



# Addressing Food Insecurity

A FOCUS OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH'S MEDI-CAL CAPACITY GRANT PROGRAM



## Creating Local Health Care Solutions

Central California Alliance for Health (the Alliance) is an award-winning regional Medi-Cal managed care health plan that serves over 40% of the population in Mariposa, Merced, Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties. The Alliance connects more than 455,000 Medi-Cal members to providers and programs in an effort to provide accessible, quality health care.

The Alliance makes investments in the communities it serves through the Medi-Cal Capacity Grant Program (MCGP) to strengthen the local health care delivery system for the future and realize the vision of "Healthy People, Healthy Communities." The Alliance established the MCGP in July 2015 with initial investments focused on increasing the availability, quality and access of health care and supportive resources for Medi-Cal members in the service area. In 2022, the focus of the MCGP expanded to integrate upstream action emphasizing health and well-being, while also addressing immediate barriers to care for local residents with Medi-Cal.

## Connecting Nutrition to Health Outcomes

The impact of nutritious food insecurity on health outcomes and quality of life is significant. A lack of access to healthy food is associated with chronic conditions including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and diet-related cancers.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, adults and children living in a food insecure household experience learning issues and lower productivity.<sup>2</sup> Medically supportive food programs have been shown to improve blood pressure, reduce hemoglobin A1C levels in individuals with diabetes, reduce BMI, decrease food insecurity and improve overall health.

## Health Care Sector's Role

About 20% of Californians are food insecure. California spends approximately \$7.2B annually on health care associated with food insecurity.<sup>3</sup> Many chronic conditions and related health care spending are largely preventable with proper nutrition.<sup>4</sup> Health care settings are uniquely positioned as places where Medi-Cal members facing food insecurity and chronic conditions can be identified and provided access to medically supportive food and nutrition education. Health care providers may refer patients to a food prescription – a model for medical treatment or preventative service for patients who are experiencing diet-related health risks or conditions, food insecurity or other documented challenges to accessing nutritious foods – in an effort to improve health outcomes and increase patient engagement in self-managing health through access to healthy food and nutrition education. The Harvard Wellness Study (2010) reported that every \$1 spent on healthy food reduces health care and economic costs by \$3.27.<sup>5</sup>

## Fast Facts About Food Insecurity in the Alliance Membership

Percentage who self-report concerns about food insecurity **32%**

Percentage who report need for nutrition education in order to stay healthy **24%**

Percentage who screened positive for food insecurity by Alliance Care Management **34%**

\*Data collected from the Alliance's 2022 Population Needs Assessment (PNA) Survey (<https://thealliance.health/wp-content/uploads/CCAH-Tri-County-PNA-Report-2022.pdf>)

## According to a 2017 Hunger in Our Schools study:<sup>6</sup>



**1 in 6**  
kids in America is facing hunger.



**59%**  
of children from low-income families say they have come to school hungry.



**62%**  
of low-income parents worry about food for their children running out before they can buy more.



**34%**  
of parents say they struggle to provide nutritious meals because of cost.

HEALTHY PEOPLE. HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.

[www.thealliance.health](http://www.thealliance.health)

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## The Alliance Funds Efforts to Address Nutritious Food Access

To improve the health and overall wellness of Medi-Cal members in Merced, Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, the Alliance is funding efforts to increase access and availability to nutritious food through its Medi-Cal Capacity Grant Program (MCGP) with two programs:



**Partners for Healthy Food Access Program** aims to improve member health and food security in the Medi-Cal population in Merced, Monterey and Santa Cruz counties through multi-sector partnerships implementing community-based nutritious and medically supportive food projects. Grant funding through the Partners for Healthy Food Access Program can support the development of local, innovative and culturally responsive food prescription projects that have a high impact on member engagement.

In 2022, the program was updated to narrow its focus on projects that align with a food prescription model that has a significant food distribution component for medically supportive food, coupled with an education and/or skill-building component. It also emphasizes directing interventions on Medi-Cal members who have or are at risk for chronic conditions, not based on food insecurity alone. As of August 2022, the MCGP has awarded \$2.2M to Partners for Healthy Food Access projects.

**Post-Discharge Meal Delivery Program (PDMDP)** launched as a two-year pilot in November 2018 and proved to be an effective intervention to keep members healthy. Partnering with a provider in each county, the pilot created the foundation for a successful transition to Community Supports implementation under CalAIM. These services are now reimbursable through Medi-Cal as Medically Tailored Meals. Medically Tailored Meals provide Medi-Cal members with serious illness with 14 ready-made, medically tailored nutritious meals each week for 12 weeks after hospital discharge. Eligible

members have a diagnosis of diabetes, congestive heart failure and/or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and are identified as high risk for hospital readmission. Over the course of the two-year pilot, the Alliance invested \$650,000 to provide 494 Medi-Cal members with over 70,200 home-delivered meals. The evaluation conducted at the conclusion of the pilot showed that post-discharge meal delivery was effective in improving member health outcomes, reduced hospital admissions and lowered health care costs. The pilot had a positive return on investment of 360%, generating a return of \$3.60 for every dollar invested.

## A “Food Is Medicine” Approach to Improve Health Outcomes

The “food is medicine” approach views nutritious food as a critical component of healing and improved quality of life. By embracing this approach, the Alliance hopes to increase food security among its members and engage them in managing their own health. The Alliance anticipates further positive outcomes of funding in food security strategies, including a reduction in preventable chronic disease diagnoses and further decrease in preventable hospitalizations and medical utilization. The Alliance has a long history of expanding support and resources to its members and continues to look for innovative and effective ways to invest in member health and wellness.



For more information about the Medi-Cal Capacity Grant Program, please visit [www.thealliance.health/grants](http://www.thealliance.health/grants)

<sup>1</sup>UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, “[Produce prescriptions can save money. New project asks how much?](#)”

<sup>2</sup>Cook and Jeng, “[Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation](#)”

<sup>3</sup>DHCS, “[CalAIM Community Supports for Social Drivers of Health](#).”

<sup>4</sup>Boeing et al., “[Critical review: vegetables and fruit in the prevention of chronic diseases](#).”

<sup>5</sup>Baicker et al., “[Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings](#).”

<sup>6</sup>No Kid Hungry, “[Hunger in Our Schools: How kids in America are going hungry and what we can do](#).”