

Care for the **Common Good**

Improving Healthy Food Access A Pillar of Good Health



Trinity Health is one of the largest not-for-profit, Catholic health care systems in the nation, serving diverse communities across 27 states. We advocate for public policies that promote the common good including sustaining our faith-based mission, improving community health, and growing our workforce while addressing the continuously shifting national health care system landscape.

Healthy Food Access Impacts Health Outcomes

Improving the health of individuals and communities is at the core of Trinity Health's Mission. This includes addressing social needs like access to healthy and affordable food. Food insecurity is defined as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. It is linked to some of the most common and costly health problems for all age groups including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and obesity. At Trinity Health, we believe food is medicine.

What Can Policymakers Do?

Increase Access to Healthy and Affordable Food

- Strengthen federal nutrition programs, i.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants, Children (WIC).
- Increase support for programs that link food insecurity to health such as produce prescriptions where patients are provided direct access to local food resources.
- Reimburse for evidence-based community nutrition, food-as-medicine, or medically-tailored meal programs in state Medicaid plans, 1115 waivers and managed care contracts.
- Strengthen access to and quality of school meal programs, including summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT).
- Reduce food deserts to improve accessibility to healthy, affordable food.
- Promote community gardens as empowering, economical and environmental opportunities.
- Provide incentives to manufacturers, retailers and farmers to reduce food waste by donating surplus healthy food.
- Ensure immigrants have access to nutrition program benefits without a waiting period.
- Support domestic efforts to promote climate resilience in food systems.

Strengthen SNAP

- Modernize SNAP eligibility guidelines to the low-cost food plan to provide critical food assistance and help promote economic stimulus.
- Improve access points for SNAP customers to receive healthy food, including online purchasing.
- Invest in technology and other administrative supports to promote SNAP benefit access.
- Maximize participation of retailers by maintaining cost-neutrality and helping them upgrade their technology to accept multiple payment methods, as needed.
- Streamline the SNAP application and renewal process.

Expand Nutrition Education

- Provide funding for heightened awareness and education about cultural and seasonal food preparation.
- Incorporate nutrition education into school meal programs.

By the Numbers¹

- 47 million people in the United States, including nearly 14 million children, face food insecurity.
- 37% of Americans who experience food insecurity do not qualify for federal nutrition programs.
- The direct and indirect health-related costs of hunger and food insecurity in the U.S. have been estimated to be \$160 billion.
- Participation in SNAP is associated with lower health care expenditures by approximately \$1,400 per person per year.

¹Sources: USDA. "Household Food Insecurity in the United States in 2023." 2024; Cook, J. T., & Poblacion, A. P. "Estimating the Health-Related Costs of Food Insecurity and Hunger." 2016; Berkowitz SA, Seligman HK, Rigdon J, Meigs JB, Basu S. "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation and Health Care Expenditures Among Low-Income Adults." 2017.

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Address Whole Person Needs

- Expand investments in social drivers of health including access to transportation, childcare, affordable housing and environmental health.
- Design population-based payment models that support care management and enable providers to identify and address social drivers of health.
- Provide stable opportunities for those who are uninsured to enroll in health insurance through marketplaces and Medicaid, including increasing the Medicaid Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAP).
- Provide reimbursement for community health worker education and outreach to address social and health needs.
- Expand access to broadband for all Americans with priority to those in medically underserved communities, including rural and tribal communities.

Trinity Health's Best Practices in Healthy Food Access Programs

Trinity Health Michigan: The Farm at Trinity Health

The Farm at Trinity Health – located in three ministries across Michigan in Ann Arbor, Oakland and Muskegon – provides community-centered food programs designed to improve health equity while investing in the local food system. The Farm is a part of a larger Trinity Health food is medicine initiative to address nutrition insecurity while improving health equity in our communities.

The Farm Share program provides locally sourced produce boxes and cooking education to members, 36 weeks a year. The Farm Share Assistance program connects more than 300 families to free memberships every year. The program has increased fruit and vegetable consumption by 1/3 cup per day per member and has improved food security by 125%. Participants have reported preparing more meals at home and becoming more confident in cooking with fresh foods. In fiscal 2025, The Farms grew close to 23,000 pounds of produce with a value of more than \$74,000 and created opportunities for 61,400 engagements with the community. Produce grown on the Farms support the Produce to Patients program, farm stands, on-site food pantries, and nutrition classes.

The Joan C. Dauber (JCD) Food Pantry at Trinity Health Of New England

Saint Francis Hospital has been serving the Hartford, Conn. community for more than four decades. Established in 1976 by Joan C. Dauber, a registered dietitian and U.S. Army veteran, the pantry was the first hospital-based food pantry in the U.S. It began as a small initiative helping discharged patients who had no access to nutritious food and has grown into a comprehensive program addressing food insecurity, a critical social determinant of health. Today, the pantry serves approximately 2,500 households monthly including patients, seniors, employees and members of the public. It provides nutritious whole foods, diapers, clothing and toiletries to families in need.

Beyond food assistance, the pantry is evolving to address broader social needs. Community Health Workers screen guests seeking food assistance to identify other non-medical needs that can be addressed and resolved during their visit, including connecting them to primary care services. It now incorporates connections to job readiness programs and workforce development resources specifically for at-risk youth, recognizing that economic stability is essential for long-term health and well-being. By linking food access, health education and employment support, the pantry helps reduce preventable hospitalizations and advances health equity in the community.

Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic: Fresh Connect

The Fresh Connect Program is a free mobile farmers market bringing fresh produce to four sites in Bucks County, Pa. with the support of local farmers, food banks, volunteers and community partners. The program serves 750 families weekly. The Farmbox program is a weekly distribution to community sites, physician practices and hospitals, providing fresh produce from local organic farmers. There are nine sites across the regional health system. Prepared and medically tailored meals are provided to patients with hypertension, congestive heart failure (CHF) and diabetes. This service reduces disparities and improves health outcomes.

Mission

We, Trinity Health, serve together in the spirit of the Gospel as a compassionate and transforming healing presence within our communities.

Core Values

Reverence • Commitment to Those Experiencing Poverty • Safety • Justice • Stewardship • Integrity