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Feeding America releases landmark evaluation showing the power of Food as Medicine in improving health across communities

The three-year initiative in partnership with Elevance Health Foundation reached more than 161,000 households, resulting in expanded access to nutritious food and reduced hospitalizations

July 8, 2026

Feeding America, in partnership with Elevance Health Foundation, today released the nation's largest Food as Medicine evaluation of food banks. The evaluation found that consistent access to nutritious food reduces self-reported hospitalizations by 14% and emergency department visits by 11%, and strengthens food security among people facing hunger.

The three-year program, evaluated by the Center for Nutrition & Health Impact, screened more than 1.45 million patients for food insecurity and connected more than 161,000 households across 13 states to nutritious food, demonstrating that nutrition and health care support improves health.

"The connection between food and health is well established, yet for millions of people facing hunger, accessing the nutritious food needed to manage overall health and chronic conditions remains out of reach," said Melanie Hall, chief health, research and evaluation officer at Feeding America and registered dietitian nutritionist. "We believe everyone deserves the opportunity to

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fell 14% and emergency department visit rates fell 11%, demonstrating that consistent, nutritious food is associated with reduced costly health care encounters for participants and health systems alike, while providing stability for households. This stability is reflected in a 47% increase in food security for participants after participating in the program.

Better clinical markers: Among participants with both baseline and follow-up clinical data, HbA1c, BMI and LDL cholesterol all improved meaningfully, with greater gains among those who attended more dietitian sessions.

Improved health behaviors: Structured nutrition education was consistently associated with improvements in participants' self-reported general health, decreases in missed or delayed care and greater ability to secure or afford medication, with comprehensive programs showing the strongest gains.

The initiative underscores Elevance Health Foundation's sustained commitment to demonstrating how partnerships between food banks and health care providers can meaningfully improve health and health care costs at scale. Elevance Health Foundation invested \$14.1 million in the program – the largest grant in the Foundation's history – helping the program grow to include 21 Feeding America network food banks and more than 50 health care sites across the country, with registered dietitian nutritionists and community health workers embedded throughout.

"We know food and nutrition play a critical role in improving health outcomes, yet far too many Americans are still lacking consistent access to the nutritious foods they need in order to thrive," said Dr. Shantanu Agrawal, chief health officer at Elevance Health. "Our partnership with Feeding America reflects a shared commitment to improving whole health by expanding access to nutritious food and strengthening community-based support. Together, we're helping people better manage their health, reducing avoidable hospitalizations and emergency department visits, and helping lower the cost of care."

A central finding of the Food as Medicine evaluation is that dignity and design matter as much as delivery. Across more than 5,600 surveys and in-depth interviews with 35 participants, neighbors consistently shared that feeling respected, having choices and working with culturally competent staff deepened their engagement with the program and contributed to better outcomes. When neighbors felt respected and supported, they were more willing to share other challenges they were navigating, positioning programs to connect them to additional resources beyond healthy groceries and support better health for the whole family.

"I felt comfortable with how she asked about my food situation because she was very understanding and patient. I appreciated her empathetic and non-judgmental approach," said a Food as Medicine participant from New York.

Policymakers, health systems and insurers increasingly recognize food and nutrition security as both a public health and economic concern. This evaluation offers evidence that community-based

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About Feeding America

Rooted in the voices of neighbors facing hunger, Feeding America unites the country ensuring everyone has access to food and a thriving future. We support tens of millions of people as part of a nationwide network of 250+ food banks, 20+ statewide food bank associations, 10+ regional co-ops and 60,000+ agency partners, food pantries and meal programs. Powered by leaders and volunteers embedded in local communities, we are one of the nation's most effective food distribution systems driving immediate impact today—and a catalyst for long-term change through advocating for legislation that improves food security and work to address its factors. We partner with people experiencing food insecurity, policymakers, organizations and supporters united with the unwavering commitment to provide nourishing food and work to end hunger at its roots so everyone can live fuller, healthier lives. Visit FeedingAmerica.org to learn more.

About Elevance Health Foundation

Elevance Health Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Elevance Health Inc. The Foundation works to improve the health of the socially vulnerable through partnerships and programs in our communities with an emphasis on maternal-infant health; behavioral health; and food as medicine. Through its key areas of focus, the Foundation also strategically aligns with Elevance Health's focus on community health and becoming a lifetime, trusted health partner that is fueled by its purpose to improve the health of humanity. To learn more about Elevance Health Foundation, please visit www.elevancehealth.foundation or follow @ElevanceFND on X and Elevance Health Foundation on Facebook.

About the Center for Nutrition & Health Impact (CNHI)

CNHI is a nonprofit research institute providing expertise in measurement and evaluation to develop, enhance, and expand public health programs. CNHI's research focuses on encouraging healthy eating and active living, improving food security and healthy food access, and promoting local food systems. With expertise in public health nutrition, CNHI is dedicated to building measurement strategies to assess the impact of innovative health-related programs. CNHI works nationally and internationally, partnering with other nonprofits, academia, government entities, and

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