



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Food is medicine initiative to combat diabetes in rural SE Oklahoma**

OKLAHOMA CITY — An initiative being launched in four southeast Oklahoma counties aims to combat type 2 diabetes and improve health outcomes through food.

More specifically, the produce prescription (PRx) program will provide fresh fruits and vegetables to qualifying individuals in low-income households in Atoka, Bryan, Coal, and Johnston counties. The produce will be locally sourced within 200 miles and primarily be Oklahoma grown. Qualifying individuals must have a type 2 diabetes diagnosis within the previous six months and be screened and found to be ready and committed to improving their health with changes to their diet.

Hippocrates is attributed with saying, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.” The medical community has long recognized that the food choices individuals make today have the power to shape their future health. However, food insecurities, limited financial resources, lack of reliable transportation and food deserts all impact the ability to consistently access and maintain a nutrient-rich diet.

Recognizing these barriers to accessing healthy food and their health ramifications, a group of community partners is joining forces to address the problems. The core initiative is structured as a collaboration among three partner organizations: FreshRx, Oklahoma Hospital Association’s Foundation for a Healthy Oklahoma, and Southern Oklahoma Development Association.

FreshRx will provide fresh fruit and vegetables that can be picked up or delivered to participants every two weeks. They will also serve as instructors for an education curriculum related to ‘food is medicine’ and meal preparation for participants.

“We’re not just delivering produce—we’re delivering power back to the people,” said Erin Martin, founder of FreshRx Oklahoma. “When doctors prescribe food and we pair it with recipes, lifestyle change, education, and local farmers, it’s more than a program—it’s a revolution in rural health care. These prescriptions fuel local farms, foster community and economic restoration, and regenerate both human and soil health.”

FreshRx has a sufficient supply of Oklahoma-sourced produce to distribute for this initiative. In addition, the Choctaw Nation has agreed to help build relationships with local farmers for future expansion.

Foundation for a Healthy Oklahoma will subcontract with two area hospitals—AllianceHealth Durant and Coal County General Hospital—each of which will employ community health workers funded by the initiative and focused on identification, screening, and enrolling qualifying patients in FreshRx and connecting them to other health-related community resources.

“The Foundation for Healthy Oklahoma is excited to bring this project to Coal County Hospital and AllianceHealth Durant. They are great hospital partners who are excited about the health benefits this project can bring to their respective communities. We believe this innovative clinical-public health collaborative will yield promising health benefits and reduce barriers to care. We are optimistic that it will serve as a model to be replicated in communities around the state,” said Eric Finley, Executive Director of the Foundation for a Healthy Oklahoma.

To ensure that transportation is not a barrier for patients, the Southern Oklahoma Development Association will contract with local nonprofits to provide transportation to health-related appointments and cooking classes and deliver produce to patients if needed.

“SODA Mobility Management is excited to be a part of this innovative and pioneering partnership,” said Todd O’Neal, SODA Mobility Navigator and member of the Oklahoma Mobility Management Program. “Our area public transit providers — SORTS (Big Five Community Action Agency) and JAMM (INCA Community Action Agency) — have met the call to provide transportation for all aspects of the project. We will build on our existing relationship to improve the health of our neighbors in south-central Oklahoma.”

The initiative is made possible by blending multiple sources of funding and an innovative public-private financing model, all of which are focused on providing maximum flexibility to partner organizations as they tailor services to unique local needs.

Aetna Better Health® of Oklahoma provided a grant to FreshRx to help with program costs.

“Aetna Better Health looks forward to the positive outcomes this important venture produces; bringing patients, providers and the community together to ensure FreshRx is successfully launched. This partnership has the potential to make a lasting impact on the health of Southeastern Oklahomans,” said Lisa Gifford, Aetna Better Health® of Oklahoma CEO.

The remainder of the program costs for the first two years will be paid for with Pay for Success financing from the Oklahoma Impact Investing Collaborative (the

Collaborative). The Collaborative has partnered with Oklahoma foundations and philanthropists to provide upfront funding for the project which is only repaid if successful outcomes are achieved. Funding for the outcome payments will come from the State of Oklahoma's Pay for Success Innovation Fund administered by the Oklahoma Office of Management and Enterprise Services.

"It has been a true honor to collaborate with several dedicated community agencies committed to improving health outcomes in rural Oklahoma," said Linda Brinlee, director of rural health for the Collaborative. "This initiative exemplifies the power of partnership—bringing together diverse organizations to creatively address the challenges faced by individuals with type 2 diabetes. By removing barriers and providing essential resources, we're not only empowering individuals to take control of their health but also strengthening the well-being of the entire community and state."

The Oklahoma State Department of Health will monitor the program's performance and share data with the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, Oklahoma's Medicaid program, to help inform future decisions related to potential Medicaid billing for food is medicine programs.

"Data provides valuable insight that drives informed and impactful decisions," said Floritta Pope, OSDH's produce prescription (PRx) program monitor. "At OSDH, we believe when partnerships like this exist, Oklahomans benefit and gain greater access to the resources they need to live healthier lives."

In May 2025, the Oklahoma legislature passed a bill authored by Senator Adam Pugh and Speaker Pro Tempore Anthony Moore directing the Oklahoma Health Care Authority to seek any necessary federal approval to provide coverage for nutrition services under the state Medicaid program. As of July 1, 2024, 20 states and the District of Columbia have approved or pending section 1115 waiver demonstrations to provide coverage for nutrition interventions to Medicaid members.

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### **About Fresh Rx**

FreshRx Oklahoma is a community-based food-as-medicine program that addresses chronic disease by connecting healthcare providers, patients, and local farmers. Through physician-referred produce prescriptions, FreshRx delivers nutrient-dense, Oklahoma-grown fruits and vegetables to individuals managing or reversing type 2 diabetes and other chronic conditions. Participants also receive culturally relevant

recipes, cooking education, and lifestyle support. Since launching in 2021, FreshRx has invested over **\$500,000 in local produce** and helped generate more than **\$5 million in healthcare cost savings**—improving health outcomes while strengthening Oklahoma’s food and healthcare systems. Learn more at [www.freshrxok.org](http://www.freshrxok.org).

### **About the Foundation for a Healthy Oklahoma**

The Foundation for a Healthy Oklahoma is the 501(C3) not-for-profit foundation of the Oklahoma Hospital Association. The Foundation for a Healthy Oklahoma invests in services, systems, and outcomes necessary to create a healthier state.

### **About Southern Oklahoma Development Association**

The Mobility Management program collaborates with individuals, transportation providers, and all stakeholders affected by transportation access and availability in the area. The objective is to devise and execute a transportation delivery system tailored to the community's mobility requirements. The Mobility Manager acts as a facilitator, fostering partnerships among transportation providers, mediating agreements between them, and pinpointing opportunities for resource sharing, cost reduction, and enhanced access to transportation services. Visit [www.sertpo.org/about-mobility](http://www.sertpo.org/about-mobility).

### **About Oklahoma State Department of Health**

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) protects and improves public health through its system of local health services and strategies focused on preventing disease. OSDH provides technical assistance, administrative support, and guidance to 68 county health departments in Oklahoma, as well as guidance and consultation to the two independent city-county health departments in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Learn more at [Oklahoma.gov/health](http://Oklahoma.gov/health).

### **About Oklahoma Impact Investing Collaborative**

The Oklahoma Impact Investing Collaborative (Collaborative) is a subsidiary of MetaFund that blends government, philanthropic, and other private financing to invest in mission-driven organizations with the potential to improve outcomes for Oklahomans. The Collaborative is a national leader in Pay for Success financing.

### **About MetaFund**

MetaFund is a nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) investing in impact and expanding economic opportunity through flexible financing and partnerships with banks, philanthropic investors, government entities, and community leaders. Since 1999, MetaFund has deployed more than \$470 million and leveraged an additional \$540 million in co-investments, with a focus on work, housing, and health. For more information, please visit [metafund.org](http://metafund.org).