NIH FOOD IS MEDICINE
CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Food Is Medicine Coalition: An American success story

Bringing value to our health care system

THE BIG IDEAS:

There’s an opportunity to grow the impact of the Office of Nutrition Research (ONR).

Thanks to targeted investments made by Congress, the Office of Nutrition Research was funded at $1 million in FY23. Congress has an opportunity to build upon the success of ONR’s work as demand for Food Is Medicine interventions continues to grow.

ONR has support from the White House.

There was strong support for the Office of Nutrition Research in Washington: the President’s FY24 Budget Request included $121.2 million for ONR. This investment will ensure that NIH can expand access to Food Is Medicine (FIM) initiatives for more Americans through research, public engagement, and education.

Medically Tailored Meals (MTMs) are research-based.

Peer-reviewed research on MTMs and other food as medicine interventions have found them to be highly cost-effective health care interventions. Through further investments and robust support for the creation of several Office of Nutrition Research Centers of Excellence, Congress can build on this body of research.

We need innovative solutions for healthcare.

Our healthcare system demands viable and innovative solutions that adapt to patients’ medical needs. CMS waivers and regulatory flexibility have provided an opportunity for health plans to pay for medically tailored meals and some states Medicaid agencies have developed alternative payment structures for MTMs.

OUR REQUESTS:

To ensure that ONR can scale several Centers of Excellence focused on Food Is Medicine interventions, we request that Members submit the following report language:

“The Committee supports the Office of Nutrition Research’s plan to establish Centers of Excellence in Food Is Medicine to advance research, education, patient care, and community outreach on the role of nutrition in preventing and treating diet-related chronic diseases. The Committee recognizes that food is medicine services, such as medically tailored meals and produce prescriptions, can improve health outcomes, reduce healthcare costs, and address health disparities among vulnerable populations. The Committee has included an additional $20 million for the Office of Nutrition Research and directs NIH to use these funds to collaborate with existing Food Is Medicine stakeholders in academia, healthcare, and the nonprofit sector to leverage their expertise and experience in this field.”

To ensure that ONR can expand FIM initiatives through research, public engagement and education, we ask that Members request:

An increase to the overall budget for ONR that meets or exceeds the President’s FY24 Budget Request of $121 million.
**THE BACKGROUND:**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the federal medical research agency dedicated to supporting scientific studies that result in better health outcomes.

Research shows: Research has consistently found that Food Is Medicine interventions are associated with improvements in food security, health outcomes, and lower insurance costs.

Definition: According to the Aspen Institute’s [Food Is Medicine Research Action Plan](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/food-is-medicine-research-action-plan/), “Food Is Medicine” is the broad descriptor of programs that recognize the critical link between diet and health, and directly connect to the healthcare system through the provision of different services, including:

- Medically Tailored Meals (MTMs)
- Medically tailored food packages or medically tailored groceries
- Prescriptions for produce or nutritious groceries
- Nutritious food referrals
- Culinary medicine or teaching kitchens.

**THE OPPORTUNITY:**

The Office of Nutrition Research (ONR) within the NIH would like to establish several Centers of Excellence that will focus on reducing the burden of diet-related diseases and nutrition disparities through support for Food Is Medicine research, patient care and education, and community engagement.

**THE IMPACT:**

The federal investments that support the Office of Nutrition Research’s work on Food Is Medicine interventions must be expanded to ensure access to these critical services.

Planning complete: Recognizing this, Congress has consistently supported ONR through annual appropriations and the Centers of Excellence concept has already been approved. Funding will enable the concept to be realized.

Build on success: Congress has an opportunity to build upon ONR’s current work, and the prior success of Food Is Medicine interventions, to expand access to MTMs, medically tailored groceries, nutritious food referrals, produce prescriptions, and other cost-effective interventions.