



Food As Medicine Clinic Update

Earlier this fall, ALL IN Alameda County (ALL IN) expanded its Food as Medicine initiative, launching 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 (San Leandro). And, ALL IN is thrilled that LifeLong Medical Center – Ashby Clinic will be launching the Food as Medicine program later this winter. Food as Medicine has been incredibly successful with its model based on Food Farmacies and Behavioral Pharmacy Group Medical Visits. The Dig Deep Farms Food Farmacy has reached over 600 food insecure people and/or those living with chronic disease and provided doorstep delivery of approximately 6,000 bags of food. By creating a demand for regeneratively grown foods for food prescriptions, there will be a need to build a network of urban farmers to supply this food for health. Open Source Wellness Behavioral Pharmacy Group Medical Visits continue to occur over video software providing much needed social connection, health coaching, and physical activity and nutrition support, especially during a renewed period of shelter-in-place.

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.

The Food as Medicine program is urgently needed given COVID-19, higher rates of food insecurity, chronic disease, and health equity. 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.” The Food as Medicine initiative is an innovative way Alameda County is working to address these challenging issues.

The expansion of ALL IN Alameda County’s Food as Medicine program is due to funding support from Alameda Alliance for Health, the USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, and Stupski Foundation, and through support of our primary programmatic partners Dig Deep Farms and Open Source Wellness. **We welcome opportunities to collaborate with other health and food systems working at these crossroads of food, agriculture, health, and equity.** Please get in touch with Maryruth if you’d like to learn more: maryruthbelsey.priebe@acgov.org.

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