New Study in JAMA Network Open Models the Significant National Healthcare Cost Savings of the Medically Tailored Meals Model

By Emily Ballou, Communications Associate

Breaking News: New research shows that medically tailored meals are associated with positive health outcomes and lower costs of care for patients with chronic and serious illness. The study demonstrates the power of MTMs if implemented nationwide: 1.5M fewer hospitalizations and a net cost savings of $13.6 billion in the first year.

JAMA Network Open features a compelling new study out of the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy showcasing the power and promise of medically tailored meals for those living with diet-related illnesses across the country: Association of National Expansion of Insurance Coverage of Medically Tailored Meals with Estimated Hospitalizations and Healthcare Expenditures in the US.

Previous research has shown that the Food Is Medicine Coalition medically tailored meal (MTM) model is associated with improved health outcomes and lower cost of care for patients with complex chronic and severe illnesses, but the intervention is still not a covered benefit in Medicare, Medicaid or private insurance funding streams. No prior study has modelled the efficacy of universal implementation.

The outcomes are stunning: If all eligible patients received access to MTMs, in just the first year of service 1,594,000 hospitalizations could be avoided for a net cost savings of $13.6 billion.

Even in modeling subgroups, savings was robust. Individuals living with food insecurity, diabetes or cardiovascular disease evidenced compelling savings on top of the aggregate.

“With medically tailored meals, patients are treated using the power of food and put on a steady path toward healing,” Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, Jean Mayer Professor at the Friedman School said.

This groundbreaking and thoughtful analysis by Kurt Hager and colleagues considers FIMC’s years of innovation at the nexus of healthcare and nutrition. Over 35 years ago, FIMC agencies created the medically tailored meal intervention and now maintain nationwide nutrition and quality standards. Our coalition leveraged this history of healthcare partnership and innovation to supply input data for the economic...
modelling, and many of the published peer-reviewed studies used for analysis were conducted by independent researchers and evaluated the impact of MTM interventions provided by FIMC agencies.

This study demonstrates that including medically tailored meals in healthcare is not simply the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do: MTMs reduce costs, improve health and change lives. Diet-related illnesses disproportionately impact BIPOC communities, low-income families, and older Americans – the exact population that FIMC agencies serve. Medically tailored meals are one of the least expensive and most effective ways to improve our healthcare system in an equitable way.

The MTM model is still not a covered benefit in Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurance funding streams. No study before this has modeled the efficacy of universal implementation. These results may inform US state, federal, and private-payer interest in expanding insurance coverage for MTMs among patients with diet-related chronic illness.

The National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition and Health supports legislative pilots to test covering medically tailored meals for individuals in traditional Medicare who are experiencing diet-related health conditions. It also promises increased guidance and authority from CMS for states wishing to use Medicaid section 1115 demonstration projects to test the expansion of coverage for food is medicine interventions. The need could not be more compelling, and the evidence could not be more convincing to move swiftly forward on these initiatives.

God’s Love We Deliver is thrilled that this analysis is now part of the national conversation around incorporating MTMs as a benefit into healthcare.
Food Is Medicine Coalition Featured in Gastropod

A podcast that looks at food through the lens of science and history, Gastropod's latest episode “Prescription Dinner: Can Meals Be Medicine?” asks, how do medically tailored meals (MTMs) work?
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Medically tailored meals are one of the least expensive and most effective ways to improve our healthcare system in an equitable way. A new original study by the Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Science and Policy ...
Karen Pearl, God's Love President & CEO, spoke on a "Food is Medicine" panel at the Biden-Harris Administration's White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. Medically tailored meals (MTM) and “Food Is Medicine”...