



Health Care  Food



June 2025 Newsletter

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Growing recognition and validation of Food Is Medicine

Recognizing the potential of food is medicine (FIM) programs to improve health outcomes for patients with or at risk for chronic disease requires strategic efforts to validate and enhance these interventions through robust research. Earlier this month, the American Heart Association released a scientific statement outlining a systematic review of randomized controlled trials that highlighted the growing potential of FIM programs. The review found that FIM programs show great potential to improve diet quality and food security in patients, and that substantial gaps stand in the existing literature about the impact of FIM interventions on clinical outcomes. The scientific statement calls for more rigorous trial designs to demonstrate both efficacy and cost effectiveness. [The Health Care by Food™](#) initiative seeks to answer these very questions.

In May, the Association awarded planning grants of nearly \$1.2 million to 12 researchers for the development of clinical trial protocols, a crucial step toward securing funding for large-scale trials that will further validate the effectiveness of FIM interventions. These approaches are the cornerstone of chronic disease prevention and treatment, as well as cost effectiveness, to inform future insurance coverage decisions.

Meanwhile, Health Care by Food's 23 clinical pilot studies are well underway to systematically strengthen FIM research by emphasizing human-centered design and behavioral science to support program engagement, increase retention and adherence, and improve outcomes.

The Association's scientific statement is a strong affirmation of what Health Care by Food exists to do. Together with people and organizations like you, we are making real and meaningful progress toward a future in which healthy food is an integral part of health care for diet-related chronic conditions. Thank you for your continued dedication and support!

With heart,



Lisa D. Sanders
National Executive Director
Health Care by Food

Scientific statement underscores the growing potential of food is medicine programs



Dr. Hilary Seligman, chair of the writing group for the Association's scientific statement on food is medicine (*M. Monti*)

According to a systematic review of randomized controlled trials in the U.S., food is medicine (FIM) programs that incorporate healthy food into health care for people with or at high risk for chronic disease successfully improve diet quality and food security, but additional research is needed to understand clinical outcomes. These findings and recommendations were released earlier this month as a scientific statement, "**A Systematic Review of 'Food Is Medicine' Randomized Controlled Trials for Noncommunicable Disease in the United States**," in the American Heart Association's flagship journal [Circulation](#).

The statement describes key findings and limitations of the 14 randomized controlled trials published to date. These studies examined the effectiveness of FIM interventions on cardiometabolic health outcomes and found consistent improvements in diet quality and food security among patients, but improvements in intermediate clinical outcomes including

hemoglobin A1c, blood pressure and body mass index were inconsistent. This may have been due to factors such as small sample size and short study duration.

The findings point to the need for efforts such as the Association's Health Care by Food™ initiative to address critical gaps in the research using rigorous trial designs to improve understanding of FIM's impact on long-term clinical outcomes for patients.

"Scientific studies show that food is medicine programs incorporating healthy food into health care hold great promise to address the rising incidence and cost of cardiometabolic diseases and other chronic conditions caused by poor diet," said **Hilary K. Seligman, MD, MAS**, American Heart Association volunteer, chair of the scientific advisory writing group and professor of medicine and of epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of California, San Francisco. "By addressing gaps in the research with more rigorous studies on food is medicine, we'll determine how best to design and implement these programs to improve the health of people with chronic disease and those at high risk."

The scientific statement calls for:

- More rigorous and longer-term randomized controlled trials to evaluate food is medicine's impact on health outcomes.
- Standardization of the foods and interventions used in FIM programs.
- A stepwise research approach, starting with small-scale studies and expanding to real-world implementation.

"We need to treat programs that provide food to patients with diet-related chronic conditions who are struggling to improve their health like any other part of medical care—integrating it as a fundamental component of the health care system," said **Kevin Volpp, M.D., Ph.D.**, American Heart Association volunteer, scientific lead for the Health Care by Food initiative and founding director of the Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine and the Wharton School. "This statement is a call to action for researchers, clinicians and policymakers to invest in the science needed to make food is medicine a cornerstone of chronic disease prevention and treatment."

"By defining the research needed to advance the food is medicine field, including optimal intervention design, populations most likely to benefit and long-term impacts, this scientific statement lays the foundation for developing evidence that can inform health care practices and policies aimed at improving health for everyone everywhere and reducing health care costs," said **Mitchell S.V. Elkind, M.D., M.S.**, a co-author of the scientific statement and chief clinical science officer of the Association.

Health Care by Food follows a strategic research approach that began with funding 23 initial small-scale studies. Learnings from these will help to develop real-world trials to include implementation science and behavioral economics for improving engagement, translating evidence into practice and promoting broad implementation and insurance coverage.

Health Care by Food Research Spotlight:

Produce prescriptions combined with AI-augmented nutrition education seek to improve pregnancy outcomes



Dr. Shreela Sharma discusses collective insights about the work required successful integration of food is medicine within the health care system at a Health Care by Food convening in October 2024. (Michael Monti)

Participation in [produce prescription programs](#) has been shown to increase dietary consumption of fruits and vegetables with associated decreases in food insecurity and improvements in cardiometabolic health. Produce prescriptions (PRx) are also designed to increase patient engagement and optimize medical spending.

There are significant gaps in what is known about consumption of produce that is delivered to patients. PRx models assume that the patient consumes the “full dose” of the produce. Little is known about the extent to which patients share the produce with other household members, what proportion of the produce is wasted and whether produce that requires cooking before consumption is wasted to a greater extent than produce that can be consumed without cooking. Measuring and understanding these patient engagement behaviors is key to maximizing program impact, and for informing future research on cost effectiveness

[Health Care by Food](#)[™] research grantees **Shreela Sharma, PhD, RD, LD**, professor of epidemiology, and **Nalini Ranjit, PhD**, associate professor of health promotion and behavioral sciences, both at UTHealth Houston School of Public Health, are conducting research to examine variations in patient consumption behaviors in a PRx study targeting high-risk pregnant women receiving biweekly home deliveries of fresh produce.

The objective of the study is twofold: One, to quantify utilization and consumption of a home-delivered produce prescription targeting high-risk pregnant mothers receiving Medicaid. And two, to evaluate if, and to what extent, diet quality along with food and nutrition security

improve when the PRx is paired with an artificial intelligence (AI) based chatbot to support food preparation and increase knowledge about healthy foods for pregnant mothers.

Built specifically for this research, Flora the chatbot is bilingual and culturally tailored to incorporate theoretically grounded behavior change techniques to prepare and consume the delivered produce and access pregnancy-related information.

More than 200 low income, high-risk pregnant women are enrolled in the study and have been randomly assigned to a nutrition education program using the AI chatbot. The outcomes measured include the impact of home-delivered food prescriptions paired with nutrition education on diet quality and food and nutrition security.

“This is an exciting project as it offers us the opportunity to understand and manage patient engagement behaviors across the entire spectrum of PRx programs, and ultimately, in helping to improve the health of high-risk pregnant women,” Ranjit said. “The Health Care by Food initiative is focused on the science to have a direct impact on diet-related medical conditions.”

Findings from this research will provide important new evidence that highlights the need for clinical, policy and health care payor and provider efforts to implement larger pilots and randomized designs of produce prescriptions. Partnerships supporting the implementation of this project include **Planet Harvest**, a produce provider; **Brighter Bites**, a produce distributor and evidence-based nutrition educator; and **Harris Health**, a public health care safety-net provider.

“As researchers, we have found that weekly meetings with partners is essential to maintain interest, gather information and support coordination,” Sharma said. “We have a real-time data monitoring system that is reviewed each week to detect any implementation gaps so that we can be nimble in addressing them.” Study results are anticipated this year.

Planning grants awarded to create competitive proposals for long-term RCTs



As the [Health Care by Food™](#) (HCXF) initiative continues to drive the research forward to make food is medicine (FIM) reimbursable, scalable and sustainable, the [American Heart Association in May awarded](#) a total of nearly \$1.2 million to [12 research teams](#) for the creation of competitive grant applications for funding of large-scale randomized controlled trials.

The research awards provide direct costs for a one-year project period that allows an investigator time to plan, design and prepare the documentation necessary to compete for federal or other funding to implement a large-scale FIM trial. These grants permit early peer review of the rationale and design of the proposed FIM trial and provide support for the development of detailed protocols and procedures needed to successfully launch a high-quality trial.

"We're gaining valuable insights into how people with chronic conditions access different food is medicine approaches and what types of programs are most effective in treating their conditions," Volpp said. "From there, we'll measure health impact to identify the approaches that are most efficacious and cost effective."

Additional larger scale randomized controlled trials are needed to determine the most effective food is medicine interventions for specific populations. The results will inform insurance coverage decisions for certain clinical indications. At the end of the grant period, researchers will deliver a rigorous and highly competitive proposal for funding from a government agency, industry or foundation. These planning grants begin July 1.

Join the Webinar:

Introducing the Behavioral Science Tactical Insight Platform (TIP): Quick Turn Testing

The poster is for an upcoming webinar. On the left, there are two circular portraits of the speakers: Cait Lambertson, PhD, MBA (top) and Krithya Karthikeyan (bottom). The background is yellow and green. On the right, the text reads: 'Upcoming Webinar' and 'Health Care by Food' at the top. The main title is 'Introducing the Behavioral Science TIP: Quick-Turn Testing for Stronger Interventions' in large red font. Below that, it says 'July 1st 2025 | 3:30 - 4:30 pm ET'. Underneath, it lists the speakers: 'Speakers Cait Lambertson, PhD, MBA Krithya Karthikeyan'. There is a QR code and a 'Scan to Register' button.

Please [register](#) for the next webinar:

Intervention design often and rightly focuses on program nuts-and-bolts, the problem to be solved, the information to be delivered and the outcomes to be captured. But **many apparently minor decisions about a project, including its branding, the way instructions are delivered, our incentive format, structure or size, or minor changes in measure wording can have profound effects on study success**. The Behavioral Science Tactical Insights Platform (TIP) is being developed to help researchers gain insights to guide these types of intervention design decisions rapidly and at low cost. This webinar will introduce the Be-Sci TIP and offer examples of how it might be used. Researchers will be invited to share tactical questions they may face that may be considered for some of our first TIP projects.

Date: Tuesday, June 1st | 3:30–4:30 pm ET

Title: Introducing Behavioral Science Tactical Insight Platform (TIP): Quick-Turn Testing for stronger interventions

Speakers: Cait Lambertson, PhD, MBA, Alberto I. Duran President’s Distinguished Professor of Marketing at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School & Krithya Karthikeyan, masters student of Behavioral and Decision Sciences at University of Pennsylvania

[Register](#)

Health Care by Food’s [Behavioral Science Task Force](#) produces an ongoing webinar series to support researchers by exploring how behavioral science strategies and marketing approaches can be integrated into food is medicine research.

Publications

[Barriers and facilitators to implementing Food is Medicine programs: Evidence from 21 food bank–healthcare partnerships | Translational Behavioral Medicine | Oxford Academic](#) Christopher

Long, PhD Christopher Long, PhD

Reports

[The Rockefeller Foundation: Majority of Americans Want Food Is Medicine Programs](#)

[The Rockefeller Foundation: Public Perception of Food Is Medicine in Healthcare](#)

Resources

[GusNIP Produce Prescription Incentive Technology Directory](#)

[American College of Lifestyle Medicine: Lifestyle Medicine & Food as Medicine Essentials](#)

Events

Health Care by Food at the [Congressional Black Caucus Foundation](#)
September 24-28, 2025 | Washington, DC

Tufts 3rd Annual [Food is Medicine National Summit](#)
October 8-9, 2025 | Boston, MA and Virtual

[American Heart Association Scientific Sessions](#)
November 7–10, 2025 | New Orleans, Louisiana
