Medi-Cal Healthier California for All (formerly CalAIM): Expanding Medically-Supportive Food and Nutrition Services
Opportunity: Section 1115 of the Social Security Act gives the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) the authority to waive certain Federal regulations or pieces of law in order to approve experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects outside the parameters of state plans. California’s 1115 Waiver expires in December 2020 and the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) is in the midst of preparing the renewal and update to the waiver. At the same time DHCS is also preparing their 1915b(3) waiver. The 1915b(3) waiver, also known as a Non-Medicaid Services Waiver, allows cost savings to provide additional services to beneficiaries. Medi-Cal Healthier California for All represents DHCS’s comprehensive waiver proposal meant to take effect January 2021. In North Carolina, Massachusetts and Oregon waivers have been used to provide food-based support to improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs.

California should join these pioneering states in their effort to support innovative prevention and treatment strategies. Both waivers provide an opportunity to include medically-supportive food and nutrition into the provision of Medi-Cal to improve health and reduce healthcare costs. The current CalAIM proposal incorporates home-delivered meals at discharge and medically tailored meals as “in lieu of” services for beneficiaries (see pages 159-160 of the Medi-Cal Healthier California for All Proposal) and is a natural starting point for incorporating additional medically-supportive food and nutrition services that can improve health and reduce healthcare costs.

Our Proposal to DHCS:
As part of the overall vision for Medi-Cal Healthier California for All and specifically in an attempt to improve outcomes for the state’s most vulnerable populations and reduce costs, we propose expanding medically-supportive food and nutrition services that address food insecurity -- a major social determinant of health -- and nutritional health into Medi-Cal. To accomplish this goal we propose the waiver include “Medically-Supportive Food and Nutrition Services” into its proposal as 1) an expansion of home-delivered and medically tailored meals which are currently included as in lieu of services and/or 2) through other mechanisms within the waiver that would enhance population health and care management. Healthy food and adequate nutrition are a fundamental part of treating, preventing, and managing chronic disease and can significantly improve a patient's quality of life and health status while also reducing health care costs. Expanding the definition of “Medically-Supportive Food and Nutrition Services” would extend allowable services to include other types of medically-supportive food and nutrition that improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs in addition to medically tailored meals, services which are already included in the current proposal. Evidence suggests that a broader range of healthy food supports beyond medically tailored meals can improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs. The level of care provided would range from prevention to treatment based on the level of acuity and need of the individuals.

Target Populations:
Meet the health needs-based criteria:
  ● being food insecure or at risk of food insecurity
AND meet at least one of the risk factors:
  ● living with a chronic condition or at risk for a chronic condition
  ● needing assistance with one or more documented activities of daily living or independent activities of daily living
  ● being pregnant and up to 24 months postpartum
  ● being homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
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- children and transitional age youth experiencing four or more categories of adverse childhood experiences

“Medically-Supportive Food and Nutrition Services” would include, but is not limited to:

- Direct medically-supportive food assistance
  - healthy food boxes, groceries, or meals to prevent or manage chronic disease
  - healthy food vouchers and food prescriptions to prevent or manage chronic disease, including but not limited to fruits and vegetables
  - medically tailored groceries
  - medically tailored meals

- Nutrition education, cooking education, and/or behavioral coaching and counseling, when paired with one of the forms of direct medically-supportive food assistance above

- Linkages to community-based food services (SNAP & WIC application assistance, food bank referrals)

- Transportation for accessing healthy food to prevent or manage chronic disease

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Supporters:

Health Related Organizations:
Adventist Health Ukiah Valley
Alameda Health Consortium
Alameda Health System
American Diabetes Association Northern California/Hawaii
APLA Health
Asian Health Services
Axis Community Health
California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems
California Conference of Local Health Officers
California Primary Care Association
Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County
Community Health Partnership
Eisner Health
Gardner Health Services
La Clínica De La Raza
LifeLong Medical Care
Los Angeles Christian Health Centers
Mendocino Community Health Clinic
Native American Health Center
North East Medical Services
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Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust
Roots Community Health Center
San Francisco Health Network
The Health Trust
Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center
University of California San Diego School of Medicine
University of California San Francisco
West Oakland Health

**Governmental Departments & Programs:**
Alameda County Health Care Services Agency
ALL IN Alameda County
Food as Medicine Collaborative
Go for Health! Santa Cruz County
San Francisco Department of Public Health
San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative

**Medical Societies & Associations:**
Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association
Doctors for America
Islamic Medical Association of North America
Napa County Medical Society
San Francisco Marin Medical Society
San Mateo County Medical Association
Sonoma County Medical Association

**Community Based Organizations**
Alameda County Community Food Bank
Blue Zones Projects Monterey County
California FarmLink
California Food is Medicine Coalition
California Food Policy Advocates
CCOF
Center for Care Innovations
Ceres Community Project
CUESA
Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council
Everyone’s Harvest
Farm Discovery at Live Earth
Food For Thought
Fresh Approach
IM4US
Leah’s Pantry
MAZON
Merced County Food Bank
Mesa Verde Gardens
North Coast Opportunities
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Nutrition and Fitness Collaborative of the Central Coast
Pajaro Valley Food Farming and Health Policy Council
Plumas-Sierra Community Food Council
Project Angel Food
Project Open Hand
Reach Out
Redwood Empire Food Bank
Regeneración - Pajaro Valley Climate Action
San Diego Food Bank
San Francisco Health Improvement Partnership (SF HIP)
Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County
Second Harvest of Silicon Valley
SF Marin Food Bank
Shape Up SF
Sierra Harvest
Slow Food California
SPUR
Teen Kitchen Project
The SF Market
Vouchers 4 Veggies: Eat SF
Western Center on Law and Poverty

References:

Health Impact of Medically-Supportive Food and Nutrition

Healthy food and adequate nutrition are a fundamental part of preventing, managing, and reversing chronic disease. CalAIM’s October 2019 proposal recognizes the value and health benefits of food supports and includes medically tailored meals (MTM) and home delivered meals as a covered benefit. Building on this great progress, CalAIM can generate more cost savings and improve health further by incorporating a broader spectrum of medically supportive foods into its proposal, including:

- Healthy food boxes, groceries, or meals
- Healthy food vouchers and food prescriptions
- Nutritional support when paired with medically supportive food

Evidence suggests that a broad range of healthy food support beyond medically tailored meals can improve health:

- HbA1c (avg blood sugar) 0.5-2.1% pts\(^1,2,4\)
- Blood Pressure -16 mmHg\(^6\)
- BMI -0.4-0.7 kg/m\(^2\)\(^5,6\)
- Preterm Birth 37% reduction\(^6\)
- Depression up to 47% reduction\(^5\)

Healthcare Savings

- Fewer ED visits\(^7\) and admissions\(^5\)
- 38% reduction in emergency transportation\(^7\)

$40-100B+

massive potential net savings\(^8\)

Benefits to expanding medically supportive beyond MTM

- Culturally Relevant: Allows patients to access culturally diverse foods beyond what might be prepared as part of medically tailored meals
- Sustainable: Less prescriptive diets/meals promote culinary practice and long term nutritional change
- Health Investment: Allows for broader reach of patients earlier on in disease course - promoting prevention and greater value
- Cost Effective: Reduces overhead of meal prep and delivery

References:

If one considers fresh healthy food to be the equivalent of a drug covered by insurance and provided by the health care system, then this is essentially a disease management program — just more successful than most.

Andrew T. Feinberg, MD referring to the Geisinger Health System ‘Farmacy’ program

Questions? Contact kettman@spur.org