

IN CANCER CARE, FOOD IS MEDICINE

A Cancer Service Line Initiative

IMPACT REPORT

2024-2025

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Over the first 10 months of implementation, the Food is Medicine (FIM) program at Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center has significantly exceeded its initial objectives and demonstrated measurable impact for cancer patients facing food insecurity.

Prepared For:

McKesson Foundation

Through strategic partnerships, innovative program design, adaptability, and the commitment of dedicated staff, the initiative has supported a diverse and vulnerable population—delivering nutritious food, education, and meaningful community connections.





www.MasseyFoodRx.com

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Welcome To In Cancer Care, Food is Medicine

The Message from Dr. Susan Hong, Director of Cancer Survivorship



Reporting Period: October 1, 2024 - July 31, 2025

The Food is Medicine (FIM) program is fully operational and continues to meet the objectives outlined in the grant. We are pleased to report strong progress on all funded activities during the first 10-months of implementation.

Advancing Cancer Care Through Food is Medicine

Over the past 10 months, the Food is Medicine initiative at Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center has become an integral part of how we care for our patients, transforming cancer care delivery by addressing one of the most pressing social determinants of health—nutrition insecurity. With support from the McKesson Foundation, we have successfully implemented food insecurity screening across our cancer programs, built a Food Resource Center, launched cooking and nutrition education, and distributed food boxes and produce vouchers that directly supported 399 cancer patients to date—far exceeding our year-one goals. Beyond meeting immediate needs, we have created a scalable, evidence-based model that integrates seamlessly into clinical workflows, connects patients to sustainable community resources through Unite Us, and advances research that will inform cancer care nationwide. This program has not only relieved the daily burden of food insecurity for our patients but has empowered them with knowledge, dignity, and support that enhances their treatment experience and long-term health. We are deeply grateful for McKesson's partnership, which continues to make it possible for our patients to focus on healing rather than hunger.

Susan Hong, MD, MPH, FACP

RGC Professor in Cancer Research Director of Cancer Survivorship VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center

Navigating Our Journey

On Oct. 1, 2024, funding from the McKesson Foundation commenced to support the development of *In Cancer Care*, *Food is Medicine*, an inaugural initiative at VCU's Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center. This initiative is dedicated to advancing cancer research related to food and nutrition, as well as enhancing patient services to alleviate food insecurity. We believe lack of access to food should not be a barrier to receiving life-saving cancer treatment.



Quarter 1: October 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024

Clinic Workflow

We developed a workflow in EPIC to systematically screen and track patients with food need.

Staff Education

Clinic staff were trained on the new food screening workflow to ensure consistent practices and accurate referral pathways across oncology clinics.

Full Integration of Unite Us

Integration of the Unite Us platform into the workflow was key to the start-up process, ensuring patients are connected to long-term, sustainable resources. Patients who screen positive for food insecurity but do not meet the criteria for this initiative because they are not on active cancer treatment are connected to Unite Us through a QR code.



Quarter 2: January 1, 2025 - March 31, 2025

Communication Strategy

We developed communication materials that included flyers, clinic brochures, patient-facing banners, an educational video, monthly bulletin, and dedicated website (www.masseyfoodrx.com)

Produce Vouchers

The program began distributing ProduceRx vouchers, enabling foodinsecure patients to purchase fresh produce from Shalom Farms. Number of patients served by the grant during the reporting period:

399

Cooking Demonstrations and Classes

The first patient cohort completed a four-class series of cooking demonstrations and nutrition education sessions. Partnering with VCU Health chefs and oncology dietitians, patients receive cancer-specific guidance on how to prepare healthy meals.

Food Resource Center

A dedicated Food Resource Center was completed, including the installation of locked cabinets (with capacity for over 800 pounds of Feed More food boxes), and a commercial refrigerator for perishable food storage. All Food is Medicine staff completed SafeServ Food Handler certification, and the Center successfully passed a formal health inspection conducted by the Feed More Health Director.

Food Insecurity Cancer Registry

IRB approval was obtained to establish the Food is Medicine Cancer Registry. Surveys are being administered to assess the impact of this initiative on treatment adherence and overall quality of life across multiple domains.

Data Collection Instrument

A secure data collection instrument was developd in REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) to collect demographic, clinical, and cancer-specific information.



Quarter 4: July 1, 2025 - July 31, 2025 (Abbreviated due to shortened reporting period)

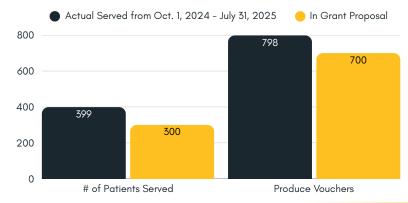
Research Activities

The Food is Medicine research team analyzed data from the USDA Household Food Security Scale, the Food Security Supplement, and the Current Population Survey, to examine **56,939** adult cancer survivors who completed a survey on food security. We found that living in **rural and nonmetropolitan** areas was associated with increased risk of food insecurity among cancer survivors (AOR = 1.21 [95% CI = 1.12-1.31]) and (OR = 1.21 [95% CI = 1.14-1.29]), respectively. States with **Medicaid food benefit coverage** had a significantly **lower food insecurity prevalence** compared to those without. These findings highlight the necessity of healthcare policies that combine nutritional support with medical services, especially for **rural Americans**.

This work titled "Evaluating the Relationship Between Statewide Medicaid Food Benefits and Food Insecurity Among Cancer Survivors in the United States" is under review in the journal Food Security.

The FIM team, in partnership with the EVMS School of Health Professions at the Virginia Health Sciences Macon & Joan Brock Institute and the VCU School of Epidemiology, conducted a scoping review titled "Food Insecurity in Cancer Survivors During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic." This manuscript is under review in The Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Targets vs. Actuals



WORKFLOW

On December 9, the Food is Medicine program launched food insecurity screening in EPIC using the validated two-question Hunger Vital Sign tool, developed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

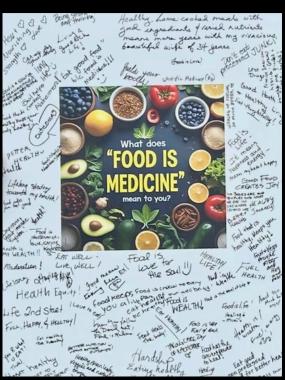
* 2 HUNGER VITAL SIGN Q'S

- 1. Within the past 12 months, the food you bought just didn't last and you didn't have money to get more,
- 2. Within the past 12 months, you worried that your food would run out before you got money to buy more.

Response options include Never True, Sometimes True, Often True, or Decline. Patients who respond **Sometimes True** or **Often True** to any one of the two questions are eligible for food resources through the McKesson grant-funded FIM program.



Medical Oncology (including Leukemia and Lymphoma programs), Surgical Oncology, Radiation Oncology, Gyn Oncology, Neuro-Oncology, and ENT (ear, nose, and throat). In addition, supportive cancer programs—Palliative Care, Cancer Survivorship, Cardio-Oncology, and Cancer Genetics.



SINCE THE LAUNCH OF SCREENING DEC. 9, 2024...

718 POSITIVE

(Both in active treatment and patients not on treatment but are undergoing surveillance for cancer recurrence) have screened positive for food insecurity at Massey.

408 ACTIVE CANCER PATIENTS Of those individuals, 408 are on active cancer patients. "Active cancer treatment" is defined at the time of screening as patients who are receiving chemotherapy or immunotherapy, undergoing radiation therapy, or taking oral chemotherapy. It also includes patients who have cancer surgery scheduled within 90 days before or after screening positive for food insecurity.

97.8% PATIENTS TOUCHED

The Food is Medicine program has reached 399 of the 408 eligible patients, representing 97.8% of all active cancer patients who screened positive for food insecurity.

The Patients We Serve

Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center, part of VCU Health, serves patients regardless of insurance status or ability to pay, reflecting its mission as a safety-net institution.

Service Area: Richmond

57% Black, 52.6% female, and 23% of residents live below the poverty line.

Massey Pilot Data

A 2023 survey revealed nearly 40% of patients in active treatment at Massey reported some level of food insecurity

67.2%

Black

The racial composition of the program mirrors broader regional disparities. Two-thirds (67.2%) of participants identify as Black, while 27.5% identify as White, and smaller percentages as Asian, American Indian/Pacific Islander/Alaskan Native, or other race. Only 5.5% identify as Hispanic/Latino. These figures underscore how inequities disproportionately affect communities of color.

Patients Touched by Food is Medicine

These figures are drawn from the Food is Medicine Registry Demographic Survey in REDCap

46.2%

Single

Almost half (46.2%) of respondents identify as single, and an additional 28.2% are widowed or divorced, suggesting many face the challenges of managing illness without spousal or household support.

77.5%

Unemployed

Furthermore, 77.5% of participants reported they are not currently employed. Only 16.4% have health insurance through an employer or spouse, indicating limited access to stable employment benefits.

49.3%

Enrolled in Medicare

The majority of patients served through the Food is Medicine program rely on public insurance programs. Nearly half of participants (49.3%) are enrolled in Medicare and over one-third (35.9%) in Medicaid, with only 15.5% covered through private insurance. Others rely on VCU Charity Care (2.8%), Tricare (2.8%), or are uninsured (0.7%). These data reflect the critical role of the safety net in ensuring cancer patients can access care.

Continued...

The Patients We Serve

13%

Care for two or more people

Household composition further reflects social and economic vulnerability. While many participants live in small households (39.3% with two people, 30.8% alone), about one-quarter are caring for children, with 11% supporting one child and over 13% caring for two or more.

47.9%

Receive SNAP benefits

Nearly half (47.9%) of respondents receive SNAP benefits, yet the prevalence of food insecurity remains strikingly high.

60%

Report Hunger

Nearly 60% reported going hungry at times, and 78.4% reported eating only a few kinds of foods due to limited resources, reflecting poor dietary diversity.

70%

Worry about food

Over 70% reported worrying about not having enough food or eating less than they felt they should due to financial constraints.



If you are an active cancer patient getting your care at VCU Massey

Please visit the **Food Resource Center** located on the Ground Floor (G) of the Adult Outpatient Pavillion.

You may be eligible for:

- Produce vouchers to local farmers markets
- Food pantry referrals
- On-site nutrition education and cooking demonstrations
- Free food boxes*

* Limited quantities apply. Please visit the Food Resource Center for further details.

Visit MasseyFoodRx.com to learn about our community partnerships and more!







MSKESSON Foundation





True Impact

Our Services

Our findings reveal the overlapping burdens of poverty, unemployment, racial inequities, and food insecurity—factors that significantly intensify the challenges of managing cancer care. The services we provide are designed to directly address these barriers and help ease the burden for patients and their families.





Food Boxes

Emergency canned goods to last 2-3 days



Produce Vouchers

\$5 vouchers to purchase fresh vegetables



Unite Us Referral

Patients referred to local food pantries



Cooking Demo & Nutrition Education

Four-part series, offered every other month

Nutrition Education & Cooking Demonstrations

Patient feedback underscores the program's effectiveness. Across three cooking class cohorts (totaling 12 classes), participants consistently reported gaining new knowledge, confidence in preparing nutritious meals, and appreciation for supportive, interactive instruction. Patients especially valued the opportunity to try new foods, bring home ingredients, and receive practical education tailored to their needs. Many expressed a strong desire for more classes, longer sessions, and expanded offerings—evidence of the demand and the program's impact.



Continued...

True Impact



The McKesson Foundation grant has had a transformative impact on Massey's most vulnerable patients. Cancer treatment already imposes a **significant financial and emotional burden**; for many, the added challenge of not knowing where their next meal will come from compounds stress and undermines treatment outcomes. With McKesson's support, the Food is Medicine program has successfully improved access to nutritious foods and empowered patients through education and support.

"Food is Medicine...is a much more vital medication than anything else because none of the other stuff would matter if I didn't have something to eat."

- Melissa Earley Massey Active Cancer Patient

Patient Experience

Melissa Earley's story illustrates this impact. Diagnosed with breast cancer in 2023, Melissa endured surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation while navigating loss of income and food insecurity. Through Food is Medicine, she received emergency food boxes, produce vouchers, and nutrition education. For her and others, the program is more than a source of groceries—it is a lifeline that allows patients to focus on healing rather than hunger. As Melissa shares:

"My body doesn't crave the chemo...my body doesn't crave the radiation, my body doesn't crave any of the pills I take. But my body craves food. Food is Medicine is like the perfect name because it's true. It's a much more vital medication than anything else because none of the other stuff would matter if I didn't have something to eat."

Her testimony has been recorded on video and is available at: https://www.masseycancercenter.org/news/initiative-helps-cancer-patients-focus-on-health-not-hunger.

Future Directions

2025-2026

Massey-Unite Us Partnership: Strengthening Data Access and Insights

Self-Directed Support:

We are working with Unite Us to extend access of our Assistance Request Form (ARF) for 12 months, beginning in January 2026, enabling patients to directly request services. This will enable us to link patients directly to the Unite Us Care Coordination team, where specialists assess needs, gather information, and connect clients to the appropriate community partners.

Data & Impact Insights:

The Unite Us partnerships will enable us to receive secure patient-level data including being able to access the Engagement Impact Dashboard. These tools provide structured data for analysis, track service utilization, and enhance transparency in how patient needs are identified and addressed. Through the dashboard, the Food is Medicine program can monitor key utilization metrics generated from Assistance Request Forms managed by the Unite Us Care Coordination Team, offering valuable insights into how patients' needs are being met within the community.



Massey-CACV Partnership: Virginia's Food is Medicine Task Force

Spearheaded by the Massey Food is Medicine Initiative, the Virginia Food is Medicine Task Force is being established as a statewide coalition committed to sharing best practices, strengthening partnerships, and advancing Food is Medicine efforts across cancer centers in Virginia. Developed in collaboration with the Cancer Action Coalition of Virginia, Grove Christian Outreach Center, Cancer Retreat Center, University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and other healthcare partners across the state, this is the first cancer-specific task force of its kind. It represents a scalable and sustainable model for integrating food insecurity interventions into cancer care.

We proudly support:



Food is Medicine Learning Circle

Spreading Food is Medicine across Virginia through collaborative learning and action



Community Care Innovation Collaborative

Connecting people in need to healthrelated social supports



Thank you to our community partners who make this work possible!









Our Mission

In Cancer Care, Food is Medicine aims to be a national role model, dedicated to pioneering evidence-based research, advancing nutrition education, and promoting health and wellness to address food insecurity among cancer patients.

To learn more, please visit MasseyFoodRx.com



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