

The path is clear: Healthy eating leads to better health



Today, one in seven North Carolinians – more than 1.6 million people, including one in five children – has limited access to nutritious food.¹

At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) we're shrinking that number through new, evidence-based approaches.

Our SNAP Application Assistance Pilot: Connecting people to the resources they need

Lack of access to food is associated with negative health outcomes and higher health care costs.² And estimates suggest that more than half a million North Carolinians, many of whom are food insecure, are eligible for SNAP but not enrolled.³

Prior research showed SNAP benefits could reduce food insecurity by up to 30%, improve long-term health outcomes for children (with a 16% reduction in obesity and a 5% reduction in heart disease), and lower medical costs as much as 25%.⁴

In 2021, Blue Cross NC piloted a program to support Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace and Medicare Advantage members experiencing food security issues. The aim was to help members who may have been eligible for, but not yet enrolled in, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – a federal program that provides a subsidy for the purchase of food to individuals with low incomes.

Our direct mail and email efforts, combined with referrals from Blue Cross NC Social Workers and Care Managers, are estimated to have resulted in nearly 2,900 people enrolling in SNAP through the pilot program.

The benefits add up

- Our SNAP Application Assistance Pilot program identified the potential to improve affordability by lowering health care expenses. Estimates revealed that for every \$1 spent on the program, medical costs were lowered by \$3 among participants.
- The ACA and Medicare Advantage groups saw a return on investment of \$3.2 million in total savings through reduced per-member-per-month (PMPM) costs. Participants also showed increased primary care engagement.³ Supporting enrollment in SNAP has the potential to improve local economies—external estimates indicate that every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity.²
- SNAP, by providing households with funds for food, potentially frees up resources for health-supporting purchases like medications and copays for doctor visits.
- As a household level benefit, SNAP can help support the health of all household members. Our evaluation focused on the impact of the program on individuals engaging with our benefits center and likely underestimates the impact on the total health care costs and health outcomes of these Blue Cross NC members and their households.
- Increased enrollment in SNAP has the potential to reduce the burden on community-based organizations that provide food allowing them to serve those in the community who need support but aren't eligible for SNAP.

Learn more about our Food is Medicine efforts

We're committed to improving health through food. You can learn more about our work to help people eat healthier, expand access to nutritious food, and more by visiting [Health through food](#) or your nearest [Blue Cross NC location](#).

Improving Health Through Food

Access to nutritious food is essential for the health and well-being of our members and communities. By improving health through food, we can not only positively impact health outcomes and help prevent and manage chronic conditions, but also make health care more affordable for all.

The non-medical drivers of health

Food security is one of the key non-medical drivers of health. Other non-medical drivers include economic stability, housing stability, education, community safety, transportation, and more. Any of these factors, individually or in combination with others, can have a profound impact on a person's health and well-being.

1. Feeding America. "Get the facts about hunger in North Carolina." <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/north-carolina>

2. Food Research & Action Center The Positive Effect of SNAP Benefits on Participants and Communities - Food Research & Action Center, <https://frac.org/programs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/positive-effect-snap-benefits-participants-communities>

3. New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst. "Impact of Food Delivery and Health Coaching on Outcomes and Costs of Care: A Payer's Perspective," <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.22.0351>

4. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "SNAP Is Linked with Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs." <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-cost>

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