



Food Pharmacy Explainer

A food pharmacy, also called a “food farmacy,” is a community-based program that provides people with access to nutritious foods to help them prevent or manage health conditions. Food pharmacies are part of the growing “[food is medicine](#)” movement. Like medically tailored meal programs, food pharmacies use food as a tool to help manage health conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity, potentially reducing the need for medication or medical care.

How are they like and unlike senior nutrition programs?

Like senior nutrition programs, food pharmacies help address food insecurity and malnutrition within communities. They also often educate participants on topics such as food groups and managing chronic diseases.

Unlike senior nutrition programs, food pharmacies typically offer produce and other groceries that people take home to prepare – not home-delivered or congregate meals. Also, food pharmacies aren’t necessarily limited to serving just seniors. Though some focus only on older adults, others help anyone with a particular health condition (e.g., type 2 diabetes) or serve any community member in need.

How are they different from food pantries?

Food pantries are sites within communities that simply distribute food to those in need. Unlike food pharmacies, the food people receive from food pantries is not tailored to an individual’s health or medical needs.

How do they work?

In many food pharmacy programs, health care providers “prescribe” healthy foods to patients with specific medical conditions or nutritional needs, such as prediabetes

or high blood pressure. The prescriptions serve an important purpose — they provide the food pharmacy with information to ensure participants receive nutritious foods tailored to their health or medical needs.

In other food pharmacies, no prescription or formal referral is required. Potential participants can self-refer or be referred by friends, social workers, or other community-based organizations.

Food pharmacies' operating models can also vary. Some work with food pantries and other partners to stock produce and other nutritious foods for direct delivery to participants. In other models, the food pharmacy gives participants vouchers that can be redeemed for free or discounted food at partnering grocery stores, local farms, or farmer's markets.

Where are they located?

Settings can also vary. Some food pharmacies have permanent physical locations within hospitals, clinics, schools, and other community spaces, including shopping malls! Others use pop-up or mobile formats to bring healthy foods and education directly to communities, especially those that are more rural.

Who can benefit?

- People who need access to more healthy foods than your senior nutrition program can provide.
- Senior nutrition program participants who need extra help managing high blood pressure, diabetes, or other health conditions through food choices.
- People who have been placed on your program's waitlist.
- Program participants raising grandchildren or with other household members who cannot receive Older Americans Act services.

How can nutrition programs work with food pharmacies?

Food pharmacies provide a much-needed and valuable community resource, offering services that complement those provided by senior nutrition programs. Start by finding out if you have a food pharmacy in your area. Conduct an internet search, ask local health care professionals, and check with other community-based organizations and partners.

If your community has a food pharmacy, get to know them. Build connections so you can:

- Educate them about your senior nutrition program and the services you offer.
- Find opportunities to partner, like hosting a joint event, to educate people in your community about the valuable services both programs offer.
- Think about current participants who might benefit from a food pharmacy and assist those participants by making an introduction to your local food pharmacy contact.

And, if there is not a food pharmacy in your community, advocate for one!

Learn more

Want to advocate for a food pharmacy in your community but wondering where to begin? Here are a few examples of how communities around the country have successfully launched food pharmacies:

- California: [Just what the doctor ordered: In California, a prescription could pay for your fresh fruits and veggies.](#)
- Connecticut: [Food Farmacy Officially Opens at CIFIC's Danbury Community Center.](#)
- Florida: [First 'food pharmacy' in shopping mall works to help those struggling with access to healthy foods.](#)
- Ohio: [Community Partners Come Together to Pledge Further Commitment to Addressing Hunger in Greater Cleveland.](#)
- Texas: ['Food Farmacies' serving food-insecure patients are coming to more Harris County health centers.](#)