



Community Health Briefs

Food Rx — CareOregon

Innovation Strategy

CareOregon wanted to design programs that would help the plan better connect with its members. To do so, it began working with the human-centered design firm [IDEO](#).

During its work with IDEO, CareOregon noticed that a number of its members were in need of food, SNAP benefits had been cut and members face a myriad of barriers to accessing food resources.

Using the IDEO process, CareOregon created the Food Rx program to provide low-income individuals with better access to fresh, healthful foods.

Drivers of Total Health Addressed in This Initiative

- Diet
- Chronic Disease
- Preventive Services
- Acute Care

Program Description

CareOregon scanned the community to see what other organizations were supplying food to the Medicaid population, and which would be willing to share or shift resources to facilitate increased access. Food Rx started by partnering with a local mobile grocer whose business also had a social mission. CareOregon asked her to participate in a pilot in which she would visit three medical clinics and accept plan-paid food vouchers for patients to use at her van. The van-based farmers market set up in clinic parking lots and a physician could prescribe a food voucher, or a “Food Rx,” during a visit that could be used immediately upon leaving the clinic.

In its research, CareOregon realized that many people felt a degree of shame in admitting they were food insecure. An important part of this program was for those offering food to build a relationship with plan members so the latter would feel comfortable discussing new ingredients, recipes and strategies for healthier eating. Initial uptake results varied from clinic to clinic depending on the strength of the provider relationships with patients and the availability of additional educational programs.

In keeping with the human-centered design approach, CareOregon synthesized the observations made during the pilot and reflected on the different ways that food affects health. It identified three primary opportunities:

- Addressing food insecurity

- Improving nutrition knowledge, habits and access
- Community building

Leaders from CareOregon are working to ensure that the current iteration of Food Rx addresses needs in all three of those areas. The community-building approach is based on the concept that food can bring people together, combat social isolation and engender better connections with the provider community.

The plan is also working on a framework of how food can affect health in different stages of life, including:

- Developmental stages, including when infants are in the womb and when they are newborns
- Preventive care
- Curative care
- Palliative care

In the current iteration of Food Rx, CareOregon is partnering with several different food vendors including [Farm to Fit](#), a local, chef-driven meal delivery service.

For curative care, CareOregon instituted a program with a wound care clinic. If a patient presents with a wound and is clinically assessed as someone in need of nutrition, he or she often does not consume enough protein to effectively form new skin and heal. The physician can refer the patient to the Food Rx program to receive high-protein meals to help heal the wound. The Food Rx prescription is for up to three meals per day, seven days a week for as long as the patient is in need. Most prescriptions last roughly six weeks, but some patients have received the service for up to twelve.

CareOregon is also working with [Women's Health Care Associates](#), an organization that helps deliver a number of newborns for CareOregon members. The plan is collaborating with the organization to teach part of its pregnancy classes and instruct new mothers on how to choose and prepare foods that will help with their child's development during pregnancy.

As Food Rx develops, CareOregon is focused on building trust with its members in the program and the physicians who write the prescriptions. The plan is also looking to connect with other community partners open to collaborative, flexible relationships and able to join the effort to improve food access to Medicaid members in Oregon.