

Meridian Health Plan of Illinois and Centene Foundation Give \$300,000 to Food Pantries to Help Tackle Food Insecurity in Illinois - Nov 6, 2025

*Donations strengthen community food resources for families struggling to access healthy food*

CHICAGO, Nov. 6, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- [Meridian Health Plan of Illinois, Inc. \(Meridian\)](#) and [Centene Foundation](#), the philanthropic arm of [Centene Corporation](#) (NYSE: CNC), today announced a strategic and timely investment aimed at addressing food insecurity across Illinois. This initiative comes as millions of Americans face increasing challenges in accessing nutritious food due to recent disruptions to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA), food insecurity currently affects approximately 47.4 million people nationwide, including 13.8 million children.

This support is a continuation of Meridian's commitment to helping those most in need and advancing long-term solutions to hunger and nutrition challenges. The \$300,000 donation will help support access to healthy, nutritious food in communities across Illinois, including:

- [Beyond Hunger](#)
- [Brave Space Alliance](#)
- [Central Illinois Foodbank](#)
- [Collinsville Food Pantry](#)
- [Dream Center Peoria](#)
- [Eastern Illinois Foodbank](#)
- [Food Pantry Network-Heart of Illinois](#)
- [Greater Chicago Food Depository](#)
- [Gum Drops](#)
- [Loaves & Fishes Community Services](#)
- [Midwest Food Bank](#)
- [Neighborhood Food Pantries](#)
- [Northern Illinois Food Bank](#)
- [Nourishing Hope](#)
- [People's Resource Center](#)
- [River Bend Foodbank](#)
- [Rock House Kids](#)
- [Southern Illinois Food Pantry Network](#)
- [St. Louis Area Foodbank](#)
- [The Kindness Campaign](#)
- [Tri-State Food Bank](#)

Meridian Health Plan of Illinois has also rolled out a number of initiatives to combat food insecurity across the state, including:

- **Eat Well, Be Well** is Meridian's new 2025 nutrition and wellness program designed to empower its members from all backgrounds to take control of their health through relevant, affordable, and nutritious meal options. The program recognizes that food choices are shaped by culture, health needs, and access. More recipe information can be found at [lmeridian.com/eatwell](https://lmeridian.com/eatwell).
- **Meridian at the Market** is a program that works with farmers' markets in communities with high food insecurities in central and southern Illinois. This initiative provides community members with access to fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables by offering vouchers to purchase fresh farm foods.
- Meridian's **Health Happens Here Grants™** program distributes various sums of money to organizations that support our members' health, such as food, in communities where Meridian members live.

"Food insecurity remains one of the most urgent health challenges facing our state. In August alone, almost 14.7% of our population needed extra help to feed their families. At Meridian, we see every day how hunger affects health, dignity, and opportunity. That's why this investment is so important. By working alongside community partners, we're ensuring families have access to healthy meals today while supporting long-term solutions that strengthen the well-being of communities across Illinois," said Cristal Gary, Plan President and CEO of Meridian Health Plan of Illinois.

Meridian's support is part of a \$1.5 million commitment from the Centene Foundation to organizations across the country, particularly food banks and other community-based groups that are typically preparing for winter but may already be experiencing critical shortages.

"Families across the country are facing unprecedented challenges as essential nutrition programs experience strain and demand for food assistance continues to rise. Local organizations have been working tirelessly to meet these needs, and this emergency funding will strengthen their efforts — helping ensure that children and families most at risk have access to healthy

meals during this critical time," said Centene's Chief Health Officer Alice Chen, MD. "Access to nutritious food is foundational to good health, and sustained investment in these programs is essential to reducing disparities and improving long-term outcomes for vulnerable communities."

Centene has long championed the fight against food insecurity. With more than 95% of its Medicaid plans offering food or nutrition intervention programs, which help address the social factors driving 80% of health outcomes, access to nutritious food remains a vital health priority.

In 2024, Centene invested \$77.1 million toward food security. Specifically, Centene's efforts have spanned multiple states, leveraging innovative, community-based partnerships to combat food insecurity and chronic disease – from [Fresh Food Pharmacies](#) in Michigan to [farmers market produce vouchers](#) in Illinois, [grocery support for diabetic members](#) in Nebraska and [maternal care food programs](#) in Arkansas – reinforcing Centene's long-standing commitment to food as a critical driver of health.

These investments reflect Centene's broader mission to transform community health through locally driven solutions, addressing drivers like access to nutritious food and promoting long-term sustainability by integrating food access with healthcare services.

### **About Meridian Health Plan of Illinois**

Meridian Health Plan of Illinois, Inc. and its family of health plans provide government-sponsored managed care to families, children, seniors, and individuals with complex medical needs. This includes Meridian Medicaid Plan, YouthCare HealthChoice Illinois, Wellcare (Medicare Advantage plans), Wellcare By Meridian (Medicaid and Medicare-Medicaid plans), and Ambetter Marketplace plans. Meridian connects members to care and offers comprehensive services to support lifelong health and wellness. Meridian is a company of [Centene Corporation](#), a leading healthcare enterprise committed to helping people live healthier lives. Learn more at [ILmeridian.com](#).

### **About 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.

SOURCE Meridian of Illinois

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<https://investors.centene.com/2025-11-06-Meridian-Health-Plan-of-Illinois-and-Centene-Foundation-Give-300,000-to-Food-Pantries-to-Help-Tackle-Food-Insecurity-in-Illinois>