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Food is Medicine: In the News and on the Stage

By [Natasha Bunzl](#), Communications Associate

It's been a great week for the [Food is Medicine Coalition](#) (FIMC) and God's Love We Deliver! On Sunday, five FIMC members, including God's Love, represented by Alissa Wassung, Director of Policy & Planning, participated in [The Root Cause Coalition's](#) 4th Annual Summit on the Social Determinants of Health. On Monday, journalist Larry Buhl's op-ed "[To Treat Chronic Ailments, Fix Diet First](#)", arguing for the importance of medically tailored meals, was published in the New York Times. It's exciting to see the national conversation shift towards recognizing that, as our President & CEO Karen Pearl argued at the 50th Anniversary of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health: "We will never reach our healthcare goals of improving outcomes and lowering costs without fully integrating the medically tailored meal intervention into healthcare."

At the Summit, the nutrition equity session brought together experts in the field to discuss expanding access to medically tailored nutrition. Our Alissa Wassung, sat on a panel titled [Addressing the Nutrition Needs of Vulnerable Populations](#) to share the expertise that God's Love We Deliver has developed over almost 35 years. This panel sought to identify strategies to expand access to nutrition services for vulnerable populations. Alissa highlighted our work for the LGBTQ+ community, children with pediatric cancer and their families, and senior caregivers. God's Love has a long history of serving people dealing with hidden hunger. What began in 1985 as an urgent response to the HIV epidemic has grown to address 200+ diagnoses. We still maintain a strong connection to the LGBTQ+ community, which is disproportionately affected by food insecurity, and now we start our days asking who else might be dealing with hidden hunger and malnutrition: food insecurity behind closed doors.



Alissa with our colleagues from the Food is Medicine Coalition

On news stands across the country, Buhl's piece focuses on a pilot run by Medi-Cal, California's version of Medicaid, which studies the benefits of medically tailored meals for patients living with congestive heart failure. He reports that this disease has some of the highest rates of re-hospitalization, and its treatment requires a strict and expensive diet. This is difficult for anyone to follow, but can be particularly challenging for low income patients. In the article, Buhl quotes Tanvir Hussain, a clinical cardiologist and [Project Angel Food](#) board member, who says that unless congestive heart failure patients follow dietary guidelines, the drug therapy doesn't work to keep them out of the hospital.

Buhl's reporting focuses both on the financial benefits of providing medically tailored meals, and also on how this intervention allows patients to maintain full and healthy lives. He frames the article with the story of Diane Henry, a congestive heart failure patient who says that since receiving medically tailored meals, she has more energy and has lost weight. "What I want to do is be able to take a long walk, go dancing. And wear my heels! I'm 54 and I still have a lot of life left." Buhl concludes with Dr. Bernard Lewin, who argues that medically tailored meals represent a "shift in thinking from a problem-based medical delivery system to a holistic, wellness-focused preventive maintenance." God's Love We Deliver leads the Food Is Medicine Coalition and is honored to partner with our peer medically tailored meal organizations.

Together, we are working to make the healthcare system focus on *health* and not just illness.

It is an exciting moment in the Food is Medicine movement. As the healthcare system is coming to recognize that food and nutrition services are an integral component of keeping people healthy and bringing people from illness to wellness, we are certain to see more actions like the Medi-Cal pilot.

"We know that food insecurity and malnutrition exacerbate existing disparities in health outcomes, but medically tailored meals are an affordable, noninvasive intervention that support patients and cost less for the health care system."

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God's Love Hosts the FIMC Accelerator

In April, God's Love hosted colleagues from across the country for three days of learning as part of the Food is Medicine Coalition Accelerator program.