

# Policy At A Glance:

## Medi-Cal: Medically Supportive Food and Nutrition Interventions (A.B. 1975)

*Medically supportive food and nutrition interventions help prevent and manage chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension. This brief provides an overview of AB 1975 and additional healthy food incentive programs in California.*

### Introduction

In 2023, nearly 4.2 million households in California participated in one or more of the three largest nutrition programs offered through the government: CalFresh, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and school meals.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, nearly 1.5 million households experienced food insecurity, or the condition of not having access to sufficient food to meet one's basic needs.<sup>1,2</sup> Access to healthy and nutritious foods is critical to health and resilience.<sup>3</sup>

Passed out of the California State Legislature on August 29, 2024, Medi-Cal: medically supportive food and nutrition interventions (AB 1975) aims to make medically supportive food and nutrition interventions a covered benefit under Medi-Cal.<sup>4</sup> Medically supportive food and nutrition interventions refer to a variety of interventions that provide nutrient rich food to prevent, treat, or reverse diet-sensitive health conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension.<sup>5,6</sup>

This brief provides an overview of AB 1975 and medically supportive food and nutrition incentive programs in California.

### Nutrition Security and Health Statistics

- 39%** Of adults in California experience food insecurity.<sup>7</sup>
- 45%** Of undocumented immigrants in California are affected by food insecurity.<sup>7</sup>
- 49.2%** Of households in California receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits have children.<sup>8</sup>
- 34.8%** Of children in California are obese.<sup>9</sup>
- 30.3%** Of adults in California are obese.<sup>10</sup>

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## Medically Supportive Food and Nutrition

Research has shown that many chronic diseases begin early in life, especially for minority populations who experience limited access to healthy food and medical care.<sup>11,12</sup> Access to healthy and nutritious food is fundamental for treating and preventing chronic diseases and is essential for overall health and wellbeing.<sup>2,12</sup> The food as medicine approach emphasizes the role of food and nutrition in supporting health and wellness through various interventions, including produce and groceries prescriptions, medically tailored meals, and nutrition education.<sup>13,14</sup> This approach includes using food as preventative medicine to enhance overall health and wellbeing and to improve nutrition security.<sup>13</sup>

Between 2018-2023, the Medically Tailored Meals (MTM) pilot program was established to provide medically tailored meals to eligible Medi-Cal beneficiaries with certain health conditions, including cancer, renal disease, diabetes, congestive heart failure, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.<sup>4,14,15</sup> As a result of this program, patients had improved health outcomes, including a 17% reduction in patients with poor diabetes control. Additionally, medically tailored meals led to savings of 16% in health care costs for patients with complex needs and over \$220 saved in healthcare costs per patient per month.<sup>14</sup>

Building upon the MTM pilot program, AB 1975 aims to make medically supportive food and nutrition interventions a covered benefit under Medi-Cal through a two-phase process. First, AB 1975 will assemble an Advisory Workgroup to assist the Department of Health Care Services in developing benefit guidance.<sup>16</sup> Then, in the second phase, it will require medically supportive food and nutrition interventions to be covered when determined to be medically necessary by a healthcare provider starting in July 2026.<sup>4,16</sup>

## White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health

On September 28, 2022, President Biden hosted the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. During the conference, the Biden-Harris Administration announced their goal of “ending hunger and increasing healthy eating and physical activity in the U.S. by 2030 so that fewer Americans experience diet related diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.”<sup>18</sup> For more information, please refer to IHPL’s December 2022 Issue Brief, titled [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#). The Conference catalyzed public and private sectors to invest a total of \$8 billion to accelerate progress and drive transformative change in the U.S. to end hunger and nutrition.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as a result of this Conference, the Administration launched the White House Challenge to End Hunger and Build Healthy Communities in February 2024.<sup>20</sup> Through the Challenge, 141 stakeholders invested nearly \$1.7 billion in efforts to end hunger and reduce diet-related disparities.<sup>18,20</sup>



# Healthy Food Incentive Programs in California

## California Nutrition Incentive Program

Started in 2015, the California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) is a state initiative aimed at increasing access to fresh, healthy foods for low-income Californians by providing matching funds to individuals who benefit from federal nutrition assistance programs. By promoting the purchase of locally grown produce, CNIP aims to improve the diets of low-income families while also supporting local farmers. Furthermore, CNIP offers grant funding to organizations to provide incentives for nutrition benefits for individuals and to support outreach efforts.<sup>21</sup>

## CalFresh Healthy Living (SNAP-Ed)

Federally known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed), the CalFresh Healthy Living program is the largest nutrition education program in the nation. The program aims to improve the health of Californians through health and nutrition education, community changes, and increased physical activity.<sup>22</sup> It supports healthy lifestyles by teaching adults about good nutrition and how to stretch their food dollars, while also building partnerships in communities to make healthy choices easier. This initiative enhances the nutritional health of low-income Californians by providing access to nutrition and physical activity education and promoting leadership in healthy community initiatives.<sup>23</sup>

## Market Match

The Market Match program is an initiative funded by the CNIP and is aimed at promoting

healthy eating by matching customers' federal nutrition assistance benefits, such as CalFresh and Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC), at farmers' markets and other direct-to-farm sites.<sup>24,25</sup> By providing financial incentives, Market Match empowers low-income individuals and families to make healthier food choices and supports the local economy and community engagement by utilizing the benefits of farmers' markets.<sup>24,26</sup> The program is available at over 240 locations across 38 counties and is operated by over 50 community-based organizations and farmers' market operators throughout California.<sup>26</sup>

## WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) offers low-income pregnant and post-partum women coupons or electronic benefits to purchase fresh produce from authorized farmers and markets in addition to their regular WIC benefits.<sup>27,28</sup> Furthermore, the WIC-FMNP teaches participants how to select, store, and prepare fresh produce in an effort to increase the consumption of healthy local foods.<sup>27</sup>

## Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

Similar to the WIC-FMNP, the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) offers low-income seniors with coupons or electronic benefits to purchase fresh, nutritious, locally grown produce through Certified Farmers' Markets.<sup>29</sup> SFMNP benefits are provided to individuals aged 60 and over who have household incomes of not more than 185% of the federal poverty income guidelines.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

Medically supportive food and nutrition interventions have been proven successful in treating and managing chronic conditions.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, researchers estimate that these interventions could save nearly \$100 billion in healthcare costs.<sup>32</sup> These targeted interventions have been shown to reduce inpatient hospitalizations by 63% and reduce emergency department visits by 58%.<sup>31</sup> By promoting the use of medically supportive food and nutrition interventions, AB 1975 can enable more patients to improve their health while reducing overall healthcare costs. Before it can go into effect, however, AB 1975 needs to be signed by the Governor, who has until September 30 to sign or veto.

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## Did you know?

Unhealthy diets have led to 678,000 deaths annually in the U.S. due to nutrition and obesity-related diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.<sup>33</sup>



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