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Health Care Without Harm, Healthy Food in Health Care Program

Policy Priority Areas

Investing in local and sustainable food initiatives and enterprises can play an important role in building community health, wealth, and climate resilience by growing a reliable regional food supply, increasing food access and affordability, and creating new job and ownership opportunities. In [Delivering community benefit: Healthy food playbook](#), Health Care Without Harm identified programs and partnerships pursuing “triple win” opportunities that improve healthy food access, support economic and workforce development, and strengthen local and sustainable food systems. Examples of such work in New England include the Vermont Community Foodbank’s Vermonters Feeding Vermonters program, which contracts with local farms to grow foods for distribution to its clients, and Community Servings’ medically tailored meal program, which incorporates locally sourced foods and includes a job training component. A new initiative seeks to build on existing partnerships and collaborations to catalyze further growth in the regional food system through comprehensive planning efforts. The [New England Feeding New England Partnership](#) is examining agricultural production, emergency preparedness, and food security with consideration for changing climate, environmental, and health conditions. Principles of equity and resilience serve as the foundation of this work to grow and strengthen the regional food system. New policies and programs focused on food system development can be designed to ensure equitable access to opportunities for building health and wealth. The outcome of these efforts will be a stronger, more resilient, regional food system capable of nourishing our communities on a daily basis and in the face of disruption.

Place-based project sites (for visits)

- [Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center/Franklin County Community Development Corporation](#): [Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center](#) (FPC) was created by Franklin County Community

Development Corporation in 2001 to support new and growing food businesses. In partnership with local farms, the FPC processes 150,000 pounds of local produce annually to produce Valley Veggies, a line of fresh frozen vegetables. As part of the Northeast Food Collective, FPC is collaborating with other regional processors to grow reliable and year round access to locally produced foods.

- Cooley Dickinson Hospital: Cooley Dickinson Hospital is a long time partner of Health Care Without Harm. Chef Gary Weiss takes part in Health Care Without Harm's Regional Leadership team and has been a leader in local food procurement. Cooley Dickinson's community focused efforts have engaged partners and community members in growing food access. In 2017, the hospital partnered with Healthy Hampshire to conduct a local food assessment. Cooley Dickinson [secured a grant](#) in 2020, through the Moving Massachusetts Upstream Investment fund, to support creation of the Hampshire County Food Policy Council to address healthy food access, a need identified in its recent Community Health Needs Assessment.
- UMass Carbon Farming Initiative: UMass is the site of a temperate climate silvopasture plot. Silvopasture systems combine trees with pastures to increase productivity and biosequestration of carbon. The UMass plot combines plantings of hybrid chestnut trees and pasture for rotational grazing of sheep.
- Springfield Food Policy Council: Under the leadership of Liz O'Gilvie, the Springfield Food Policy Council is working to address nutrition inequity and hunger in the community. Its work to increase access to fresh, affordable food includes expanding urban agriculture and partnering with the City of Springfield and Sodexo to establish the Springfield Culinary Nutrition Center.
- MAACHI: The [Alliance for Community Health Integration](#) Coalition, coordinated by Massachusetts Public Health Association, brings together public health, consumer advocacy, social service, and community organizations to engage health care to address social determinants of health and advance health equity.

Recently supported legislative actions:

- 1115 Waiver Recommendations to MassHealth
 - Massachusetts' 1115 Waiver designs MA state Medicaid system and must be renewed approximately every five years. Supported the inclusion of health care systems' addressing health-related social needs (e.g. food

insecurity) and reimbursement for services like Food is Medicine programs.

- MA Farm to School Grant Program
 - [This bill](#) was reintroduced by Senator Lesser and Representative Pignatelli in MA.
 - Establishes a competitive grant program to help more schools provide students with healthy, locally grown foods in school meals and support new markets for farmers and fishermen.
 - The proposed program supports infrastructure investments, staff training, and educational initiatives that lead to farm to school program success and sustainability; supporting local economies and regional food systems.
- CAAB368 - Medically Supported Food Prescriptions:
 - Aims to directly address racial and ethnic health disparities, combat chronic disease, and reduce health care costs as well as nutrition and food insecurity among Medi-Cal beneficiaries by establishing a two-year, food prescription pilot in partnership with the health plans
 - Food prescriptions are an effective medically supportive food intervention used to treat, reverse, and prevent chronic health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and depression.
 - Improving the health status, nutrition security, and overall resiliency of Medi-Cal beneficiaries is especially important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disproportionate impact it is having on low-income households and communities of color.

General policy recommendations:

- [USDA Supply Chain Recommendations](#)
- CMS address food insecurity and improve community resilience by supporting medically tailored nutrition interventions (including medically tailored meals, produce prescription programs and others):
 - Include medically tailored nutrition interventions as a covered/reimbursable service and expense;
 - Create nutritional and procurement criteria for these programs that address locally, sustainably, and equitably grown and produced food and beverages (consider leveraging the [Food Services Guidelines for Federal Facilities](#) for this);
 - Establish accountability measures for these programs to report against this criteria;

- Incentivize (through increased reimbursement/meal budget) these programs to source food and beverages that are locally, sustainably, and equitably grown and produced (i.e., purchasing medically-tailored meals prepared locally).
- CMS include procurement of locally, sustainably, and equitably grown and produced food and beverages, and food waste reduction, recovery and management in [Conditions for Coverage \(CfCs\) and Conditions of Participations \(CoPs\)](#).
 - Create nutritional and procurement criteria that addresses locally, sustainably, and equitably grown and produced foods (consider leveraging the [Food Services Guidelines for Federal Facilities](#));
 - Establish accountability measures to report against this criteria;
 - Incentivize (through increased reimbursement/meal budget) these programs to source foods that are locally, sustainably, and equitably grown and produced.
- Federal health care facilities conduct a comprehensive assessment of:
 - Current implementation of local, sustainable and equitable food and beverage purchasing, baselining this purchasing using available programs and tools being used by some institutional entities and municipalities (example tool: [Good Food Purchasing Program](#));
 - Progress made and barriers encountered in implementing the current [Food Services Guidelines for Federal Facilities](#) in both selling (in cafeteria) and serving (in patient service) food.
 - Use the information collected through the assessments above to establish criteria and set goals and targets related to local, sustainable and equitable food and beverage purchasing, and establish a tracking system with mandated regular reporting on progress.
- Health Care Without Harm and its partners recently launched the development of a food purchasing standard for local, sustainable and equitable procurement for use in hospitals, school, universities, municipalities and other institutional food sectors. This [Anchors in Action](#) food procurement standard will be integrated into and support the above recommendations.