



Health Care  Food



March 2026 Newsletter

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Ongoing progress, growing impact in food is medicine

March is National Nutrition Month, making it a fitting time to reflect on the growing momentum behind food is medicine and the role nutrition can play in helping to treat, manage and prevent chronic disease. Across the country, researchers, clinicians, community organizations and policymakers are working to better understand how food can be integrated into health care for people with chronic conditions or at high risk. At the American Heart Association's Health Care by Food™ (HCXF) initiative, we're proud to be part of this movement and to help advance the science, partnerships and infrastructure needed to move the field forward.

This month has brought exciting milestones for the initiative. At the American Heart Association's EPI | Lifestyle Scientific Sessions, we presented the inaugural Health Care by Food Most Impactful Food Is Medicine Research Award to Tori Taniguchi, MPH, recognizing outstanding research that strengthens the evidence base for nutrition interventions in health care. We were also pleased to participate in scientific discussions focused on building the field-based infrastructure needed to support community-engaged food is medicine research.

As always, our progress reflects the collective work of many partners, investigators and communities who are helping shape the future of this field. This month and every month, we look forward to continuing to share new insights from HCXF-supported research and highlighting the many ways innovation across the field is helping bring food and health care closer together.

With heart,

Lisa



Lisa D. Sanders
National Executive Director
Health Care by Food

HCXF presents inaugural award and showcases community-engaged research at EPI | Lifestyle Scientific Sessions



Tori Taniguchi, MPH, accepts the first annual Health Care by Food™ Most Impactful Food Is Medicine Research Award at the [EPI | Lifestyle Sessions](#) council dinner. (*American Heart Association*).

At the Heart Association's [EPI | Lifestyle Scientific Sessions](#) held earlier this month in Boston, the initiative announced its inaugural Health Care by Food Most Impactful Food Is Medicine Research Award, honoring the most meritorious scientific publication in the food is medicine field over the past year. This new annual award celebrates groundbreaking research that strengthens the evidence base for integrating healthy food into clinical care to treat, manage and prevent cardiovascular disease and other diet-related chronic diseases.

The inaugural award recognizes the research team behind the publication, "[Pilot study of a heart healthy food box intervention for Native Americans with uncontrolled hypertension: methods and results from the Chickasaw Healthy Eating Environments Research Study](#)." The study provides compelling evidence that culturally tailored, heart-healthy food box interventions – developed in partnership with tribal communities – are feasible and show promise for improving systolic blood pressure, diet quality and food security among Native American adults living with uncontrolled hypertension. The study highlights the potential of food bank–tribal partnerships as a strategy to reduce cardiometabolic disparities in communities facing longstanding barriers to healthy food access.

[The award was presented to Tori Taniguchi, MPH](#), the study's lead author and data director and research epidemiologist, Center for Indigenous Health Research and Policy at Oklahoma State University.



Shreela Sharma, PhD, RDN, LD, Kevin Volpp, MD, PhD, Lisa Goldman Rosas, PhD, MPH, and Lauren Eberly, MD, MPH, talk about field-based infrastructure framework in food is medicine research. (*American Heart Association*).

Health Care by Food also hosted a [rapid-fire seminar](#) at [EPI | Lifestyle Scientific Sessions](#), introducing the equity-driven conceptual framework developed by the initiative's Field-Based Infrastructure task force. Participants gained actionable insights into four critical areas: the core principles of community-engaged research, the application of behavioral science in FIM interventions, strategies for building strong partnerships across sectors, and the importance of creating spaces for shared knowledge and continuous learning.

Panel Participants:

- Moderator: Shreela Sharma, PhD, RDN, LN — Co-Chair, Field Based Infrastructure Task Force; Professor, Department of Epidemiology, UTHealth Houston

- Panelists:
 - Lisa Goldman Rosas, PhD, MPH — Co-Chair, Community Engagement and Implementation Science Task Force; Associate Professor, Stanford University
 - Cait Lambertson, PhD, MBA — Co-Chair, Behavioral Science Task Force; Alberto I. Duran President's Distinguished Professor & Vice Dean and Director of the Wharton Undergraduate Division, The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania
 - Lauren Eberly, MD, MPH — Assistant Professor of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania; Staff Cardiologist, Indian Health Service, Gallup, New Mexico

Engaging the community at Scientific Sessions and beyond



From the earliest days of this initiative, which was [announced](#) at the 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, engaging the community of scientific researchers, food is medicine practitioners, advocates, elected officials and others has been central to our efforts. Key to this approach has been the initiative's presence at conferences and other professional meetings nationwide, where the latest discoveries and innovations for improving public health and wellbeing are discussed.

At the American Heart Association's annual Scientific Sessions 2025 conference in November, Health Care by Food hosted a Food is Medicine Pavilion featuring engaging discussions about the state of scientific research on food is medicine, the promise of food is medicine to help patients effectively treat, manage and prevent chronic disease and the need for collaboration across the food and nutrition community to realize that promise.

We're proud to present this highlight video to convey the high level of excitement and engagement the initiative generated at Scientific Sessions 2025. We're planning even bigger things for [this year's conference](#), Nov. 7-9 in Chicago, and other professional conferences throughout the year.

Creating lasting change: the patient voice



HCXF Lived Experience Patient Advisory Board member, Mercedes Cruz-Ruiz, discusses her health journey. Click image to view video. *(ATB Productions)*

Food is medicine can help patients unlock long-lasting health improvements through behavior change. Mercedes Cruz-Ruiz, a community health worker, stroke survivor, and member of the Health Care by Food Lived Experience Patient Advisory Board, helps the initiative understand the challenges patients face as they work to shift habits, improve their health and navigate a complex care system.

Mercedes has hypertension, diabetes and arrhythmia, and she suffered a stroke in 2003. Her diagnoses devastated her – fueling anger that made it challenging to improve her health on her own. “I was now getting more bad news,” she recalls, “and I already had a life of bad news.” Although she was prescribed medication, she didn’t understand how food could influence her health until she became a volunteer with the American Heart Association.

Once she understood the relationship between her diet and her diagnoses, Mercedes changed her lifestyle. She learned to read nutrition labels, studied portion sizes and lost 120 pounds thanks to profound lifestyle and behavior changes she has maintained for the past 20 years.

Today, Mercedes brings her experience to the Health Care by Food Lived Experience Patient Advisory Board, where she helps ensure that the Heart Association’s food is medicine work reflects the realities patients face every day. She offers a firsthand view into the emotional complexity of behavior change, the barriers patients encounter when navigating chronic conditions and the type of support that helps change stick. Mercedes

brings critical personal insights on how to change behavior and achieve long-term health improvements from behavior change – two key areas the initiative is examining.

“Food is medicine,” she says, “has really given me another platform to share knowledge.”

HCXF supports Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Program Pilot Act

The American Heart Association signed a [letter of support](#), led by the Food is Medicine Coalition (FIMC) and sent to congressional leadership in mid-January, encouraging passage of the Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Program Pilot Act ([H.R. 5439](#); [S. 2834](#)), which has bipartisan cosponsors in both the House and Senate. The bill authorizes a six-year demonstration program in Medicare Part A under which hospitals could provide medically tailored, home-delivered meals and medical nutrition therapy for beneficiaries who have a diet-impacted disease after they are discharged from the hospital. A previous version of the bill in the last Congress advanced out of the House Ways and Means Committee.

We join the dozens of public health organizations that signed the letter in urging Congress to pass this bill, which has the potential to help achieve the HCXF initiative’s goal to identify effective methods for incorporating healthy food into health care in ways that improve health outcomes.
