

# Doctors in California Are Prescribing Food as Medicine, and It's Keeping Patients out of Hospitals

ZEE KRSTIC May 10, 2018 Cooking Light Magazine

A California Senator launched the program after hearing that health care costs plunged by 55 percent for those who ate doctor-approved meals in a Philadelphia pilot program.

You are probably aware that healthy eating can prevent a lot of illnesses, but it turns out that receiving proper nutrition can actually make the chronically sick healthier too. That's why some Medicaid patients suffering from chronic or life-threatening illnesses are now being prescribed food in addition to medicine. It's part of an effort to increase health and reduce health care costs—and there's some solid evidence that it'll work.

The program, spearheaded by the California division of the Food Is Medicine Coalition, uses proper nutrition to reduce the likelihood of hospitalization and costly intensive care for lower-income patients. It's part of a pilot program that Senator Ben Allen (D) and assembly members Blanca Rubio (D) and Richard Bloom (D) hope will spread, lowering costs of California's Medi-Cal system across the state, according to the Huffington Post.

The new pilot program funds six different nonprofit organizations scattered throughout California that deliver free prepared meals to Medicaid patients whose cases require them to be on a very specific, approved diet.

For now, the pilot program will operate over the next three years and provide 12 weeks' worth of medically tailored meals to 1,000 people suffering from congestive heart failure—they'll receive carefully curated breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, as well as two in-home visits from registered dietitians.

As the Huffington Post points out, healthcare professionals mandate that those suffering from congestive heart failure only consume about 2mg of sodium each day—an amount that's less than a teaspoon of salt. That's a challenge for anyone, let alone a patient who lives on a limited income.

The program, which will cost California \$6 million over the next three years, gained steam after a study was published tracking the success of one nonprofit organization that provides meals for chronically ill residents living in Philadelphia.

The nonprofit is called MANNA, and it's one of 27 member organizations of the Food Is Medicine Coalition, an association of nonprofits who work to provide healthy, medically prescribed meals to those suffering from serious illnesses in 18 states across the nation.

The researchers behind the study closely followed the medical costs of MANNA clients eating targeted meals, and compared them to other low-income patients with similar illnesses who were not receiving free meals.

Those who ate the prescribed meals had monthly medical costs that were more than 50 percent lower. Trips to the hospital were also slashed dramatically—as well as how long they stayed in the hospital itself.

More importantly, the study found that those who ate healthy meals were 23 percent more likely to return home from a hospital visit, as opposed to needing long-term care.

At Cooking Light, we've long maintained that eating healthy foods are important to maintaining health and prevent illnesses, big and small. Preliminary research shows that the work done by members in the national Food Is Medicine Coalition could help reduce the cost of the Medicare system in California, a state that the Huffington Post reports as suffering from high rates of food insecurity and chronic illness.

But a prescription for a healthy diets could help populations across America prevent or possibly heal from a whole slew of medical problems—and could even help reduce health care costs. Perhaps this is an idea that needs to be taken seriously by healthcare professionals at all levels.

For more information on California's Food Is Medicine pilot program, or to donate to one of the six nonprofits providing meals for sick residents across California, click here.

<http://www.cookinglight.com/news/california-food-is-medicine-coalition-project-angel-food>