On October 21st, Senator Julian Cyr and Representative Denise Garlick introduced An Act Relative to Establishing and Implementing a Food and Health Pilot Program. This legislation would require the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to establish a Food and Health Pilot Program that equips health care systems to connect MassHealth enrollees with diet-related health conditions to one of three appropriate nutrition services, with the expectation that health outcomes will improve and cost of care will decrease.

WHAT IS THE FOOD AND HEALTH PILOT PROGRAM?

On October 21st, Senator Julian Cyr and Representative Denise Garlick introduced An Act Relative to Establishing and Implementing a Food and Health Pilot Program. This legislation would require the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to establish a Food and Health Pilot Program that equips health care systems to connect MassHealth enrollees with diet-related health conditions to one of three appropriate nutrition services, with the expectation that health outcomes will improve and cost of care will decrease.

FOOD INSECURITY & HUNGER COST THE COMMONWEALTH NEARLY $1.9 BILLION IN AVOIDABLE HEALTH CARE COSTS EVERY YEAR

RESEARCH SHOWS:

- Households with severe food insecurity have 76% higher annual health care costs compared to food-secure households
- Average inpatient hospitalization costs are 24% higher and readmission within 15 days is almost twice as likely for malnourished patients as compared to properly nourished patients

FOOD IS MEDICINE INTERVENTIONS LOWER HEALTH CARE COSTS & IMPROVE HEALTH

MEDICALLY TAILORED MEAL PROGRAMS:
- 16% net reduction in health care costs
- 70% reduction in ED visits
- 50% fewer inpatient admissions

MEDICALLY TAILORED FOOD PACKAGES:
- Increase fruit and vegetable intake
- Improve medication adherence
- Improve HbA1c levels

NUTRITIOUS FOOD REFERRALS:
- Improve fruit and vegetable intake
- Improve HbA1c levels
- Improve BMI

Emerging research demonstrates that connecting people with complex health conditions to medically tailored nutrition services may be an effective and low-cost strategy to improve health outcomes, decrease utilization of expensive health care services, and enhance quality of life.

For more information on the Food and Health Pilot Program please contact:
Kristin Sukys, Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation – ksukys@law.harvard.edu
PILOT DESIGN

Patients participating in the Pilot will be screened for food insecurity, their need for medically tailored nutrition services will be assessed, and they will be referred to and enrolled in the appropriate type of nutrition service to meet their need. Each participant in the Pilot who qualifies will receive one of three medically tailored nutrition services.

WHAT COULD BE EVALUATED?

1. Medically Tailored Meal Programs
2. Medically Tailored Food Packages
3. Nutritious Food Referrals

Medically Tailored Meals are meals tailored to personal medical conditions by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. Individuals are referred by a health care provider or plan. A medically tailored meal service consists of at least 10 meals per week.

Medically Tailored Food Packages include a selection of non-prepared grocery items selected by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist or other qualified nutrition professional as part of treatment for an individual with a defined medical diagnosis. The recipient of medically tailored food is typically capable of shopping for and picking up the food and preparing it at home, and is referred by a health care provider or plan. A medically tailored food service consists of food and grocery ingredients sufficient to prepare 14 meals per week.

Nutritious Food Referrals are vouchers for free or discounted nutrient dense food. Individuals must receive referrals from health care providers or plans after being identified as having or being at risk for diet-related diseases. A nutritious food referral service is equivalent to $20 or more per week.

WHICH INTERVENTIONS ARE INCLUDED?

1. MEDICALLY TAILORED MEAL PROGRAMS
Medically Tailored Meals are meals tailored to personal medical conditions by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. Individuals are referred by a health care provider or plan. A medically tailored meal service consists of at least 10 meals per week.

2. MEDICALLY TAILORED FOOD PACKAGES
Medically Tailored Food Packages include a selection of non-prepared grocery items selected by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist or other qualified nutrition professional as part of treatment for an individual with a defined medical diagnosis. The recipient of medically tailored food is typically capable of shopping for and picking up the food and preparing it at home, and is referred by a health care provider or plan. A medically tailored food service consists of food and grocery ingredients sufficient to prepare 14 meals per week.

3. NUTRITIOUS FOOD REFERRALS
Nutritious Food Referrals are vouchers for free or discounted nutrient dense food. Individuals must receive referrals from health care providers or plans after being identified as having or being at risk for diet-related diseases. A nutritious food referral service is equivalent to $20 or more per week.

3 GOALS OF THE PILOT

1. Evaluate the impact of offering a suite of nutrition services on health care utilization and costs
2. Expand access to Food is Medicine interventions across Massachusetts
3. Enhance the ability of our health care system to provide appropriate nutrition services based on patient need

1. John T. Cook et al, An Avoidable $2.4 Billion Cost: The Estimated Health-Related Costs of Food Insecurity and Hunger in Massachusetts, CHILDREN’S HEALTHWATCH & GREATER BOSTON FOODBANK, (Feb. 2018). Note that we have excluded special education costs in our calculation of $1.9 billion based on our focus on the health care system.


4. The medically tailored meal provider in this study was Boston-based Community Servings. Seth A. Berkowitz et al, Association Between Receipt of a Medically Tailored Meal Program and Health Care Use, JAMA INTERNAL MEDICINE, (2019).

5. The medically tailored meal provider in this study was Boston-based Community Servings. Seth A. Berkowitz et al, Meal Delivery Programs Reduce the Use of Costly Health Care in Dually Eligible Medicare and Medicaid Beneficiaries, HEALTH AFFAIRS, (2018).


