Milan Pact Awards 2025	**BALTIMORE (1)**						
Country	United States of America						
Population	568,271						
Title of practice	Food is Medicine						
Subtitle	Advancing Health Equity in Baltimore						
MUFPP Recommended Action	8. Address non-communicable diseases associated with poor diets and obesity, giving specific attention where appropriate to reducing intake of sugar, salt, trans-fats, meat and dairy products and increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables and non-processed foods. – SUSTAINABLE DIETS AND NUTRITION						
Starting year	2021	**Ending year (if any)**			☐ already submitted in the past		
Actors and stakeholders' involvement	**Municipal departments**	**Other public institutions**	**NGOs CSOs**	**Research centres**	**Private sectors**	**International organizations**	**Other**
	4	2	8	2	7	1	3
Budget	The total budget is approximately €1,758,419 to cover staff, food, and program expenses. Baltimore City's Food Policy and Planning Division has contributed €840,000. Additional funding comes from philanthropic foundations, grant funding, and various partners.						
Brief description	MedStar Health operates four hospitals in Baltimore, each implementing Food Rx - a comprehensive Food is Medicine program providing both nutritional and clinical support. Food Rx supports patients managing both diabetes and food insecurity by providing weekly deliveries of fresh ingredients to prepare 10 medically tailored meals. Referred through MedStar's Collaborative Care Program and local clinics, participants attend biweekly visits with access to a food pantry, kitchen tools, recipes, nutrition education, and a three-month YMCA membership to increase physical activity. The program meets a critical need, as 18% of Baltimore residents face food insecurity, and diabetes is the city's sixth leading cause of death. Now active in four hospitals, Food Rx has enrolled 451 low-income patients at high risk for, or living with, diet-related diseases. Results show 69% reduced their HbA1c, also known as haemoglobin A1c, by >1%, with average reductions of 2.2% in 3–6 months and 2.1% in a year; patients with a Body Mass Index (BMI) over 30 lost an average of 7.1 pounds, and racial disparities in diabetes outcomes dropped by 51.1%. A key lesson is that comprehensive FIM initiatives can significantly improve health outcomes for diet-related diseases while increasing food security for patients. Our role as a city includes securing and distributing funding, guiding program design, city, state, and national advocacy, and data reporting.						
Innovation	As a whole, Food is Medicine is innovative because it treats food as a core part of healthcare, focusing on prevention and root causes rather than symptoms. This is unlike Western medicine which often relies primarily on prescriptions and procedures. Food Rx builds on this innovation by embedding medically tailored food access directly into clinical care while also supporting physical activity, social connection, and reducing barriers to transportation and healthcare system navigation. Food Rx also serves patients living in Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPA). These are neighbourhoods where residents have limited access to healthy, affordable food due to factors such as low income, few nearby grocery stores, and limited transportation options. This is especially important as racial, economic, and geographic barriers contribute to high rates of diet-related disease in these areas. By addressing food insecurity and improving access to preventive care, the program reduces comorbidities linked to diet-related diseases and poverty in vulnerable populations. MedStar's Food Rx program was awarded the 2023 Health Equity Leadership Award by the American Heart Association. In addition, it is the recipient of the American Hospital Association's 2025 Dick Davidson NOVA Award, given to healthcare organizations who are successfully collaborating with the community to deliver Food is Medicine healthcare in a unique way that promotes health equity and justice for underserved populations.						

Impact	The social impact of Food Rx is significant, supporting vulnerable populations facing the dual burden of chronic disease and poverty. MedStar has screened 1,546 patients for food insecurity and social needs, enrolling 451 (29%) in Food Rx. The program supports primarily Black adults ages 45–70, many with physical or mental disabilities, as well as immigrants from Mexico, other countries in Latin America, and Africa. Patients receive medically-tailored groceries for themselves and their families, plus one-on-one support from dietitians. Since 2021, over 91,000 meals have been distributed, improving intake of fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins. Clinically, a 2.2% average HbA1c reduction was reported within 3–6 months and 2.1% at 12 months, with an average 7.1 pounds of weight loss for those with a BMI >30. The program also reduced the diabetes outcome gap between Black and white patients by 51%. Many households are multigenerational, extending impact across age groups. Economically, healthcare utilization for patients enrolled in Food Rx dropped significantly, with average inpatient, ED, and observation charges decreasing by $6,709 per patient within 30 days after enrolment. Environmentally, Food Rx reduces food waste through partnerships with Hungry Harvest (rescued produce) and First Fruits Farm (organic, no-cost donations). Patients are also encouraged to shop at farmers markets and local produce stands, supporting sustainable local food systems.
Inclusion	Many food system fields of action are directly connected to the design and implementation of the Food Rx program and Food is Medicine initiatives. 1. Governance: Food Rx brings together diverse stakeholders which include government agencies, healthcare systems, insurance providers, nonprofits, philanthropic networks, and private companies to collaboratively fund, manage, and support the program. 2. Sustainable Diets: The program addresses dietary related diseases by improving access to fresh produce, offering nutrition education, and encouraging joint action by health and food system sectors to promote long-term dietary changes and health care management. 3. Social & Economic Equity: MedStar's Community Health Advocates provide patients with direct social support and connect them to federal assistance programs. Additionally, Food Rx distributes family-sized food boxes that promote home cooking and shared meals while strengthening household food security. 4. Food Production: Food Rx supports local food production by connecting patients to resources that encourage supporting farmers markets and local farms. In addition, it partners with organizations that rescue surplus food and source from regional growers. 5. Food Waste: In partnership with Hungry Harvest, Food Rx reduces food waste by recovering cosmetically imperfect and surplus produce that would otherwise go to landfills, and redistributing it through weekly food box deliveries to patients.