



# Advancing Food is Medicine in Rhode Island: *The Role of Medically Tailored Meals (2026)*

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## The Problem

Chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension remain significant public health challenges that continue to rise in prevalence among residents of Rhode Island (Table 1). Further, disparities in the social drivers of health continue to exacerbate the burden of chronic disease among marginalized Rhode Islanders.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Nutrition and diet have a significant role in the development of chronic disease, with Food is Medicine (FIM) initiatives increasingly recognized as promising prevention and treatment approaches both in Rhode Island and nationally.<sup>4</sup> FIM refers to evidence-based interventions that integrate whole, nutrient dense foods into clinical care to prevent, manage, and treat diet-related chronic diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, and coronary heart disease (CHD).<sup>5,6</sup> FIM interventions complement conventional medical treatment rather than replace it. Specific FIM interventions used to target treatment of chronic diseases include Medically Tailored Meals (MTMs) and medically tailored food packages (Figure 1)<sup>6</sup>. However, gaps persist in the statewide adoption of these programs.

Table 1: Chronic Disease Rates of RI Adults in 2021 & 2024, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS)<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Chronic Disease	Percent of Adults in RI with Chronic Disease in Year	
	2021	2024
Cardiovascular Disease	7.4%	9.5%
Diabetes	10.4%	11.6%
Hypertension	33.0%	34.0%*

\*Data is from 2023. Data from 2024 is unavailable for hypertension rates in RI.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 🍏 FIM refers to evidence-based interventions that integrate whole, nutrient-dense foods into clinical care to prevent, manage, and treat diet-related chronic diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, and coronary heart disease
- 🍏 One in three RI adults are diagnosed with hypertension, a risk factor often associated with high sodium intake
- 🍏 10% of adults in RI are diagnosed with diabetes
- 🍏 Medically Tailored Meals (MTMs) are an effective complement to traditional medicine in managing chronic disease
- 🍏 MTMs are associated with an estimated \$23.7 billion annual savings on healthcare spending

## Medically Tailored Meals as Food is Medicine

MTMs represent the most clinically intensive model of FIM approaches, providing fully prepared meals tailored to individual medical conditions, whereas produce prescription programs and grocery interventions focus primarily on improving access to nutritious foods.<sup>7</sup> For example, MTMs may be designed to have less sodium, less saturated fat, and/or more fiber depending on the individual's diagnosis. It is estimated that nationally, MTMs could save \$23.7 billion annually on healthcare spending.<sup>8</sup> In Rhode Island alone, there is an estimated \$2,500 saved per patient if MTMs were used for chronic disease treatment.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, MTMs have been shown to increase diet quality in participants with diabetes using MTMs for treatment (Figure 2).<sup>9</sup>

Together, these approaches demonstrate how nutrition can be systematically integrated into healthcare delivery and treatment.

Figure 1. Food is Medicine Pyramid<sup>2,3</sup>

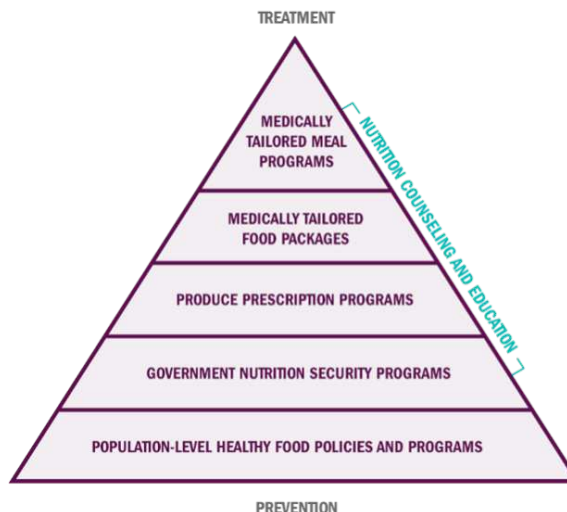
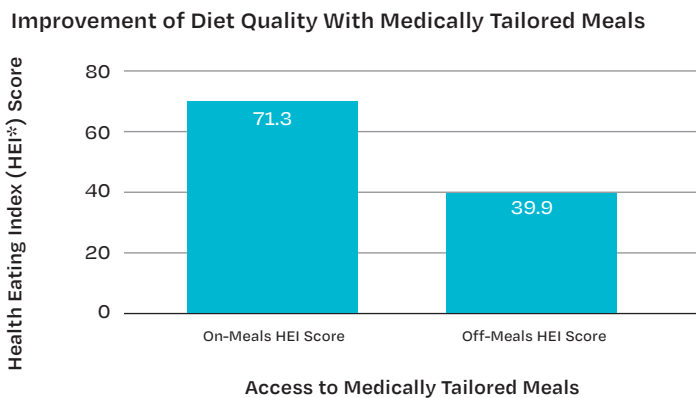


Figure 2: Improvement of Diet Quality with Medically Tailored Meals for Patients with Diabetes<sup>9</sup>



The Healthy Eating Index (HEI) measures diet quality to assess how well a set of foods aligns with key recommendations & dietary patterns. Developed by the USDA & National Cancer Institute, it uses a 0-100 scale.

## Medically Tailored Meals in Rhode Island

Several RI organizations provide MTMs to Rhode Islanders, including Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island (MOWRI), a leader in FIM since 2022. In collaboration with healthcare providers and community partners, MOWRI has nearly doubled the amount of MTMs delivered annually, with 48,507 MTM served between 2022-2025.<sup>10,11</sup> These programs serve diverse patient populations, including older adults and the perinatal population. Through these collaborative efforts, MOWRI prioritizes the health needs of patients in order to promote equitable health outcomes. Other organizations, including Mom’s Meals and Community Servings also deliver MTMs throughout the state of RI as demonstrated in Table 3.<sup>12,13</sup> However, the reach of these programs in RI is limited.

Table 2: Medically Tailored Meal (MTM) Programs at Meals on Wheels of RI

Program Overview	Offerings	Community Partners Involved
Medically Tailored Meals Pilot Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTMs</li> <li>• General wellness meals</li> <li>• Therapeutic groceries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brown University Health</li> </ul>
Meal Delivery to Unhoused Individuals in Medical Respite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTMs</li> <li>• General wellness meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crossroads Rhode Island</li> </ul>
Perinatal Meal Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTMs</li> <li>• General wellness meals</li> <li>• Therapeutic groceries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blue Cross Blue Shield of RI</li> <li>• Women and Infants Hospital of RI</li> <li>• Neighborhood Health Plan of RI</li> </ul>
Meal Delivery Program to Clients with HIV/AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTMs</li> <li>• General wellness meals</li> <li>• Therapeutic groceries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AIDS Care Ocean State (ACOS)</li> </ul>
Meal Delivery for Long Term Services and Supports Waiver Clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therapeutic meals</li> <li>• General wellness meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Medicaid Plans</li> <li>• PACE-All Inclusive Care for the Elderly</li> </ul>
Home Delivered Meals to Patients with Diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTMs</li> <li>• Therapeutic groceries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Astrana Health (previously Prospect Health)</li> </ul>

Data from Meals on Wheels of RI, March 2026

Table 3: Other MTM Programs in RI<sup>12,13</sup>

Name of Vendor	Offerings	Patients Served
Mom’s Meals (National For-Profit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTMs</li> </ul>	Medicare/Medicaid participants with a focus on seniors and other patients with chronic conditions
Community Servings (MA-based Non-Profit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MTMs</li> <li>• Nutrition Education</li> </ul>	Medicare/Medicaid participants with a focus on seniors and other patients with chronic conditions

## Overview of Policy and Environmental Changes in RI around MTM:

Over the past several years, there has been a growing effort among community organizations to incorporate MTM interventions in the treatment of chronic disease. Local organizations and state health and human service departments have collaborated to understand the feasibility, facilitators, and barriers surrounding MTMs. To that end, legislation has been proposed to aid in understanding the feasibility of using MTMs as a treatment for chronic diseases. Since 2023, there has been at least one bill introduced each year in the State Legislature, in both the House and Senate (Table 4).<sup>14-19</sup> Currently, for State Fiscal Year 2027, companion Rhode Island House and Senate bills have been introduced to establish a Food as Medicine Task Force to develop recommendations for the creation and implementation of a Food as Medicine Pilot Program.

Table 4: Past and Current Bills Referencing MTMs in the R.I. Legislature<sup>14-19</sup>

Proposed Bill	Description of Bill
2024 S.B. 2592	Proposed the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) establish a program providing coverage for nutritional assistance and medically tailored meals, groceries, and produce prescriptions for certain beneficiaries where there is a clinical need.
2025 S.B. 0333/ H.B. 5775	Proposed EOHHS establish a 1-year pilot program for nutritional assistance and medically tailored meals, groceries and produce for people with diet-related diseases or food insecurity, and other interventions when there is a clinical need.
2026 S.B. 2892/ H.B. 8171	Proposes EOHHS establish a Food As Medicine Task Force for the purpose of developing recommendations for the creation and implementation of a food-as-medicine pilot program in Rhode Island.

## Recommendations for Expanding MTMs in Rhode Island:

### 1. Establish a Rhode Island Food Is Medicine Task Force:

Establish a FIM Task Force to develop recommendations for the creation and implementation of a FIM pilot program in Rhode Island.

### 2. Utilize a Health Equity Approach to Elevate the Voices of Rhode Islanders around the Development & Evaluation of MTMs:

Ensure that all Rhode Islanders who have lived experience with chronic disease are included in the development and evaluation of MTMs to account for diverse meal preferences, social, and economic contexts.

### 3. Launch Statewide FIM Pilot Program in Collaboration with RI State Agencies and Community Partners:

Explore the feasibility of a statewide FIM pilot program across healthcare systems and community organizations to generate RI-specific data on costs, savings, clinical outcomes, and operational feasibility, while strengthening cross-sector partnerships.

### 4. Promote Healthcare Coverage of MTMs:

Encourage coverage through public and private insurance to create a sustainable financing mechanism, reduce preventable hospitalizations, and improve chronic disease management among food- and nutrition-insecure populations.

### 5. Implement Nutrition Counseling:

Ensure that patients receive tailored nutrition counseling to support sustainable dietary changes for the management of chronic disease.

## Summary

*As the prevalence of chronic disease continues to increase in Rhode Island, it is imperative that FIM approaches are considered as a form of treatment. In particular, MTMs are an evidence-based treatment to reduce healthcare costs, reduce health disparities, and decrease the prevalence of chronic disease. With an increasing number of MTM programs being implemented across Rhode Island, coordinated efforts to fund, reimburse, scale, implement and evaluate MTMs may reduce fragmentation, strengthen effectiveness, and lead to a healthier state.*

## MOWRI Advocacy in Action

Meeting the needs of Rhode Island's underserved populations is made further challenging by increasing rates of food insecurity and more complex by the burden of chronic illness.

With the release of "Building Resilience, Deepening Impact," Meals on Wheels of RI's 2030 Strategic Plan, our organization continues to offer a powerful platform for influence, not just as a service provider, but as a leader in shaping systems and advancing equity.

Importantly, these efforts align with the R.I. Food Strategy 2030 efforts to promote the nutrition security of all Rhode Islanders.

[Click here to learn more & join MOWRI in advancing health equity.](#)

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