronic disease. From medically tailored meals—used in cardiac rehabilitation programs by one of our research grantees highlighted below—to produce prescriptions and nutrition education, FIM programs are demonstrating their potential to improve health outcomes, reduce hospitalizations and help patients manage chronic conditions including hypertension, diabetes and heart failure.

During this Heart Month, we're reaffirming a simple but transformative idea: The food we eat is central to our wellbeing and a critical component of health care. We're doing that through scientific research, public policy advocacy, storytelling about patient lived experiences and partnerships—such as our early work with self-insured employers discussed below—that demonstrate how nutrition can measurably improve heart health across communities nationwide. We're also continuously communicating about the value of FIM and the role of the HCXF initiative to key audiences—see below for information about a recent Mayo Clinic podcast about the role of food is medicine in cardiovascular disease and obesity with the Heart Association's Chief Executive Officer, Nancy Brown, and HCXF Scientific Lead, Kevin Volpp.

All of this critical work will be discussed at the Heart Association's [EPI | Lifestyle Scientific Sessions](#) in Boston next month—details below.

With heart,



Lisa D. Sanders
National Executive Director
Health Care by Food

The role of food is medicine in treating and preventing heart disease & obesity



Journalist Cathy Wurzer hosted Nancy Brown, American Heart Association CEO; Dr. Kevin Volpp, Health Care by Food™ scientific lead; and Dr. Andres Acosta, an obesity, precision medicine and omics expert at Mayo Clinic.

Heart Association CEO Nancy Brown and HCXF Scientific Lead Kevin Volpp, MD, PhD, FAHA recently joined Mayo Clinic gastrointestinal physiology researcher Andres J. Acosta, MD, PhD to discuss heart disease, obesity and the role of food is medicine on "[Tomorrow's Cure](#)," a podcast presented by Mayo Clinic.

At the heart of the discussion, anchored by journalist Cathy Wurzer, was the evolving understanding of obesity as a chronic, multifactorial condition and the critical role of nutrition. Volpp emphasized the importance of building evidence to treat healthy food like medical therapy, especially for people with conditions such as heart failure, diabetes or obesity.

"Whatever your baseline genetic risk level is for heart disease, you can lower it by aggressively changing behaviors to embrace healthier lifestyles," Volpp said. "We need to determine how to increase access to healthy food to all people, and collectively, how we can put food is medicine programs in place that are effective and easy for patients to follow."

The panelists noted that improvements in cardiovascular health are achievable at any age. Modest changes, such as increased consumption of nutrient-dense foods and consistent physical activity, can have significant positive effects, particularly among older adults. Research demonstrates that even short-term dietary interventions can yield measurable improvements in stability and quality of life for patients with established cardiovascular conditions.

Employers find value in food is medicine



Dr. Hilary Seligman discusses chronic disease, health care spending and employer opportunities to benefit employees and the bottom line. (*American Heart Association*)

Health Care by Food™ is working to empower employers to improve employee health by implementing evidence-based, cost-effective food is medicine strategies through shared learning, data-driven insights and cross-sector innovation. Our goal is to provide guidance and strategic consultation to design and implement FIM programs to improve effectiveness, scalability and integration with benefit design.

In early February, the HCXF employer team participated in the In-Value-Able Conference in Cleveland, Ohio, facilitating a breakout session and promoting employer technical assistance opportunities at an exhibitor booth. The event brought together benefits and well-being professionals to highlight key innovations shaping the benefits landscape. During the session, the team showcased how employers can play a pivotal role in improving workforce health through FIM strategies.

Hilary Seligman, MD, MAS, HCXF deputy scientific lead and professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, identified how chronic disease—often rooted in poor nutrition—drives most of health care spending as employers face rising costs, reduced productivity and widening disparities. Seligman demonstrated how employers can play a transformative role in improving workforce health through FIM strategies to improve health outcomes, reduce hospitalization and lower costs—benefiting both

employees and organizations.

Attendance at the conference also provided a platform to inform participants about the Heart Association's technical assistance offerings, learning networks and evidence-based resources designed to support the development, implementation and scaling of effective FIM programs to promote a healthier, more resilient workforce.

Food is medicine in cardiac rehab



SUPeRFOOD

enhanced SUPport for initiation and
paRticipation in a FOOD is medicine program

Nutrition counseling plays a crucial role in [cardiac rehabilitation programs](#), with evidence suggesting that participation can lead to improved metabolic and cardiovascular outcomes. However, the effectiveness of nutrition counseling can vary, and further studies are needed to fully understand its impact on cardiac rehab outcomes.

The "SUPeRFOOD" study, led by cardiologist and Health Care by Food research grantee, Alexis L. Beatty, MD, MAS, evaluated how to enhance patient engagement and health outcomes by incorporating food is medicine into cardiac rehab along with innovative digital technology. Beatty, professor of epidemiology, biostatistics and medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, and her research team randomized adults enrolled in cardiac rehab programs to receive electronic medical record links to enroll in a food is medicine program and receive navigation tips and/or text messaging prompts.

Study outcomes included program enrollment, patient satisfaction and understanding, and application of the Heart Association's [Life's Essential 8™](#) guidance for optimal cardiovascular health. The study enrolled 84 participants, with 87% successfully receiving food.

Project Open Hand, a non-profit serving the San Francisco and Oakland communities, partnered with Beatty's research team to prepare and deliver medically tailored groceries and medically tailored meals to the adults participating in the study.

“When we bring together innovative technology, preventive cardiology and access to healthy foods, we create the kind of environment that can help people achieve their healthy eating goals,” Beatty said. “Food is medicine gives us an opportunity to support heart health in a way that’s practical, empowering and deeply human.”

Register: HCXF behavioral science webinar



The graphic is a promotional poster for a webinar. It features a yellow background. On the left is a portrait of Dipayan Biswas, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. To the right of the portrait, the text reads: 'Upcoming Webinar' in blue, followed by the title 'Role of Technological and Sensorial Factors in Influencing Food Choices' in large, bold, red font. Below the title, the date and time are listed: 'March 3, 2026 | 3:30 - 4:30 pm ET'. Underneath, it says 'Speakers' followed by 'Dipayan Biswas, PhD, MBA' and his affiliation: 'Frank Harvey Endowed Professor of Marketing, University of South Florida'. In the bottom right corner, there is a QR code and a blue button that says 'Scan to Register'. The top right corner of the graphic has the logo 'Health Care Food' with a red heart icon.

Webinar: Role of Technological and Sensorial Factors in Influencing Food Choices

When: March 3, 3:30 - 4:30 pm ET | 2:30–3:30 pm CT | 12:30 - 1:30 pm PT

Speaker: Dipayan Biswas, PhD, MBA, Frank Harvey Endowed Professor of Marketing, University of South Florida

Description: This presentation will discuss the findings of research studies that show how technological modes and sensory elements influence the types of foods chosen. Specifically, certain sensory ambient factors (such as dim lighting) and certain technologies (e.g., digital kiosks) lead to more unhealthy food choices.

Food is medicine seminar – March 20th in Boston



Health Care by Food at EPI | Lifestyle – [Register now!](#)

Thursday, March 19th 8:00-8:30AM | David Kritchevsky Memorial Lecture

From Policy to Practice: Systems-Level Strategies to Improve Dietary Behaviors and Reduce Cardiovascular Risk

Angela Odoms-Young, PhD
Cornell University

Friday, March 20th 12:15-1:15PM | Grand Ballroom | **Special Lunch Session:**

Conceptual Framework and Key Considerations for Field-Based Infrastructure in Food Is Medicine Research

As part of HCXF's paradigm for accelerating and supporting research in building scientific evidence for effective FIM interventions, its Field-Based Infrastructure Task Force (one of the initiative's nine research task forces) is tasked with defining the essential components required to successfully implement food is medicine interventions within health care systems. With a focus on practical considerations, the task force develops recommendations on the tools and infrastructure needed to test, refine and scale these programs effectively.

This rapid-fire seminar will introduce a conceptual framework for all populations developed by the task force, highlighting key strategic considerations for advancing FIM research. Participants will gain actionable insights into four critical areas:

- Centering on Core Principles of Community-Engaged Research
- Applying behavioral science to FIM interventions
- Building Strong Partnerships and Alliance
- Creating Spaces for Shared Knowledge and Continuous Learning

Presenters:

Shreela Sharma, PhD, RDN, LD
UT Health Houston

Lisa Goldman Rosas, PhD, MPH
Stanford University

Cait Lamberton, PhD, MB
University of Pennsylvania
Lauren Eberly, MD, MPH
University of Pennsylvania

Upcoming Event:

Webinar hosted by UTHealth Houston: [Food for Thought: Nutrition, Brain Health, and Stroke Prevention](#)

Mar 12, 2026 - 1:00 PM ET

Health Care by Food Research Grantee Dr. Anjail Sharrief: [Remote BP Monitoring and Evidence-Based Nutrition Interventions to Promote Brain Health Equity and Wellness after Stroke - reSEARCH@Heart](#)

Publications:

[Feasibility of an Indigenous Food Is Medicine Program for Patients With Heart Failure in Rural Navajo Nation: The MUTTON-HF Nonrandomized Clinical Trial | Cardiology | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)

[Innovations in Food Is Medicine Through Centering Cultural Connections and Local Food Systems | Cardiology | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)

[The Future of Nutrition Interventions in Medicaid | JAMA Internal Medicine | JAMA Network](#)

[Voices From the Field: Individual Leaders Share Their Stories of Food is Medicine - PMC](#)

[Cost-Effectiveness of Semaglutide for Secondary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease in US Adults | JAMA Cardiology | JAMA Network](#)

[Advancing nutrition education: Harvard medical student reflections on a scalable online course - The American Journal of Medicine](#)
