

9.18.20 / [Community](#)

# Reflecting on 10 Years of the Food is Medicine Coalition

By [Karen Pearl, President & CEO](#)

Dear Community,

This week marks the completion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Food is Medicine Coalition Symposium. The Symposium is attended by our peer organizations in the [Food is Medicine Coalition](#) (FIMC), an association of nonprofit, medically tailored food and nutrition services (FNS) providers from across the country. God's Love is the convener of FIMC, and I have the honor of being its chair. While we were saddened to not be able to meet in-person, everyone really stepped up the plate to make our first virtual Symposium a *huge* success, sharing best practices, championing food is medicine, and learning and laughing all along the way.

The Symposium is the culmination of the year-long staff development program for medically tailored food and nutrition services agencies on advocacy, research and best practices for the MTM intervention at local, state and national levels, as well as an avenue for updates and education about advocacy efforts for all member organizations nationwide. Each year, FIMC organizations gather at our Symposium to advocate for access to medically tailored meals (MTM), a low-cost, high-impact intervention for sick and low-income people in our communities. We discuss best practices in medically tailored nutrition, research in the field and healthcare innovation projects across the country. Of particular focus this year was the introduction of **the Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meal Demonstration Pilot Act of 2020 (H.R. 6774)**, as well as **the innovations organizations have made to manage through and succeed during COVID-19 and how we can best address systemic racism and its impact on health disparities in our communities.**

It is with great pride that we look back on a decade of convenings from this, our 10<sup>th</sup> annual Food is Medicine Coalition Symposium. FIMC agencies have made enormous strides this year on all fronts, especially in how we have managed to ramp up services during COVID-19, while keeping our staff, volunteers and clients safe. We are witnessing important transformation in healthcare services, where medically tailored meals are more and more integrated into treatment plans because of their positive impact on the health of people living with severe and chronic illness while also controlling the cost of health care. And, what will continue to drive innovation is our success in advocacy that will make it possible one day for all people who need our meals to have access to them through health plans, including Medicaid and Medicare.

To this end, earlier this year, members of the Bipartisan Food is Medicine Working Group – Congressman Jim McGovern (MA), Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (ME), Congressman Roger Marshall (KS), and Congresswoman Jackie Walorski (ID) – introduced the Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meal Demonstration Pilot Act of 2020. This bill, when passed, will establish a Medicare pilot program to address the critical link between diet, chronic illness, and the health of older adults. This pilot will ensure that medically vulnerable seniors get access to lifesaving medically tailored meals in their home, while providing the outcomes data we need to build a more resilient and cost-effective health care system. Both goals are even more critical during the pandemic, as FNS providers endeavor to keep the elderly – especially those living with severe and chronic illnesses – healthy and at home. With little to no federal funding for medically tailored meals at present, this bill demonstrates progress toward sustainability for this unique service in the future.

As essential service providers, FIMC agencies have been serving ever more clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Every organization in FIMC experienced a surge in demand due to COVID, and all had to alter operations in a variety of ways to meet demand while cooking and delivering in a safe way. At the Symposium, it was invigorating to hear all of our different organizations share how we streamlined menus, implemented no-contact deliveries and other health protocols, worked with volunteers, and continued to meet the needs of our clients every step of the way.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights what medically tailored meal providers have known for 35 years: the right food and nutrition are key to helping those living with severe and chronic illnesses stay at home and out of the hospital. The COVID-19 pandemic has also illuminated the deep impact of healthcare disparities on communities of color, those who are at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19.

Effectively addressing the social determinants of health such as access to healthy, nutritious food and to housing, has emerged as key to advancing the health of communities and combating structural racism.

Ten years ago, few people were saying “Food Is Medicine.” Both at God’s Love and with our FIMC colleagues, we worked hard to get meetings with elected officials and policy makers to share with them, at the local, state, and federal levels, how our meals truly make a difference in the health and well-being of our clients. With hard work, coalition building, and constant learning and education, I am so proud of what FIMC has accomplished with the introduction of our MTM Bill, having real champions for our work at all levels of government, and the increased strength of our Coalition in both advocacy and research.

The Symposium was full of sessions where participants discussed best practices in medically tailored nutrition, research in the field, and healthcare innovations projects from across the country. In order to continue to seize the opportunity of having a virtual Symposium, this year we included three additional learning tracks in addition to Policy — Nutrition, Operations and Development – each with their own offerings. Topics included cultural competence, renal nutrition, and standards for medically tailored groceries in the Nutrition Track; databases, scaling, and shipping in the Development track; and Planned Giving, year-end planning, and event planning in the Development Track. Thank you to all of our facilitators and presenters for sharing your knowledge and expertise with us.

I’d like to give a *very* special thank you to our keynote speaker, self-care expert & culture shift educator/podcast producer Dr. Janet Taylor, M.D. MPH. Dr. Taylor encouraged us to move toward racial equity in all of our work by continuing to develop our programs in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways, having staff who reflect the communities that we serve, and centering the client experience in all that we do.

In addition to many expert speakers from individual members of the Food is Medicine Coalition, the Symposium featured speakers from: The Rockefeller Foundation, The Root Cause Coalition, Kaiser Permanente, Manatt Health, Nonprofit Finance Fund, The Aspen Institute, Tufts University and the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation at Harvard Law School, among others.

I think no one among us will forget the closing remarks by Congressman Jim McGovern, a longtime champion of the Food is Medicine Coalition and Chair of the House Congressional Caucus. I know we all cheered on our screens when, in discussing the proposal pilot legislation that he introduced this year, we heard him say *“Advocacy matters. If I had not been exposed to [FIMC], I wouldn’t have gone to medically tailored meals. You have educated me. Advocacy works! We wouldn’t be introducing this bill if it weren’t for the people on this call.”*

Food insecurity and chronic illness afflict more than 100 million Americans. The Food is Medicine Coalition speaks for the growing body of scientific [research](#) that shows chronically ill patients who receive medically tailored meals experience better health outcomes. These studies have also found that medically tailored meals are an inexpensive solution that significantly reduces healthcare costs for the sickest among us.

We also want to give our heartfelt thanks to our great friend, chef, television personality, and author Chef Amanda Freitag who hosted a phenomenal cooking demonstration of her classic Kale and Tomato Stew – beyond delicious and, a great way to close out our program!

The Symposium is truly a highlight of the year, bringing together our peer organizations, learning from each other and outside experts, and sharing all that we know. And what we know is this: that medically tailored meals help lower healthcare costs, improve patient outcomes, and improve patient satisfaction.

The FIMC National Symposium underscores the power of this common sense, non-pharma-based treatment. We already look forward to the next ten years of success!

## **Related Blog Posts**



6.18.21 / Policy

## **Congrats to Danielle Christenson on making the NYC Food Policy 40 under 40 list!**

Each year, The Hunger College New York City Food Policy Center releases a class of the city's 40 individuals under 40 who are working to transform and improve the food system. We are honored to have had many staff membe...



6.9.21 / Policy

## **Congressman Jim McGovern Volunteers and Talks #FoodIsMedicine**

On Monday, June 7, Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, Chair of the Committee on Rules in the House and Co-Chair of the House Hunger Caucus visited God's Love for a tour and a volunteer shift. Congressman McGovern is a ...



4.9.21 / Policy

## **National Public Health Week: National Medically Tailored Meal Policy Recommendations**

The vital themes of this year's National Public Health Week – especially advancing racial equity, strengthening community, building COVID-19 resistance and elevating the essential and health workforce – resonate deeply with o...