



2021 Food Pharmacy Patient Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

Since 2014, the Food as Medicine Collaborative (FAMC) has coordinated a diverse group of stakeholders to pioneer solutions to effectively address health disparities and food insecurity by bridging the divide between healthcare and food systems. We do this by supporting Food Pharmacy programming, systems changes, and policy advocacy. Our Food Pharmacy model aims to simultaneously address food insecurity and disparities in chronic disease management by offering culturally relevant high quality groceries, cooking demonstrations, nutrition education, health coaching, and resource referrals as part of patients' medical care.

In 2020 alone, Food Pharmacy programs in San Francisco provided food to 2,740 unique patients and currently serve patients at 16 clinic program locations. Many clinics adapted or abbreviated their services during the pandemic, but remained committed to serving patients through their Food Pharmacies. Our evaluation sought to capture patient perception of Food Pharmacy and its impact on their health and food security and identify areas for improvement on the program model, both before and after pandemic-related changes.

"[Food Pharmacy] has allowed me to feel like I am a part of the community, and not only a part of the community, but part of the health center in promoting good health and care and attitude dispositions in the community of the populations who live here."

- Southeast Health Center
Patient

Three National Health Corps members interviewed 31 Food Pharmacy attendees from five of our partner clinics located in San Francisco.

- Four of the five clinics focus on serving Black/African American patients, and the remaining clinic predominantly serves Latinx and Asian/Asian American and Pacific Islander patient populations.
- NHC members conducted interviews with nine patients who had attended Food Pharmacy pre-covid and 22 interviews with patients who began attending Food Pharmacy after the onset of the pandemic.
- Based on the duration of their attendance at Food Pharmacy (pre- and post-COVID or exclusively post-COVID), patients participated in structured phone interviews that asked about the quality of their experience with the program, barriers to attendance, and areas for program improvement.

Patient interviews highlighted a number of successful aspects of the Food Pharmacy program and a set of key challenges.

A primary goal of Food Pharmacy is to support patient health, especially for those managing chronic conditions. Patient interviews suggest:

- Increased access to nutritious food through Food Pharmacy enabled healthier eating and improved chronic disease management.
- Food Pharmacy programming promoted more positive engagement with medical systems, both by reducing urgent care needs due to stabilized chronic conditions and by facilitating regular contact with healthcare providers through the co-location of Food Pharmacy with their clinics.

“Oh it helped me a whole lot, you know Southeast is like my first family now. I be dealing with Southeast so much, I call them my family. And everybody who works with Southeast, they’re respectable, you know they respect us and everything and I like the way they do that with the medical and the Food Pharmacy.”

- Southeast Health
Center Patient

In addition to building pathways to healthier eating, patients also frequently cited the financial benefits of the Food Pharmacy program. Patient interviews revealed the following:

- Financial strain is a barrier to accessing nutritious food and identified Food Pharmacy as a direct solution to that obstacle.
- Patients deeply appreciated that Food Pharmacy programming is free. Participating in Food Pharmacy allowed patients to save or stretch the money they would normally allocate for food, which gave them more flexibility in meeting other expenses.
- Food Pharmacy programs supported communities with lower access to healthy food and thus made gains in achieving equity in food access.

Finally, patients clearly articulated the broad value of Food Pharmacy programming by describing the services as a community hub and an opportunity for patients to deepen relationships with their clinical providers. Patients appreciated their warm interactions with Food Pharmacy staff and other Food Pharmacy attendees, and several patients noted that Food Pharmacy increased their trust in their healthcare providers.

Patients overwhelmingly provided positive feedback about their Food Pharmacy experiences, but additionally offered recommendations for future program modifications.

These suggestions included:

- Regularly collecting patient feedback to align food and additional program services to the unique patient population of each clinic;
- Having more flexible dates and times for the program to accommodate a variety of patient schedules;
- Increasing access by opening the program to a greater number of patients; and
- Creating a home-delivered grocery system to further increase the accessibility of healthy food.

“It showed me that the staff here really care about me. I appreciate going there unlike before. It was a little bit rough at first but now that I communicated with the staff here, I’m satisfied with the healthcare they provide for me... I feel a lot more comfortable going there now. I feel like I can trust the staff there. They’re out to help me, and that’s what it’s all about, isn’t it?”

- Curry Senior Center Patient

Our patient suggestions highlight the importance of continually evaluating the multifaceted barriers to food security and healthy eating. Moving forward, especially in light of the evolving nature of COVID-19, the Food as Medicine Collaborative will continue to innovate the existing Food Pharmacy model to reach more patients, improve patient health and reduce health disparities across the city’s communities.

For more information about the Food as Medicine Collaborative or our work with Food Pharmacies, please contact Janna Cordeiro at Janna@sfphf.org.