

Meridian and the Centene Foundation Announce \$1 Million Grant to the Food Bank Council of Michigan - Jul 31, 2025

The partnership aims to expand access to fresh food and enhance health outcomes in rural southwest Michigan food deserts

DETROIT, July 31, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- Meridian Health Plan of Michigan, Inc. ("[Meridian](#)"), a leading managed care organization in Michigan, and the [Centene Foundation](#), the philanthropic arm of [Centene Corporation](#) (NYSE: CNC), announced today a \$1 million grant to the [Food Bank Council of Michigan](#) (FBCM), a cooperative network of the state's regional food banks dedicated to alleviating hunger and food insecurity. The grant will support efforts in Prosperity Region 8, which includes Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties to upgrade current food pantries, equipping community members with food as medicine interventions, and providing technological support to future In Lieu of Services (ILOS) implementation. Additionally, the two-phased program will fund a fresh food pharmacy program at a federally qualified health center to support patients with diet-sensitive chronic conditions while offering health coaching supporting.

"[Research](#) shows that hunger, health and well-being are deeply connected," said Patty Graham, Meridian Plan President and CEO. "People who are food insecure are affected by diet-sensitive chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure. By focusing on a proactive coordinated approach, this partnership will increase food access, remove transportation barriers and create a holistic pathway to address the root causes of health problems and health disparities in rural Michigan."

Phase One will designate and upgrade two existing food pantries to serve as Nourish MI Pantries, a model developed by the Food Bank Council of Michigan in collaboration with regional food banks, funders, and healthcare partners to support and enhance community pantries across the state. The model offers a shared standard that expands access to fresh, nutritious foods, enhances client experience, and supports partnerships in health and equity.

Participation in the model reflects a commitment to practices like client-choice shopping, fresh and frozen food availability, set hours, and a wide variety of healthy options. Pantries may also receive the ILOS Certified designation, allowing them to serve enrollees of Michigan's Medicaid Health Plans (MHPs) participating in the Comprehensive Health Care Program (CHCP) Nourish MI Pantry Packs, a curated food pack that aligns with healthcare and nutrition goals.

The Phase One pantries will be equipped to deliver food as medicine interventions supported by local food bank development teams to implement a long-term plan for sustaining access to fresh food. Support could include the purchase of food, cold storage (such as refrigerators or freezers), shelving and other storage supplies, and technological support such as computers or tablets to support future In Lieu of Services (ILOS) implementation. The food banks will also provide technical assistance as needed to help the pantries effectively support ILOS patients. The initiative aims to strengthen local food access while also building capacity for ILOS operations for all participating Medicaid health plans.

Phase Two, set to begin in 2026, will expand the program, designating and upgrading five additional Nourish MI Pantries across the same region. It will also fund the Fresh Food Pharmacy (FFP) program at [Grace Health](#), a federally qualified health center in Battle Creek. The funding for FFP helps eligible members with diet-sensitive chronic conditions access nutritious food and health education, while also supporting efforts to build a long-term sustainability strategy for the program. Eligible patients of Grace Health with chronic conditions can shop at the on-site pantry and participate in health coaching support.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Michiganders facing food insecurity has continued to grow and is especially prevalent in rural communities, [where many travel long distances to get fresh produce because of limited grocery stores and limited public transit](#). This, along with other factors such as low income and few job prospects, can lead to food insecurity, which can adversely impact health and well-being. More than [1.4 million people are food insecure in Michigan](#), according to Feeding America's [Map the Meal Gap](#), and more than 378,000 of them are children.

"At the Food Bank Council of Michigan, our mission is to create a food-secure state through advocacy, collaboration and innovative solutions," said Dr. Phil Knight, Food Bank Council of Michigan Executive Director. "This partnership with Meridian and the Centene Foundation exemplifies that commitment by bringing lasting, fresh food access to rural communities in a way that's both sustainable and designed to improve health outcomes. Together, we're not only addressing hunger today, but laying groundwork to solve it for tomorrow."

By investing in the sustainability of the Fresh Food Pharmacy program and partnering with local pantries to strengthen and designate them as Nourish MI Pantries aligned with food as medicine principles, Meridian and the Centene Foundation further their commitment to bring fresh food year-round to rural areas. This includes areas of the state where residents face access barriers ensuring a healthier, more food-secure future for all Michiganders through this three-year partnership.

About Meridian Health Plan of Michigan, Inc.

Meridian provides government-sponsored managed care services to families, children, seniors and individuals with complex medical needs primarily through Medicaid (Meridian), Medicare Advantage and Medicare Prescription Drug Plans (WellCare), Medicare-Medicaid Plans (MeridianComplete) and the Health Insurance Marketplace (Ambetter from Meridian). Meridian is a [Centene Corporation](#) company. For more information, visit www.mimeridian.com.

About the Centene Foundation

The [Centene Foundation](#) (the "Foundation"), a private nonprofit focused on investing in economically challenged communities, is the philanthropic arm of [Centene Corporation](#) (NYSE: CNC) ("Centene"). The Foundation supports projects and initiatives strategically aligned with Centene's mission-driven culture and enhances the work Centene is doing to remove the barriers to wellness underserved and low-income populations face. The Foundation is committed to addressing drivers of health and improving health equity in three distinct areas of focus: healthcare, social services and education. To learn more, visit the Centene Foundation's [website](#).

About Food Bank Council of Michigan

The Food Bank Council of Michigan (FBCM), founded in 1984, leads a unified effort to end hunger across the state. By addressing the root causes of hunger, FBCM raises awareness, advocates for policies that protect those in need, conducts in-depth research to find sustainable solutions, and provides thought leadership and resources to Michigan's food banks. Working with its network of regional food banks, over 2,800 hunger relief agencies, private companies, farmers, state and federal officials, and other allies, FBCM strives to ensure that no Michigander goes without food.

To learn more about the Food Bank Council of Michigan's role in eliminating food insecurity, visit www.fbcmich.org or call 517-485-1202.

SOURCE Meridian of Michigan

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