

Food Day is a nationwide celebration of healthy, affordable, and sustainably produced food as well as a grassroots campaign for better food policies. It builds all year long and culminates today on October 24. Like World Food Day on October 16, national Food Day aims to help people Eat Real. That means eating more vegetables, fruits and whole grains. This annual event involves some of the country's most prominent food activists, united by a vision of food that is healthy, affordable, and produced with care for the environment, farm animals, and the people who grow, harvest and serve it.

At God's Love, we serve our clients hand-cooked meals tailored to provide each person with the nutrition they need to address their unique medical condition. Our meals contain no preservatives or additives, and our vegetables and proteins are chopped and the dough for our nutritious desserts is rolled by 8,000 volunteers annually. Throughout our 28 years of service, nutrition – not just food, but the *right* food – has been our signature difference. If any organization understands the influence of healthy food on people's lives, it is the God's Love community. And we are just beginning to promote the enormous impact healthy eating and the right food policies can have on our nation's health as a whole.

Recently, the Kaiser Family Foundation released **a report** that detailed how the most costly cohort of patients in America are the 1 percent who are battling multiple chronic illnesses. Cycling in and out of hospitals and other institutions, they consumed 21 percent of the nearly 1.3 trillion dollars Americans spent on health care in 2010, at a cost of nearly \$88,000 per person. Surgeon Carnell Cooper, vice president of medical affairs for Prince George's Hospital Center, where more than 50 percent of patients are uninsured or underinsured, says that more effectively managing the 1 percent is "a huge problem for us and for the health-care system in general. We are well aware from a quality perspective that we have to work on decreasing readmissions."

A vast majority of God's Love clients are at risk of becoming part of this very 1 percent, as they struggle with multiple co-morbidities, many of which are chronic, and the individually-tailored meals that we provide help stabilize their food source and keep them healthy, and in their homes and out of more expensive forms of care.

This has great implications for cost-savings and health outcomes for high-risk, high-need beneficiaries, given that malnutrition is one of the greatest contributors to hospitalization, re-admission and nursing home care nationally. **1 in 3 people nationwide are admitted to the hospital malnourished.** Food and nutrition services (FNS) is often forgotten as a remedy, even though it is an inexpensive treatment that addresses this root cause of institutionalization. One can feed a person a diet designed for their unique combination of illnesses for \$20/day, whereas a hospital stay is upwards of \$4,000/day.

To put this in perspective, MANNA, a sister FNS agency in Philadelphia, recently mounted a rigorous study matching 65 MANNA clients to 633 clients at a managed care organization (MCO) to compare healthcare costs on and off the MANNA FNS program. The results were stunning. Average health care costs for MANNA clients fell 62% for 3 months after beginning services (for a total of almost \$30,000). The impact of feeding patients the right food for their diagnoses is undeniable. **Check out the MANNA study on their website.**

When we at God's Love discuss better food policy on Food Day, we are not just talking about farm to table; we are talking about guaranteeing that nutritious food makes it to where it will make a very big difference: to those patients who are struggling with multiple chronic illnesses and would most benefit from medical nutrition therapy. We believe that any plan to improve health – and healthcare – in our country, including the roll out of the major programs of the Affordable Care Act in the coming year, must not fail to include food and nutrition services for this population. The research dictates that this must be done.