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FIMC (California) Contact: Delfin Vigil, dvigil@openhand.org or (415) 259-1247

Senator McGuire Contact: Kerrie Lindecker, Kerrie.Lindecker@sen.ca.gov or (707) 319-3654

The Health Trust Contact: Paul Hepfer, paulh@healthtrust.org or (408) 961-9845

Governor Brown approves 'Food Is Medicine' \$6 million program for California's chronically ill

Goal to enhance health outcomes expected to save taxpayers millions

Sacramento, CA – Governor Jerry Brown today approved a \$6 million innovative healthy food pilot project for low income Californians with chronic health diseases. The Food Is Medicine based program, which drew staunch support from State Senator Mike McGuire, and State Assemblymembers Phil Ting and David Chiu, among other legislators, is expected to save taxpayers millions.

The \$6 million project will be used over a three year pilot project period supporting a Food Is Medicine Coalition that includes **Project Open Hand** in San Francisco, **Ceres Community Project** and **Food For Thought** in the North Bay Area, **The Health Trust** in Santa Clara County, **Project Angel Food** in Los Angeles and **Mama's Kitchen** in San Diego. The funds will target chronically ill Medi-Cal patients who suffer from congestive heart failure, cancer, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or renal disease.

The funding for this pilot project is included in SB 97, a budget bill that was voted on and approved in the Senate on Monday afternoon (June 26) and signed into legislation by Governor Jerry Brown Tuesday (June 27).

The soon-to-be launched program is modeled off of work in Philadelphia by the organization **Manna**. There, the pilot project demonstrated after delivering three medically tailored meals each day to 65 patients with chronic diseases for six months, their healthcare costs dropped from \$38,937 per month to \$28,183 per month and were 55 percent lower than other groups in [the study](#).

After working hand-in-hand with members of the statewide [Food Is Medicine Coalition](#), Senator McGuire embarked on a crusade to get funding secured in the budget for a statewide pilot program to include medically-tailored, home-delivered meals that are appropriate for the individual's chronic diseases. He described the work of coalition as "life changing."

"We couldn't be more excited to turn this local success story into a statewide program that will improve the health of those who need it most while reducing costs for taxpayers over the long term," Senator McGuire said. "The bottom line: We believe, over the next three years, we'll demonstrate enhanced health outcomes for chronically ill Medi-Cal patients and save millions in health care costs."

California State **Assemblymembers Phil Ting and David Chiu** strongly supported

funding for this medically tailored meals project. Chiu sponsored the budget ask in the state assembly subcommittee in support of food as medicine. Alongside Chiu was **Assemblymember Blanca E. Rubio**, among others who testified in support. **State Senators Scott Wiener** and **Nancy Skinner** were also vocal supporters of the project.

A key catalyst that drove funding for this new pilot project included the results of a **UCSF/ Project Open Hand “Food Is Medicine”** research study that evaluated the impact of a medically tailored meal program for San Francisco and Alameda County residents with Type 2

Diabetes, HIV and/or dual diagnosis. The results, published earlier this year in the peer-reviewed [Journal of Urban Health](#) demonstrated a significant reduction in hospitalization (63%), an increase in medication adherence (50%) and a drop in ER visits (58%).

What experts are saying about the medically tailored meal program:

“This is an exciting time for our agencies and those very vulnerable, critically ill Californians we serve. We are particularly thrilled that the California Legislature had the vision to launch the very first statewide, medically-tailored-meal program in the United States. California is once again leading the nation in the implementing low cost/high return medical interventions to improve the health of our most marginalized and underserved citizens.”

-Mark Ryle, CEO Project Open Hand, San Francisco

“Los Angeles has the highest food insecurity rate in the country. This pilot program will go a long way to make sure that people who are sick and hungry can get the food that not only keeps them alive, but will help them heal. We applaud the State of California for being visionaries in reducing food stress in the state, while bringing down the cost of health care. With a medically tailored intervention, we expect health care costs to be reduced by at least 20 percent.”

-Richard Ayoub, Executive Director, Project Angel Food, Los Angeles

“We are thrilled for the opportunity to demonstrate that we can improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable health-challenged California residents by providing medically tailored meals; and in doing so significantly decrease the cost of providing healthcare. A winning situation for all of California!”

-Alberto Cortes, Executive Director, Mama’s Kitchen, San Diego

“High quality food is the missing piece of the puzzle for many patients, especially those on Medi-Cal who are often food insecure. We are grateful to Senator McGuire whose vision and leadership were critical to creating and forming this pilot project. The research is clear – when patients have enough healthy food, especially when it's tailored to their illness, they feel better and they do better. This translates to less emergency room visits, shorter hospital stays, a greater ability to adhere to treatment – and all of that leads to lower healthcare costs.”

-Cathryn Couch, CEO Ceres Community Project, Sonoma County

“We applaud our California lawmakers who had the vision and understanding that food truly does have the power to heal. By passing a budget that will fund further proof of this concept, we move closer to not only improving the health of hundreds of thousands of individuals, but the State stands to recognize enormous cost savings for decades to come. “

- Paul Hepfer, Vice President of Programs, The Health Trust, Santa Clara County

“I am so pleased to see progress toward ensuring that the most critically ill patients have access to the food they need to stay healthy in their homes. Not only do these meals nourish, but they also hold promise for keeping people out of the hospital, preventing health crises, and allowing people to maintain independence at home.

-Hilary Seligman, MD PhD UCSF Global Health Sciences

The pilot project will track the utilization of the program closely, along with health outcomes, before, during and after the program has ended. At the end of the 3-year program, the Department of Health Care Services will evaluate what impact the program had on hospital readmissions, decreased admissions to long term care facilities, and emergency room utilization and will report the findings back to the legislature.

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ABOUT THE FOOD IS MEDICINE COALITION (FIMC):

The [Food is Medicine Coalition \(FIMC\)](#) is an association of nonprofit, medically tailored food and nutrition services (FNS) providers from across the country. The FIMC advances public policy that supports access to food and nutrition services for people with severe and/or chronic illnesses; promotes research on the efficacy of food and nutrition services on health outcomes and cost of care; and shares best practices in the provision of medically tailored meals and of nutrition education and counseling. [Project Open Hand](#), [Ceres Community Project](#), [Project Angel Food](#), [Mama's Kitchen](#), [Food For Thought](#) and [Health Trust](#) represent a California contingency of the Food Is Medicine Coalition.

To schedule in an interview with a representative of the Food is Medicine Coalition, please contact Delfin Vigil at (415) 259-1247 or e-mail: dvigil@openhand.org

ABOUT THE HEALTH TRUST:

The Health Trust is a nonprofit foundation building health equity in Silicon Valley. It ensures that health related grants, policies and services exist to support Silicon Valley's most vulnerable communities. Helping people manage chronic conditions and providing nutritious food to those that need it most, has always been a priority of The Health Trust. Since its inception in 1996, The Health Trust has operated a Meals On Wheels program that delivers hot nutritious meals and offers wellness checks to seniors, adults with disabilities and individuals that are homebound. The Health Trust also provides evidence based chronic disease self-management programs designed to provide people living with chronic conditions the tools to live healthier and more independent lives. The Health Trust also operates The Jerry Larson FOODBasket that supplies our AIDS Services clients with the fresh and nutritious food needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. For more information, visit healthtrust.org.