

Meridian Health Plan of Illinois Commits \$1.15 Million to Expand St. Louis Area Foodbank Mobile Pantry Program - Dec 2, 2025

"Food On The Move" aligns with Meridian's Eat Well, Be Well initiative to increase access to healthy food and nutrition awareness to underserved populations, food deserts, and rural areas in Illinois.

CHICAGO, Dec. 2, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- [Meridian Health Plan of Illinois, Inc.](#) (Meridian), a company of [Centene Corporation](#) (NYSE: CNC), announced it will provide a \$1.15 million grant over the next three years to [Food On The Move](#), a mobile food pantry program by the St. Louis Area Foodbank that brings healthy food to underserved populations and food deserts in urban communities and rural areas in Illinois. This partnership will deliver healthy food and essential resources to underserved communities across Illinois, aligning with Meridian's [Eat Well, Be Well](#) initiative.

The three-year grant will support more than 300 mobile market distributions throughout the Metro East and Southern Illinois. St. Louis Area Food Bank serves 12 counties in Illinois, focusing on low-income areas with limited access to nutritious food.

More than 1.6 million Illinois residents — about one in eight — face food insecurity, according to [Feeding America](#). In St. Clair County alone, an estimated 34,520 people (13.5%) are food insecure. Meridian's Eat Well, Be Well initiative expands access to healthy food and nutrition education statewide by supporting programs like Food On The Move.

"We're committed to improving access to healthy food and to making a difference in people's lives," said Cristal Gary, Meridian Plan President and CEO. "Through this partnership with the St. Louis Area Foodbank, Food On The Move creates a vital pipeline to combat food insecurity and improve health outcomes. Together, we can deliver critical food and health resources directly to those who need them most."

In 2024, Food On The Move provided support to roughly 12,000 individuals across 4,300 households. By May 2025, the program reached nearly 18,700 people in more than 6,500 households. With Meridian's support, the initiative is positioned to serve an anticipated 60,000 community members through 2028.

Recipients say the program provides dignity and stability during challenging times. One mother shared that after a major life change, she struggled to feed her children. But thanks to Food On The Move, she can now provide healthy meals. Another caregiver said the program helped her support a household that grew from eight to thirteen family members. Stories like these underscore the importance of the program's mission to fight food insecurity and strengthen communities across Illinois.

"This program is invaluable because it allows neighbors to maintain dignity while meeting their needs. Anyone in need is welcome — whether seniors, families, individuals, or people with disabilities — and each mobile pantry stop can serve up to 100 families. Having the ability to choose the foods that best fit their household, along with access to essential grocery staples, creates a reliable and respectful resource for the community," said Rachel Jones, St. Louis Area Foodbank Director of Partners and Programs.

Meridian joined Food On The Move events in January 2025, offering health and nutrition resources, engaging additional community partners, and providing hands-on support with food distribution. Starting in 2026, Meridian will partner with trusted local healthcare providers to deliver vaccines and health screenings for diabetes, high blood pressure, and other conditions associated with food insecurity at selected Food On The Move events.

For a full schedule and more information, visit [STLfoodbank.org/find-food](#). To learn more about Meridian's community impact and whole-health approach, visit [ILmeridian.com/IL-first](#).

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 St. Louis Area Foodbank

Everyone deserves access to food and the promise of a healthy diet, which is why the St. Louis Area Foodbank is committed to ensuring access to the foods and resources our neighbors need to thrive. Through our network of partners and programs across 26 counties in Eastern Missouri and Southwestern Illinois we are working to revolutionize the hunger relief system. Food On The Move is a direct service program for individuals living in areas of Illinois and Missouri with limited access to healthy food and resources. Our Food On The Move trailer is outfitted as a mobile pantry, allowing the St. Louis Area Foodbank to take nutritious food directly into neighborhoods. This mobile, choice-based food pantry is designed to increase access to food and decrease food waste by encouraging neighbors to take the foods they like and need.

SOURCE Meridian of Illinois

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