

Native American Health 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 September 1st, 2020 launch at Native American Health Center (NAHC). The program at NAHC, a community health center that provides health services to the Bay Area's Native American community and other underserved communities, builds upon the prior successful implementation of Food as Medicine at Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center.

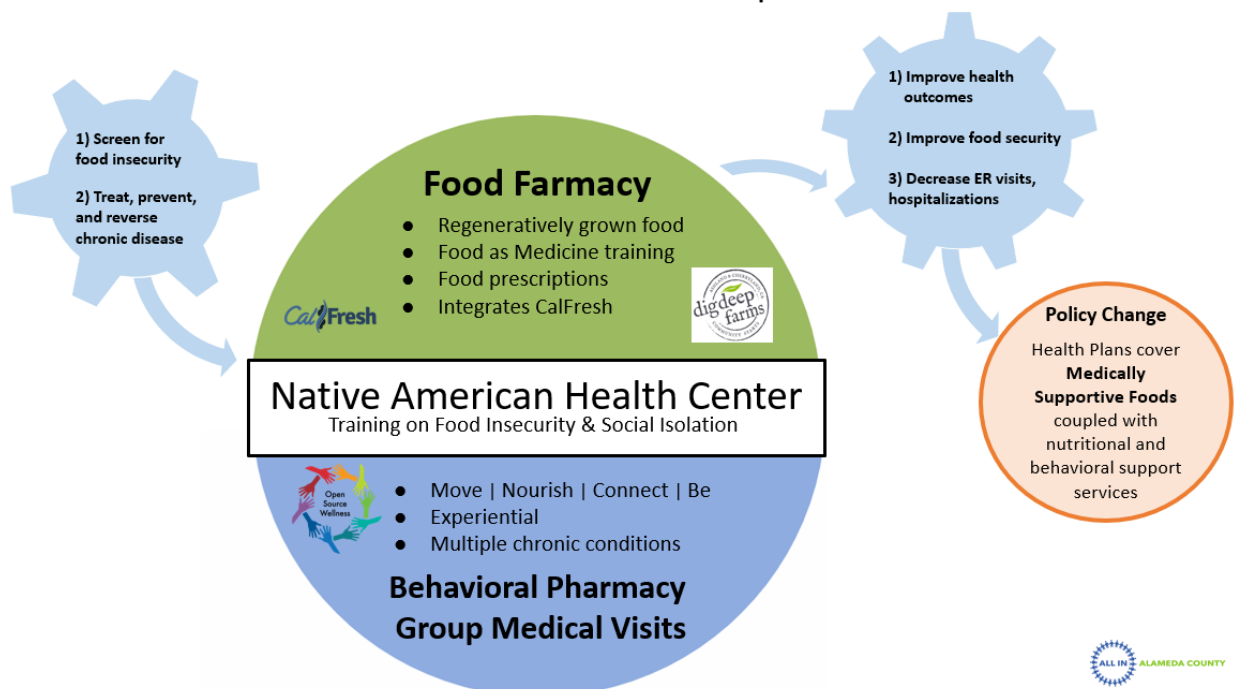
This most recent expansion of the Food as Medicine program was created thanks to funding support from Alameda Alliance for Health, the USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, and Stupski Foundation, and to our primary programmatic partners Dig Deep Farms and Open Source Wellness.

Food as Medicine addresses both chronic diseases and social determinants of health such as food insecurity and social isolation by bridging healthcare, agriculture, and food systems in Alameda County. By screening for food insecurity, establishing clinic-based interventions, and connecting with urban farms, Food as Medicine can treat, prevent, and reverse chronic conditions like diabetes and obesity, as well as prevent COVID-19 hospitalizations.

Food as Medicine builds two 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, and reduce ER visits and hospitalizations. The prescriptions are filled by Dig Deep Farms, which grows fresh produce using regenerative agriculture practices (pesticide-free, seasonal, highly nutrient dense, and local produce).
- 2) **Behavioral Pharmacy:** Group Medical Visits bring together multiple patients with various types of medical conditions to experience movement, nutrition education, social connection, and mindfulness practices under the guidance of health coaches from Open Source Wellness and a medical provider from the clinic.

ALL IN's Food as Medicine Initiative moves clinics upstream



Through the Food as Medicine program, primary care providers and staff will receive state-of-the-art training on nutrition, screen patients for food insecurity, and provide referrals to the “Food Farmacy.” The Food Farmacy will include four months’ worth of regeneratively grown fresh and nutrient-dense vegetables that will be delivered directly to patients’ residences. Additionally, eligible patients will be referred to a 16-week “Behavioral Pharmacy” Group Medical Visit facilitated by Open Source Wellness that has shifted to a virtual model in response to COVID-19.

“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 COVID-19, higher rates of food insecurity and chronic disease. Food insecurity, or the lack of access to nutritious food to support a healthy life, has been linked to various adverse health outcomes like obesity, diabetes, and depression. Individuals with chronic diseases have seen their conditions exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as Americans dealing with diabetes, chronic kidney disease, heart failure, and severe obesity are between 3-6 times more likely to be hospitalized due to COVID-19. In addition, food insecurity is far more prevalent in communities of color, including being almost twice as prevalent in African American and Native American communities.

“Today, more than 130 million Americans are affected by chronic diseases that are often preventable and reversible. And COVID has magnified the other health crises we were facing prior to the pandemic— food insecurity, social isolation, and racism,” said Dr. Steven Chen, Chief Medical Officer of ALL IN. “COVID is requiring all of us to do things differently. This partnership with Native American Health Center will advance health equity by transforming our systems of care to address both structural determinants of poor health and chronic disease through an integrated and actionable model.”

Since Food as Medicine’s inception, ALL IN has worked with a diverse group of partners and stakeholders to expand the initiative at clinic sites throughout the County. The program also has sites at Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center and Hayward Wellness Center, as well as smaller Food Farmacies operating at La Clinica de La Raza, Roots Community Health Center, and West Oakland Health Center. In addition, Stanford University, the University of California San Francisco, the Community Health Center Network (CHCN), and Alameda Alliance for Health are working together to evaluate Food as Medicine’s impact on health outcomes, hospitalizations, and food insecurity.

Food as Medicine sits within ALL IN’s overall strategy to address poverty through innovation and collaboration by integrating previously silo-ed work areas: food insecurity, chronic disease and healthcare, food systems and regenerative agriculture, and economic empowerment with a public safety lens. Food as Medicine also partners with the Alameda County Sheriff’s Community Capitals Policing initiative, which seeks to address root causes of crime by reinvesting in underserved communities. Community Capitals Policing has invested in the forming of Dig Deep Farms and its Food Hub which grows, aggregates, and distributes the fresh produce to the clinics, and has worked with Alameda County Probation to hire probationers for food delivery and urban farming jobs.

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