

MARCH 2024

ISSUE 8

THE BROADSHEET

FOOD IS MEDICINE: INVESTIGATING FOOD INSECURITY AND THE EMPOWERING FORCE OF NUTRITION



"Explore the potent healing properties of nutrition in our special edition, 'Food Is Medicine,' uncovering how food serves as a powerful tool for wellness and vitality."

March is Nutrition Month





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Rep. Robin Kelly, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust

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Explore the disparities, challenges, and solutions for food insecurity in America.

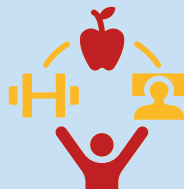
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FOOD AS MEDICINE

Learn about the “Food As Medicine” concept and how it impacts those most in need.

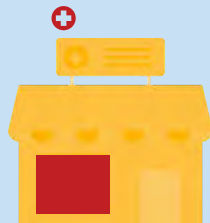
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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Welcome to the second issue of The Broadsheet for the 118th Congress, celebrating National Nutrition Month! This edition delves into the critical link between food insecurity and nutrition as a vital intervention for disease prevention and management.

One in eight households in the United States are affected by food insecurity. This means that many individuals and families lack consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food insecurity often disproportionately affects under-served communities, particularly communities of color, including those with lower incomes or limited access to grocery stores and fresh food options. These communities may rely more heavily on convenience stores or fast-food restaurants, where inexpensive but often less nutritious foods are more readily available. The significance of wholesome nutrition cannot be overstated, good food is imperative to good health.

Nearly half of all American adults have one or more preventable chronic diseases linked to poor-quality nutrition and physical inactivity. These ailments include, but are not limited to, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and poor bone health. Lower food security is notably linked to a heightened risk of chronic conditions, highlighting the vital importance of having access to nutritious foods.

“One in eight households in the United States are affected by food insecurity.”

In January, I introduced H.R. 6407, the Medical Nutritional Therapy Act, which expands access to nutritional counseling for a wide range of diet-related chronic diseases, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to address these issues.

Nevertheless, there exists a robust network of providers, advocacy groups, and community organizations who operate in the “Food Is Medicine” realm, using their expertise and connections to improve access to nutritious foods and combat diet-related illnesses.

With nearly over 2000 farms in my district, I firmly believe that many of the resources needed to address access to nutritious foods already exist. I’m committed to leveraging existing resources and uplifting the work of those in promoting access to wholesome foods that nourish our communities.

CHAIR, CBC HEALTH BRAINTRUST

FOOD & NUTRITION RESOURCES



Hunger Free America operates the National Hunger Hotline on behalf of United States Department of Agriculture. The hotline is a resource for individuals and families seeking information on how to obtain food. The National Hunger Hotline staff connects callers with emergency food providers in their community, government assistance programs, and various social services.

The hotline can be reached at 1-866-3-HUNGRY (1-866-348-6479), for English, or 1-877-8-HAMBRE (1-877-842-6273), for Spanish, from Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Eastern Time.

For the texting, service use 914-342-7744 with a question that may contain a keyword such as "food," "summer," "meals," etc. to receive an automated response to resources located near an address and/or zip code. By sending a text you consent to receive messages where message and data rates may apply. Individuals can opt out of receiving messages at any time by texting STOP.

SNAP

Text "**SNAP**" to find your state's SNAP hotline number or click on the [link](#).

EBT

Text "**EBT**" to find your state's EBT hotline number or click on the [link](#).

School Meals

Text "**school meals**" to find a school meal site in your area or click on the [link](#).

SFSP

Text "**SFSP**" to find a summer meal site in your area or click on the [link](#).



UNVEILING AMERICA'S FOOD INSECURITY LANDSCAPE

By Ebony Caldwell, MD, MPH

For some, food insecurity is as American as apple pie. Explore the disparities, challenges, and solutions for food insecurity across the nation.

Food insecurity is defined as an uncertainty or inability to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all household members due to insufficient financial resources.¹ In 2022, U.S. households faced a 2.6% increase in food insecurity compared to 2021, signaling heightened struggles for families.² However, this

pervasive issue exhibits significant variations in prevalence across the nation. For instance, Griggs County, ND, boasts high food security at 2%, while Kusilvak Census Area, AK, faces 26% insecurity. Such disparities reflect underlying factors such as unemployment, poverty, and systemic barriers hindering access to food.³

The impact of food insecurity is particularly acute in households with children, where 17.3% faced food insecurity in 2022. This statistic includes cases where both adults and children experienced food insecurity, as well as those where only adults were affected. Alarming, in about 1% of these households, one or more children also experienced not having enough to eat.²

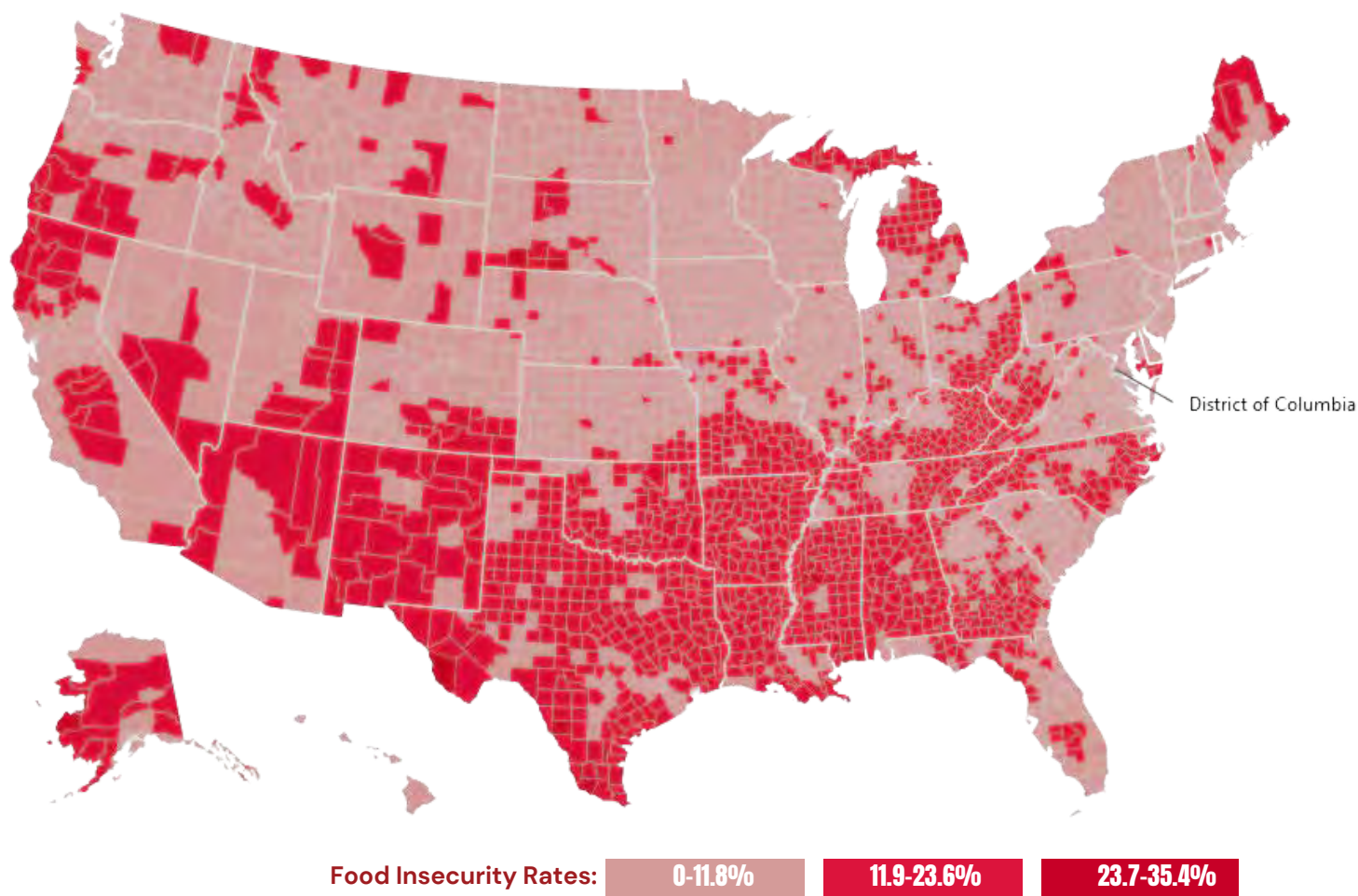
In response to these challenges, various interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing food insecurity across various spheres. During the first two years of the COVID-19 crisis, the increase in amount and expanded access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, mitigated what could have been even higher levels of national food insecurity.² Furthermore, the increase in the Child Tax Credit under the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 resulted in a 3% reduction in food insecurity for many families.⁴

Nevertheless, disparities persist, particularly along racial, ethnic, and geographic lines. Food insecurity rates among Black and Latino individuals are consistently higher than among white, non-Hispanic individuals. Furthermore, the South hosts the majority of food-insecure counties nationwide, with nearly 20% of southern counties exhibiting food insecurity rates of 16% or higher. Additionally, individuals living in rural communities make up 63% of those with high food insecurity rates, despite only being 11% of the US population.²

Alarming, in about 1% of households with children, one or more children also experienced reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns during the year.



2021 US Food insecurity Rates By County*



*Figure adapted from: Feeding America. (2023). Map the Meal Gap. Retrieved from <https://map.feedingamerica.org>

Federal programs like SNAP serve as crucial resources in combating hunger, yet eligibility limitations and enrollment disparities persist, leaving many without access to assistance.² Moreover, rising food prices, such as those seen in the last year with post-pandemic inflation, exacerbate financial strain on households which exacerbates food insecurity.⁵

These statistics underscore the persistent issue of food insecurity in the U.S., highlighting the need for continued efforts to address the root causes and provide support to vulnerable households. As the nation strives for economic recovery and social welfare, ensuring food security for all remains a critical priority to ensure the health of the nation.

A comprehensive approach that acknowledges the intersecting factors contributing to food insecurity is needed to implement targeted policies to ensure equitable access to nutritious food for all Americans.

1. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/#insecurity>
2. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>
3. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/overall-executive-summary>
4. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/beyond-food-deserts-america-needs-a-new-approach-to-mapping-food-insecurity/#2>
5. <https://apnews.com/article/hunger-food-us-increase-inflation-pandemic-report-49fe26f083583d6efa66c6509657a741>

FOOD AS MEDICINE:

BRIDGING GAPS IN ACCESS TO MEDICAL NUTRITION THERAPY, DIETITIANS, AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD



By Lauri Wright, Academy of
Nutrition and Dietetics
President, 2023-2024

There's a growing interest in "food as medicine" — the use of food and nutrition to improve health. National Nutrition Month®, hosted every March by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, is a perfect time to talk about Food As Medicine (FAM) and its impact on overall health and managing chronic diseases.

FAM uses food to prevent, manage, and treat health conditions. Many FAM programs also tackle food insecurity (not having enough food for a healthy life) by partnering with local organizations and food banks to make sure communities have access to healthy foods.

This is especially crucial for Black and Hispanic communities, who often face higher rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease. These conditions are linked to not having enough nutritious food. FAM programs offer various services like cooking classes, produce prescription initiatives, and nutrition education to improve health and quality of life. These programs address not only the symptoms of chronic diseases, but also their root causes, promoting long-term wellness and reducing the need for medication.

Continued on next page →

National Nutrition Month® is an annual campaign established in 1973. This year's theme is "Beyond the Table," which addresses the spectrum of the farm-to-fork aspect of nutrition.

– Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Access to nutritious food is important, but it's not the only factor. People with chronic diseases also need to know which foods can help manage their conditions. That's where registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) come in.

RDNs play a crucial role in bridging the gap between food insecurity and better health outcomes. For example, RDNs can create medically tailored meals based on a person's individual health needs. These meals follow healthy eating guidelines and address specific dietary needs, leading to improved health results and reduced healthcare costs.

Programs like medically tailored meals are a step in the right direction, but there's still more work to be done. Expanding access to medical nutrition therapy (MNT) provided by RDNs increases access to care, with RDNs customizing a plan of action for each person's unique health conditions. Through MNT, RDNs can customize a plan to a person's unique health conditions and help them choose foods that will improve their health. RDNs also can connect food insecure individuals to other FAM or local programs for resources to help them make healthier food choices within their budget.



2024 NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH

A CAMPAIGN BY

THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

The Academy appreciates U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly's leadership in introducing H.R. 6407, the Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) Act, which would expand Medicare beneficiaries' access to MNT. It is crucial for Congress to support this legislation, ensuring that everyone receives access to nutrition counseling that meets their health needs.

By including food as medicine programs and MNT in federal health plans, we can promote health equity nationwide — with RDNs leading the charge.



FROM HUNGER TO HEALTH:

Empowering Communities Through Food Is Medicine Initiatives



By Kate Maehr, Executive Director and CEO,
Greater Chicago Food Depository

Explore how 'Food is Medicine' initiatives are transforming communities, bridging the gap between sustenance and healthcare.

Hunger persists in our community. After more than three years of unprecedented challenges, including a global health crisis, inflation and record high food prices, families are still struggling to make ends meet. One in eight U.S. households (12.8% or 17 million households) experienced food insecurity in 2022, according to the US Department of Agriculture's Household Food Security Report.

Black and Hispanic households nationwide are much more likely to face food insecurity, with 22.4% of Black households and 20.8% of Hispanic households experiencing food insecurity compared with 9.3% of white households.[1]

People facing food insecurity are our neighbors. And many of those we serve are experiencing the stress of food insecurity at the same time as --



Source: Greater Chicago Food Depository

having to manage a chronic health condition, such as hypertension and obesity. Food insecurity can exacerbate or even cause chronic disease. For these patients, maintaining a healthy diet is critical. Having reliable and consistent access to healthy food improves health outcomes. Oftentimes, the costs associated with accessing nutritious food are simply inaccessible, unattainable, and too overwhelming. This results in patients being forced to make trade-off decisions between food and medicine, utilities, and other necessities. For them, food is not purely sustenance; food is medicine.

Food insecurity, chronic disease, and costly health outcomes are intrinsically linked. Access to healthy, affordable food can have a significant impact on quality of life. By increasing access to healthy food options, we can prevent or mitigate diet-related diseases for millions of Americans.[2]

Food Is Medicine took center stage at the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in 2022, at the Root Cause Coalition's "Come to the Table" regional summits following the conference, and more recently, at the U.S. Department of Human Services' Summit on Food Is Medicine in January.

Nationally, notable groups like Feeding America and the Food Is Medicine Coalition have already made great strides advancing the connection between hunger and health. The Greater Chicago Food Depository collaborates with both, sharing our experience with health partners.[3]

In partnership with community clinics and hospitals, the Food Depository connects patients who have screened positive for food insecurity with resources such as emergency food distributions, medically tailored meals and support on public benefits enrollment. These services increase patients' access to healthy food and build a bridge between preventative healthcare, nutrition education, and quality food.

The Food Depository is also set to grow our production of healthy prepared meals to up to 10,000 meals a day. These meals are a vital resource to our neighbors at increased risk of hunger, including older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals on medically tailored diets.

We are also working closely with the Alliance for Health Equity, a local hospital-community collaboration based out of the Illinois Public Health Institute, on the strategy for implementing the food and nutrition benefits included in Illinois' recent Medicaid 1115 demonstration extension application should it be approved. The waiver would, among other health-related social needs benefits, allow the use of the Medicaid program to support nutrition education, medically tailored meals, prescriptions for fresh produce, and help with accessing benefits for hundreds of thousands of at-risk neighbors in Illinois. With currently just 19 states with approved or pending waivers addressing nutrition, it would be a valuable resource for all states.[4]



Source: Greater Chicago Food Depository

The [1115] waiver would allow the use of the Medicaid program to support nutrition education, medically tailored meals, prescriptions for fresh produce and help with accessing benefits for hundreds of thousands of at-risk neighbors in Illinois.

We believe a healthy community starts with food. Together we can create a hunger-free community where everyone has the chance to thrive. Together we can continue to explore and innovate on Food Is Medicine initiatives. And together we can support and protect federal nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC that increase access to healthy foods.



[1] U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2022." Last updated: Wednesday, October 25, 2023. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=107702> | [2] U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. "Predicted prevalence of five chronic diseases increased as household food security worsened." Last updated: Monday, January 08, 2024. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=108211> | [3] Greater Chicago Food Depository. "Our Work at the Intersection of Health and Hunger." <https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/about/how-we-help/health-partnerships/>. | [4] Erika Hanson, Daniel Albert-Rozenberg, Kathryn M Garfield, Emily Broad Leib, Ronit A Ridberg, Kurt Hager, Dariush Mozaffarian, The evolution and scope of Medicaid Section 1115 demonstrations to address nutrition: a US survey, Health Affairs Scholar, Volume 2, Issue 2, February 2024, qxae013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/haschl/qxae013>

COMMUNITY PHARMACIES FOR FOOD IS MEDICINE

By Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian,
Director, The Food is
Medicine Institute, Tufts
University



Explore the groundbreaking integration of food prescriptions into community pharmacies, revolutionizing healthcare by addressing nutritional needs and improving health outcomes.

Picture this: during your weekly errands, you swing by the local community pharmacy to refill your high blood pressure medication. There, the pharmacist surprises you with an offer—an additional treatment option in the form of a food prescription, or produce prescription. This innovative approach provides an electronic debit card, empowering you to purchase nutritious essentials like fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds. With each monthly refill of this produce prescription, not only does the burden of affording healthy foods ease, but your health also sees tangible improvements. This paradigm shift exemplifies the

power and expanse of 'Food Is Medicine' interventions.

Food Is Medicine (FIM) initiatives—nutrition programs and interventions integrated into the healthcare system to advance specific health needs and health equity in different populations—are among the most exciting innovations to promote healthier eating, reduce food and nutrition insecurity, improve health and well-being, and reduce preventable healthcare use. FIM interventions are typically designed and delivered through hospitals, medical clinics, or community non-profit organizations.

“[P]atients are likely to visit a community pharmacy almost twice as often as a physician or other healthcare professionals.”



However, patients are likely to visit a community pharmacy almost twice as often as a physician or other healthcare professionals[1], presenting an opportunity to leverage community pharmacies to screen and refer patients to receive nutrition care. Incorporating FIM initiatives into community pharmacies has the potential to improve nutrition and health outcomes, particularly in historically marginalized and vulnerable populations.

To explore the role of community pharmacies in advancing FIM, the Food Is Medicine Institute at Tufts University’s Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy recently launched the “Community Pharmacies for Food Is Medicine” (CP4FIM) project. CP4FIM will leverage the potential of community pharmacies to advance FIM—utilizing them for their high level of engagement and community trust.

The aim is to generate valuable evidence on the feasibility and impact of FIM interventions in the community pharmacy setting. The project will design and implement the screening, referral, and delivery of a produce prescription (PRx) program in the community pharmacy setting among U.S. adults with cardiometabolic risk factors and food and/or nutrition insecurity.

After being screened and referred by the pharmacy team, eligible participants in the PRx program will receive an electronic debit card. This card enables them to procure a variety of nutritious items—fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds, whether fresh, frozen, or canned—from select food retail outlets. The research team will then assess the PRx program’s effects on critical nutrition-related measures, including food and nutrition security, as well as diet quality.

“In addition, the program will assess health outcomes such as hemoglobin A1c, blood pressure, and body mass index. Furthermore, the team will conduct an evaluation of the program’s processes and investigate its sustainability.”

The Food Is Medicine Institute will be the first to implement and evaluate a FIM program in the community pharmacy setting. The project is funded by the National Association of Chain Drug Stores Foundation.

The Food is Medicine Institute, directed by Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, is a university-wide collaborative effort based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, bringing together experts from across disciplines with other local and national collaborators to advance Food Is Medicine research, training, patient care, and community and policy engagement. The first-of-its-kind Institute serves as a catalyst to drive change, improve health, reduce health disparities, and create a more equitable and resilient healthcare system that recognizes the power of nourishing food. Efforts will be centered in health equity to work collaboratively with and improve the lives of traditionally marginalized, vulnerable populations. More information here: <https://tuftsfoodismedicine.org/>

[1] Pharmacists as accessible health care providers: quantifying the opportunity, <https://www.jmcp.org/doi/full/10.18553/jmcp.2022.28.1.85>



Food is Medicine
@TUFTS UNIVERSITY



FROM E-COMMERCE TO CLOUD, AMAZON IS WORKING TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY

By: Danielle Morris, Global Health Equity Lead,
AWS Social Responsibility & Impact

Josh Hirschland, Principal Product Manager,
Amazon Community Impact

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Amazon Access

In a country celebrated for its abundance, health disparities persist, with 17 million households in the U.S. grappling with the daily challenge of lacking consistent access to affordable, nutritious foods. Consistent access to healthy food options becomes even more pronounced when we consider that over 6 million households with children face particular hurdles in accessing adequate nutrition. The complexities surrounding food access underscore the broader challenge of health equity, where social and economic factors intertwine to create disparities that impact the well-being of individuals and families across the nation. Addressing these inequities is not only crucial for promoting a healthier society, but also for fostering a more equitable and inclusive food system for everyone.

Source: Amazon Access

Continued on next page →

Enhancing access to essential resources, including nutritious foods vital for our well-being, requires a collective and collaborative commitment from stakeholders at all levels. At Amazon, we are humble and thoughtful about even secondary effects of our actions. We begin each day with a determination to make better, do better, and be better for our customers, our employees, our partners, and the world at large. That is why we have launched initiatives in almost every part of our business—from e-commerce to our cloud services division—to help each individual access nutritious food that they need to get and stay healthy.

Amazon is proud to be one of the first retailers to offer online SNAP acceptance to beneficiaries as part of our commitment to making food accessible through online grocery shopping, offering all customers convenience, time savings, and low prices delivered straight to their door.

This service does not require a Prime membership and helps expand food access, particularly in high food priority areas where residents live over a mile away from a grocery store. As a result of our efforts to listen and learn from community members across the country, we also established Amazon Access, a centralized hub that makes shopping in Amazon's online store easier and more affordable for customers with programs, discounts, and services like payment with SNAP EBT.

Amazon also directly supports the work of community organizations that help those faced with food insecurity through donations of food, financial support, and delivering prepared meals and groceries on behalf of these organizations throughout our communities.

Since March 2020, Amazon has partnered with local food banks and schools to deliver meals to vulnerable families in over 35 cities worldwide.

In the U.S., our food bank partners provide, prepare, and package the groceries. Amazon's delivery fleets collect the pre-packaged meals of fresh and shelf-stable foods from food banks and community organizations. Our teams then make "contactless" deliveries directly to the homes of vulnerable groups in their communities.

Over the last four years, Amazon has delivered more than 33 million meals directly to underserved families; donated more than 88 million pounds of food to food banks, pantries, kitchens, and shelters; and provided more than \$12 million to local organizations to help alleviate food insecurity. You can read more in our 2023 community impact report.

In 2021, Amazon Web Services (AWS) launched the AWS Health Equity Initiative as a three-year, \$40 million commitment in cloud credits and technical expertise to help solve gaps in health equity.





In January 2024, AWS announced an additional \$20 million in funding for the Health Equity Initiative, bringing the company's total commitment to \$60 million.

Since then, 229 organizations have leveraged AWS-powered cloud technology to address health disparities, including those related to food security and nutrition-related health outcomes around the world. Having distributed more than \$30 million of the original resources, we see even greater potential to support more organizations using the cloud to make a difference in the health and lives of underserved populations. In January 2024, AWS announced an additional \$20 million in funding for the Health Equity Initiative, bringing the company's total commitment to \$60 million to accelerate the pace and scale of innovation to advance health equity.

Two dynamic Health Equity Initiative Award winners exemplify how cloud technology is being used to increase access to healthy foods in the U.S. and worldwide. The Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE) is working to advance health equity for over 50,000 vulnerable senior citizens living in New Orleans, Louisiana. According to an assessment by Tulane University, 25% of local residents in the New Orleans area live under the U.S. poverty line and nearly 85,000 individuals are food insecure. Utilizing AWS, CORE's CoreConnect streamlines the meal service initiatives of governmental and community organizations and increases access to local 311 services among vulnerable senior citizens. Separately, the George Institute for Global Health, located in Australia, is leveraging data to improve the health of millions by addressing people's diets around the world. Their AWS-powered FoodSwitch program is working to tackle this global challenge by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data from across 25 countries on their respective food supply to influence nutrition-related behaviors, government policies, and industry practices. Over one-third of poor health outcomes, like diabetes and cardiovascular disease, are driven by the lack of consistent access to nutritious foods.

From e-commerce to cloud computing, we recognize that our scale brings broad responsibility. Our customers and institutions that use our cloud services depend on Amazon. We're committed to do our part to help families access healthy foods. By democratizing access to Amazon's services and government benefits, we're using technology to promote convenience and food security. And, we're just getting started.

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