

# Food as Medicine Legislative Issue Brief

## What is Food as Medicine?

Food as Medicine (FAM) interventions are emerging as an effective approach to addressing nutrition security and chronic disease among patients with nutrition-related disease or risk-factors. FAM is defined by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics as “a philosophy where food and nutrition aids individuals through interventions that support health and wellness.” FAM integrates nutritious foods and evidence-based nutrition interventions into clinical care to prevent, manage, and treat nutrition-related chronic conditions. Registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) and nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTRs) design, deliver, and evaluate these interventions to ensure effectiveness.

## What is an RDN?

Registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) are credentialed nutrition practitioners who have completed:

- An accredited bachelor’s degree (or higher) in dietetics
- 1,200+ hours of supervised practice
- The national Registration Examination for Dietitians

To maintain the credential, RDNs must also secure 75+ hours of continuing education every five years.

## Why Food as Medicine Matters

FAM is a reaffirmation that food and nutrition play a role in sustaining health, disease prevention and as a therapy for those with conditions or in situations responsive to changes in their diet. FAM programs improve health outcomes and help address chronic disease, health disparities, and total cost of care—particularly for people with or at risk for diet-related conditions. The Academy has identified four focus areas where FAM programs promote health and prevent disease:

1. Food as preventative medicine to **encourage health and well-being**
2. Food as medicine to **improve nutrition security**
3. Food as medicine in disease **management and treatment**
4. Food as medicine to **promote food safety**

## Legislative Solutions

The **Fueling Optimal Outcomes through Diet (FOOD) for Health Act** (not yet reintroduced) led by Rep. Robin Kelly provides grants for Food as Medicine programs prioritizing local foods and diversity.

The **Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Program Pilot Act (H.R.5439/S.2834)** led by Reps. McGovern, Pingree, and Evans and Sens. Booker, Marshall, Smith and Cassidy establishes a Medicare pilot delivering medically tailored meals to vulnerable beneficiaries.

The **National Food As Medicine Program Act** (not yet reintroduced) would provide a comprehensive approach to addressing nutrition-related chronic conditions and enhancing public health by establishing a Food as Medicine Waiver Grant program. This program aims to help initiate, implement, and expand interventions that integrate food as a key component of medical care. Additionally, the Act would establish a USDA Food as Medicine Technical Assistance Program, designed to help producers connect with local healthcare systems, enabling them to deliver Food as Medicine interventions to communities in need. To further support these efforts, the Act directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop and issue comprehensive guidance to states and counties. This guidance will assist in the planning, implementation, and expansion of Food as Medicine programs across the country. Furthermore, the Act mandates that the HHS Secretary submit a report to Congress, providing an evaluation of the impact of these programs, ensuring transparency and accountability in their effectiveness in improving public health outcomes.

## What These Bills Do

Implementing these FAM initiatives will scale evidence-informed FAM models, measure impact through reporting, and test Medicare delivery of medically tailored meals (MTMs) to inform broader policy adoption.

## The Academy's Recommendations

1. Support passage of the FOOD for Health Act, MTM Pilot Act, and National Food As Medicine Program Act
2. Include RDNs/NDTRs in design, delivery, and evaluation
3. Prioritize outcomes and cost reporting for long-term policy decisions

## About Us

Representing more than 112,000 credentialed nutrition and dietetics practitioners, the Academy is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. Many Academy members—registered dietitian nutritionists, nutrition and dietetic technicians, registered, and advanced-degree nutritionists—treat the Medicare population.

**For more information from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, please contact [govaffairs@eatright.org](mailto:govaffairs@eatright.org).**

## References

<sup>i</sup>Steiber A, Handu D, Mantinan K., and Hagedorn-Harfield R. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Food As Medicine Strategic Roadmap. Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2025; 125, 1601-1610.