

Lifelong Medical Center Launches Food as Medicine Program

Initiative Furthers County's Effort to Address Food Insecurity, Improve Health Outcomes

[ALL IN Alameda County](#) (ALL IN) has announced the most recent expansion of its Food as Medicine initiative with the February 1st, 2021 launch at Lifelong Medical Center (LLMC). The program will launch at Life Long Medical Center at Ashby, a community health center that services neighborhoods in Berkeley and North Oakland. This partnership builds upon the prior success of Food as Medicine at Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center and Native American Health Center.

This most recent expansion of the Food as Medicine program is thanks to funding support from Alameda Alliance for Health, the USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, and Stupski Foundation, and to primary programmatic partners Dig Deep Farms and Open Source Wellness.

Food as Medicine provides an integrative model for healthcare that addresses the social determinants of health and chronic disease. This model shifts medical practices by giving healthcare providers in Alameda County's network of community-based health clinics the tools, training, and infrastructure they need to utilize healthy food interventions in combination with group behavioral support to improve health, socio-emotional wellbeing, and food security for Alameda County residents.

Food as Medicine builds three important pieces of innovative infrastructure at primary care clinics:

- 1) **Food Farmacy:** Patients are prescribed produce by their healthcare team to treat, prevent, and reverse chronic disease, which can also reduce ER visits, hospitalizations, and medication usage. The prescriptions are filled by [Dig Deep Farms](#) an urban farm utilizing regenerative practices to fortify the soil and grow nutrient-dense food that is pesticide-free, seasonal, and local. Food prescriptions, which include sixteen weeks of vegetables delivered to patients' doorsteps during shelter-in-place. Finally, Dig Deep Farms creates green economy jobs for people on probation to work as pharmacists, farmers, and drivers.
- 2) **Behavioral Pharmacy:** Group Medical Visits bring together patients with various medical conditions to "[move, nourish, connect, and be](#)" through weekly visits that include physical activity, healthy food, social connection, and stress reduction. The behavioral group support, provided by [Open Source Wellness](#), is currently delivered virtually and lasts for four-months.
- 3) **Provider Training:** State of the art trainings ensure that providers and frontline healthcare staff at primary care clinics understand the science and have the confidence to share information and deliver the interventions with diverse patients. Providers and staff are then responsible for screening patients and referring them to the Food Farmacy and/or the Behavioral Pharmacy.



“With the added stress and economic insecurity caused by the COVID pandemic - particularly for communities of color - the ALL IN Alameda County Food as Medicine initiative located at the Lifelong Ashby Health Center has arrived at a critical moment,” reflected Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson. “This program not only acknowledges how food and nutrition impact our overall health - but it also uses strategies like the Food Pharmacy and the Open Source Wellness program to reduce rates of anxiety, depression, and stress. With this innovative and holistic approach, it is my hope that we continue to break down barriers to food access and that more people in Alameda County will achieve greater health and well-being.”

“This innovative program has become one of Alameda County’s primary strategies for addressing health disparities, which have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, in our most vulnerable families and communities,” said Alameda County Supervisor Wilma Chan. “As we expand Food as Medicine countywide, I am grateful for the invaluable partnership with the Alameda Alliance for Health and our other partners that clearly demonstrates our collective commitment to addressing the root causes of health disparities.”

The Food as Medicine program is urgently needed given the issues county residents face: high rates of COVID-19 and high rates of food insecurity and chronic disease. Food insecurity, the lack of access to nutritious food to support a healthy life, is almost twice as prevalent in communities of color. Further, food insecurity is linked to various adverse health conditions like obesity, diabetes, and depression.

“Today, more than 130 million Americans are affected by chronic diseases that are often preventable, treatable, and reversible with food as medicine. COVID has highlighted the connection between chronic diseases and other crises we were facing prior to the pandemic—food insecurity, social isolation, and racism. COVID is requiring us to work differently across silos to advance health equity.” said Dr. Steven Chen, Chief Medical Officer of ALL IN.

ALL IN is part of a multi-sector collaboration of organizations aiming to expand Food as Medicine, reinvent public safety, eliminate poverty, and support local farms. The program also has sites at Native American Health Center, Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center, and Hayward Wellness Center. In addition, Stanford University, the University of California San Francisco, the Community Health Center Network, and Alameda Alliance for Health are working together to evaluate Food as Medicine’s impact on health outcomes, hospitalizations, and food insecurity.

With this multi-sector support, Food as Medicine leads a national movement to rebuild our food and healthcare systems and address upstream structural determinants of health, not only for the wellbeing of our residents, but also because rebuilding systems is our only hope to revitalize depleted soil, reduce carbon emissions, and fend off climate change.

To learn more about Food as Medicine efforts, visit <http://www.acgov.org/allin/>.