



Health Care  Food



October 2025 Newsletter

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Food is medicine: a tonic for better health care

As we move into the final stretch of the year, I'm filled with optimism in how far this movement has come, and in the collective effort driving it forward. Across the country, the movement to integrate food into health care is gaining traction—and Health Care by Food (HCXF) is proud to be at the forefront of this transformation.

This month's newsletter highlights the many ways our team is advancing the mission:

- At the **American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions** next month, we'll host the first-ever Food is Medicine Pavilion, showcasing innovation, research and real-world impact.
- HCXF-funded researcher, **Dr. Alexandra van den Berg**, is leading compelling work on maternal health and food insecurity that will increase understanding of the unique needs of mothers and families.
- We were honored to join the **Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference**, where we elevated the role of nutrition in health policy conversations.
- And **from Capitol Hill to statehouses** across the country, our advocacy team is driving policy change that brings food-based interventions into the heart of health care.

Together, these efforts reflect a powerful truth: Healthy food is not just nourishment, it represents opportunity for people with chronic disease or at high risk, and can serve as a catalyst for systems change.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us.



Lisa D. Sanders
National Executive Director
Health Care by Food

Join Health Care by Food at the Food Is Medicine Pavilion at the Association's Scientific Sessions



We're thrilled to invite you to the *Food Is Medicine Pavilion*, presented by [Health Care by Food™](#), at the Association's annual [Scientific Sessions 2025](#), which takes place November 7-10 in New Orleans at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. This year, we're bringing expanded, immersive programming that dives deep into the transformative potential of food is medicine (FIM.)

Explore rigorous research, learn about bold advocacy efforts and hear powerful patient stories that are reshaping nutrition and health. Whether you're a clinician, researcher, community leader

or advocate, this is your chance to connect, collaborate and catalyze change.

What to Expect:

- Early insights from transformative research studies funded by Health Care by Food.
- Lively networking with leaders across disciplines.
- Interactive kiosks showcasing other key Association food and nutrition initiatives.

Let’s reimagine healthy food in health care together—one bite at a time.
We can’t wait to see you in New Orleans!

Check out the full schedule below and register for Scientific Sessions [here!](#)

Date	Time	Location
<u>Saturday, November 8</u>		
Health Care by Food & Food Is Medicine Funded Studies	9:45 AM- 11:00 AM	FIM Pavilion in Exhibit Hall
Abstract Poster Board Session	11:30 AM-12:30 PM	Zone 2 (Sci & Tech Hall)
Food Insecurity & Cardiometabolic Health: From Evidence to Interventions		
From Pilots to Practice: Advancing Engagement Strategies and Behavior Change Tactics to Strengthen FIM Intervention Development and Integration into Health Care	1:30 PM- 2:45 PM	FIM Pavilion in Exhibit Hall
Food Is Medicine 3-Minute Oral Pitch Contest	3:15 PM- 4:15 PM	FIM Pavilion in Exhibit Hall
<u>Sunday, November 9</u>		
Health Care by Food Funded Studies	9:45 AM- 10:15 AM	FIM Pavilion in Exhibit Hall
Transforming Health Through Food: HCXF Lived Experience Patients Share Food as Medicine Journey	10:15 AM-11:00 AM	FIM Pavilion in Exhibit Hall
Food Is Medicine Pilots in Medicaid: Early Outcomes, Evaluation Lessons, and the Clinician’s Role	3:15 PM- 4:05 PM	FIM Pavilion in Exhibit Hall
<u>Monday – November 10, 2025</u>		
Health Care by Food Funded Studies	9:45 AM- 11:00 AM	FIM Pavilion in Exhibit Hall
The Association’s Health Care by Food Initiative is Bearing Fruits: Early Results from Food is Medicine Pilot Projects	3:15 PM- 4:30 PM	220-222

Enhancing food is medicine interventions for food insecure postpartum women in Central Texas



Food is Best Medicine staffer delivers food to a postpartum mother.

The postpartum period is a critical window for maternal health, particularly among mothers experiencing food insecurity. Food-insecure mothers may be at a significantly higher risk for mental health disorders, weight retention and lower rates of breastfeeding compared to food secure peers.

To address this, Health Care by Food research grantee, **Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH**, professor of health promotion and behavioral sciences at the University of Texas School of Public Health in Austin helped to launch the **Food is the Best Medicine** (FBM) program in 2023 to improve health outcomes and promote equitable access to nutrient-rich food for new moms and their newborn children in Central Texas. Dr. van den Berg was joined by Austin collaborators at Ascension **Seton Medical Center, Farmshare** and the **Cook's Nook**.

Over the past 18 months, van den Berg has led a research study to assess the effectiveness of three different versions of the FBM program. Each version included delivery of nutrient-dense food weekly to new moms and their infants. Every FBM delivery contained local fresh fruits and vegetables, nutritious shelf-stable goods, ready-to-eat meals and meal kits. The 150 postpartum women participating in the study were randomly selected to one of three interventions for 8 weeks and followed up at 3 months:

- Food deliveries only
- Food deliveries plus two in-home visits from community health workers
- Food deliveries along with virtual support via the Food Ways platform

Dr. van den Berg shared learnings from her research:

HCXF: What are the most important insights you've gained from the FBM study so far?

van den Berg: The need for this program was far greater than we anticipated. Our waiting list for new moms consistently exceeded the number we could enroll each week. Through end-of-study focus groups, we also learned there is a significant need for more mental health support. Although our quantitative data showed a downward trend in postpartum depression from baseline to the end of the study, many moms shared personal stories of ongoing depression and anxiety—particularly related to food insecurity and uncertainty about being able to feed their families, especially while not working after childbirth.

HCXF: What did you learn about how food deliveries alone compare to enhanced support models in improving postpartum outcomes?

van den Berg: We did not find statistically significant differences between the three groups. All groups showed improvements in food security and fruit and vegetable consumption. Focus group discussions revealed that some women highly valued the community health worker (CHW) visits, while others found it difficult to accommodate home visits due to the demands of caring for a newborn and other responsibilities. Although we have not yet fully analyzed the qualitative data we collected, it appears that first-time mothers and single parents may have benefited more from CHW visits than mothers with prior parenting experience. In terms of the virtual group, website analytics showed that not all participants in the virtual group accessed the Food Ways platform, even when prompted by text messages. While the platform offered useful resources—such as recipes and community food information—many moms indicated that logging onto a new platform felt like an added task they did not have time or energy for.

HCXF: Were there any surprising or unexpected findings across the three intervention groups?

van den Berg: Although unrelated to treatment, the reduction in postpartum depression in both the focus groups and qualitative data was somewhat unexpected, and highlighted that depression and anxiety were more widespread than we had anticipated.

HCXF: How did participants respond to the culturally tailored meals and meal kits?

van den Berg: Both the prepared meals and the meal kits were very popular. When asked which they preferred, responses were mixed—some moms favored the ready-to-eat meals for their convenience, while others preferred the meal kits because they could stretch the ingredients further to feed the entire family. Several participants also mentioned adding extra spices or ingredients to the kits to “make them their own.”

HCXF: What did the study reveal about the types of support postpartum women value most?

van den Berg: Although many moms indicated that they benefitted from receiving home visits or having access to the virtual platform, it seems clear that they valued receiving the food the most. We were able to collect many quotes and stories from moms providing their appreciation for “one less thing they had to worry about.”

HCXF: How did the different delivery models (CHW visits vs. virtual support) influence engagement and outcomes?

van den Berg: Process data indicated that moms who received CHW visits were generally more engaged. However, this did not translate into significant differences in our primary outcome measures. We are still analyzing social support data, which may reveal more nuanced effects. For food security and diet-related outcomes, access to food itself appeared to be the most influential component.

HCXF: What are the key takeaways that could inform future maternal health or food insecurity interventions?

van den Berg: There is an urgent need for integrated mental health support in this population. In response, we have developed a program that combines mental health services with Food Is Medicine interventions, and we are currently seeking funding to pilot this model.

Register for upcoming Behavioral Science Webinars



Upcoming Webinar

Human Story Adoption: Food and Health

Nov 4, 2025 | 3:30 – 4:30 pm ET

Speakers

Shawn Dennis

*Board Member, CEO, CMO, Venture Partner,
Adjunct Professor, and Brand Expert*



Scan to Register

Human Story Adoption: Food and Health

November 4, Tuesday, at 3:30 - 4:30 pm ET | 2:30–3:30 pm CT | 12:30 - 1:30 pm PT

Speaker: Shawn Dennis, Board Member, CEO, CMO, Venture Partner, Adjunct Professor, and Brand Expert

Description:

There is a deep connection between what we eat and the stories we surround ourselves with. Belief has become a path to purchase. Integrating social purpose and understanding shifting generational norms has never been more relevant, more critical and more confusing for food brands as well as health care professionals trying to integrate healthy eating into patients' lives. The goal of this webinar will be to build a deep understanding of the underlying drivers and connections between the stories we adopt in our lives and how we shift frictions around intent toward healthier eating. We will also look at the frictions around healthy eating and the importance of story adoption to address the difficulties of behavior change.

Serving up better health through the clinic, kitchen and community



Top left: Lisa Sanders, American Heart Association; Elizabeth Yee, The Rockefeller Foundation; Kevin Volpp, HCXF scientific lead. Top right: Lived Experience members: Charlz Henry, Alicia Reed, Anita Bell-Muhammad, Phalba Adams and moderator, Stacey Chang. Bottom left: Dion Dawson; Anna Maria Izquierdo, MD, PhD; Lisa Sanders; Jennifer Freeman; Oluwabunmi Ogungbe, PhD, MPH, BNSc, RN. Bottom right: Chef Derrick Purcell, Kym Whitley, Buddy Lewis.

Health Care by Food[™] brought the food is medicine (FIM) movement to the nation’s capital last month at the **Congressional Black Caucus Foundation’s Annual Legislative Conference** in Washington, D.C. With 12,000 lawmakers, policymakers and advocates present, HCXF hosted educational and experiential opportunities that demonstrated why FIM is critical to reduce the burden and cost of diet-related disease.

The panel discussion, *“What is Food is Medicine? How healthy food through health care can address chronic disease”* featured **Lisa Sanders**, executive director of HCXF; **Elizabeth Yee**, executive vice president for program strategy at The Rockefeller Foundation and HCXF Scientific Lead **Kevin Volpp, MD, PhD, FAHA**.

Yee highlighted the role of food and poor nutrition as a leading cause of poor health outcomes and the principal driver of rising health care costs. She reflected on The Rockefeller Foundation’s \$100 million commitment to integrate healthy food into the health care systems to help more people in the U.S. thrive. Volpp, the Mark V. Pauly Professor at the Perelman School of Medicine and the Wharton School and Director of the Penn Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics, explained how HCXF is focused on “rigor in research, behavioral science and meeting people where they are with human-centered design.”

Four members of **HCXF’s Lived Experience Patient Advisory Board** shared stories rooted in their journeys in a panel titled *“The Human Perspective of Food Is Medicine.”* The initiative recruited these patient advocates to learn from their perspectives, better understand their health experiences and foster collaboration between patients, health care providers and researchers.

"Living with chronic conditions, I've experienced firsthand how difficult it can be to balance medical advice with the realities of everyday life," said Patient Advisory Board member **Anita Bell-Muhammad**. "HCXF represents hope, accountability and the belief that food can be a powerful tool in managing health. It also reinforces that I'm not navigating this journey alone—there are organizations, resources and a larger community invested in supporting patients like me in making sustainable dietary changes."

Lisa Sanders moderated the panel, "*State of the Plate: Food Is Medicine in Action*," to illustrate to lawmakers how successful, evidence-based FIM programs are being implemented on the ground, showcasing cross-sector collaboration and highlighting how stakeholders are coming together to address implementation changes.

Three of the panelists, **Jennifer Freeman**, executive director of Community FarmShare; **Oluwabunmi Ogungbe, PhD, MPH, BNSc, RN**, assistant professor at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing; and **Anna Maria Izquierdo, MD, PhD**, clinician at Care For Your Health are collaboratively engaged in a HCXF-funded research pilot. **Dion Dawson**, chief dreamer and social impact visionary of Dion's Chicago Dream, rounded out the panel with nutritional philanthropy as a catalyst to build community and transform lives. Each panelist shared insights on how FIM is grounded in their work along with best practices for lived realities.

Conference attendees also were treated to [heart-healthy cooking demonstrations](#) and tastings by **Chef Derrick Purcell**, culinary director of the Franciscan Center of Baltimore, on the exhibit hall culinary stage, which was sponsored by HCXF. Chef Purcell was assisted by comedians and American Heart Association volunteers **Buddy Lewis** and **Kim Whitley**, who served up laughs and led conversations around how food can heal, how culture connects to health and about the importance of access to healthy foods. Meanwhile, the HCXF exhibit booth enjoyed a steady stream of eager conference attendees, encouraged to consider that food is more than just part of the conversation—it's part of the health care solution.

Lectureship focuses on behavioral economics for improving U.S. health



L-R: Michael Smith, Kevin Volpp, Donna Paulhamus, Kim Blanch and Eric Plautz (*Kelly Bachman*)

Health Care by Food Scientific Lead Kevin Volpp, MD, PhD, joined community program leaders at the University of Delaware in September to highlight the role of incentives and encouragement in the implementation of food is medicine as a potential paradigm shift in improving health. Volpp, the Mark V. Pauly Professor at the Perelman School of Medicine and the Wharton School, and Director of the Penn Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics, delivered this year's Foltyn lectureship, "*Preventive Power: Using Nudges and Incentives to Improve Health.*"

"It's important to develop and test ways of deploying programs that change clinician and patient behavior as the final common pathway in health improvement efforts," said Volpp. "We have a significant opportunity to improve health by treating or preventing chronic disease through food is medicine (FIM) programs. The focus of the initiative is designing and testing approaches to using FIM to improve health and examining cost effectiveness. We are making great progress in understanding drivers of engagement, a critical input in the success of programs in improving health."

Before Volpp's presentation, Michael Smith, director of strategic initiatives and partnerships for the College of Health Sciences at the University of Delaware, moderated five-minute lightning talks with Eric Plautz, community health worker with food is medicine at Christiana Care; Kim Blanch, director of community & mobile outreach at Beebe Healthcare; and Donna Paulhamus, director of the nutrition clinic at the University of Delaware. Each panelist highlighted how their unique community program was positioned to help improve health, especially for those who need it most throughout Delaware communities, by providing nudges and food as medicine.

Before the seminar, Dr. Volpp met with PhD students in both nutrition sciences and behavior science and promotion. "I encourage anyone looking to improve population health to consider volunteering with the [American Heart Association](#)."

Lectureship focuses on behavioral economics for improving U.S. health



The American Heart Association's Chief Clinical Science Officer for Brain Health and Stroke, Mitchell S.V. Elkind, M.D., M.S., presented "Behavioral Economics in Action: The Association's Health Care by Food Initiative," at the National Association of Business Economics (NABE) 67th Annual Meeting on October 14th in Philadelphia. NABE's mission is to advance the practice of economics and the application of economic principles for the greater good.

Dr. Elkind shared how the Association works to prevent cardiovascular disease through enabling healthy behavior change, with a focus on nutrition and food is medicine programs. He also discussed the Health Care by Food initiative in detail, with a particular emphasis on behavioral economics approaches such as:

- **Choice architecture**, which refers to the process of designing the context in which individuals make decisions, by presenting options and information in ways that can influence people's choices and behaviors.
 - **Nudges**, which are aspects of choice architecture that alter people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives, such as putting healthy food items at the beginning of cafeteria selections.
 - **Incentives**, which are comprised of internal or external factors that motivate individuals to take certain actions.
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Health Care by Food federal advocacy update



Spotlighting national policy challenges and opportunities in food is medicine at Tufts 3rd annual FIM summit. (*American Heart Association*)

FY26 appropriations: House LHHS bill completes slate of FIM research provisions

The House Appropriations Committee last month released details of its fiscal year (FY) 2026 [Labor-HHS funding bill](#), which was approved by a 35-28 party-line vote. Like its Senate counterpart, the House bill directs the National Institutes of Health to provide an update on its investments in FIM research in the next budget request, including the FIM Centers of Excellence, and expresses support for the Health and Human Services FIM collaborative. The House also provides a \$10 million increase for nutrition research through the NIH Office of the Director.

At the time of this writing, the federal government has been shut down since October 1st. Once the government reopens, appropriators will begin negotiations between the House and Senate bills to reach a final agreement on FY26 NIH funding.

Bipartisan MTM bill reintroduced in House and Senate

The Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Program Pilot Act ([H.R. 5439](#); [S. 2834](#)) has been reintroduced by Reps. Jim McGovern (D-MA), Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY), Dwight Evans (D-PA), Chellie Pingree (D-ME) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) in the House, and Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Roger Marshall (R-KS) and Tina Smith (D-MN) in the Senate. The bill authorizes a six-year demonstration program in Medicare Part A under which hospitals 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 advanced out of the House Ways and Means Committee in the last Congress under the leadership of Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL). The American Heart Association is supportive of this

bill as part of efforts to promote evidence generation for FIM interventions.

Federal Advocacy Brings HCXF to Massachusetts & Michigan

The HCXF federal advocacy team represented the American Heart Association on federal policy panels at two different FIM convenings on October 8 – Colin Schwartz, senior advocacy advisor for HCXF, at the [Tufts Food is Medicine National Summit](#) in Boston, MA and Joanna Ratigan, federal government relations manager for food is medicine, at the [Michigan Food as Medicine Summit](#) in Lansing, MI. The discussion in Michigan focused on the need for additional evidence and consistent definitions and standards for FIM; challenges and opportunities in the FIM federal funding and coverage landscape and impacts for patients, practitioners and researchers; and how to best make the case for federal support of FIM in the current political climate. At Tufts, HCXF staff provided updates in the FIM policy landscape, including legislative and regulatory opportunities at the federal level, and the need to defend Medicaid in order to advance FIM research.

Food is Medicine: What States Need to Know



Alexa Worhman, senior state advocacy advisor for the food is medicine, American Heart Association. (*American Heart Association*)

Last month, Health Care by Food sponsored a food is medicine (FIM) learning hub at the **Council of State Governments West** Annual Meeting in Jackson Hole, WY to demonstrate how Medicaid 1115 waivers test FIM interventions, what early evidence shows and why rigorous evaluation is key to policy sustainability. Participants included legislators from 13 states and territories including American Samoa, Guam and Baja California. Policymakers explored how

states can leverage well-designed pilots to build toward enduring, impactful policy solutions that make healthy food a core part of health care. The session featured HCXF research grantee **Seth Berkowitz, MD, MPH**, associate professor of medicine and vice chief for research at the University of Carolina School of Medicine, and Washington State Representative **My-Linh Thai**, Deputy Majority Leader of the House Democratic Caucus, member of the Appropriations and Health Care & Wellness committees, and pharmacist. HCXF Senior Advocacy Advisor for States **Alexa Worhman** moderated the discussion.

Upcoming Events

American Public Health Association [APHA 2025 Annual Meeting](#)
November 2-5 | Washington, DC

[American Heart Association Scientific Sessions](#)
November 7-10 | New Orleans

[International Stroke Conference 2026 - Professional Heart Daily | American Heart Association](#)

Pre-Cons and Stroke Nursing Symposia: February 3, 2026
Sessions: February 4–6, 2026 | New Orleans, Louisiana

[Epidemiology and Prevention | Lifestyle and Cardiometabolic Health](#)
March 17–20, 2026 | Boston

Publications

[Race and Ethnicity Disparities in Life's Essential 8 Among Ever-Pregnant Adults in the United States: The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2011 to 2020 | Journal of the American Heart Association](#)

[Social Determinants of Health Correlates and Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease Risk Among Adults in Baltimore: The EngAGE With Heart Study | Journal of the American Heart Association](#)

[UNC Health, Blue Cross NC Study Offers Clinical Evidence on How Food Delivery Models Can Reduce Food Insecurity and Improve Health Outcomes | Newswise](#)

[Cross-Sectional Association of Physical Activity With Life's Simple 7 Metrics in Community-Dwelling Black Men | Journal of the American Heart Association](#)

[Let the Food Be Medicine: A Paradigm Shift Post Covid-19 - ScienceDirect](#)

[Predicted Risk, Preclinical Heart Failure Measures, and Incident Heart Failure: The ARIC Study - ScienceDirect](#)

[Frontiers | Defining the evolving field of culinary medicine across multiple domains](#)

[Temporal Trends, Patient Characteristics, and Outcomes of Type 2 Versus Type 1 Myocardial Infarction Among Medicare Beneficiaries | Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes](#)

[Food as medicine in gastrointestinal cancer therapy | Nature Reviews Gastroenterology & Hepatology](#)
