



# The Colorado Food is Medicine Summit

## Report from the 2023 event

### SUMMARY

The first-ever **Colorado Food is Medicine Summit** was hosted on November 8, 2023, by Project Angel Heart and Kaiser Permanente, in partnership with Colorado Health Institute and Food Bank of the Rockies to tackle the critical issue of how to increase health through access to essential nutrition programs for all Coloradans.

The Summit served as a platform for insightful discussions, collaboration, and the sharing of expertise among leaders dedicated to promoting health equity through food and nutrition. The diverse perspectives and experiences shared at the Summit highlighted the need for comprehensive, community-driven solutions, and laid the groundwork for ongoing initiatives and partnerships.

This report provides highlights from what was a thoughtful, inspiring day. A comprehensive list of speakers, their biographies, and presentation slides are [available here](#).



Kim Bimestefer gives the opening keynote address at the Colorado Food is Medicine Summit.

### ATTENDEES

The one-day *Colorado Food is Medicine Summit* brought together **more than 200 stakeholders from nearly 80 organizations**. Of attendees:

- 40% work for community-based programs or nonprofit organizations
- 14% work for health care providers
- 10% work as researchers
- 10% work for government agencies
- 9% work for health care payers
- 7% are licensed nutritionists (RD, RDN, NDTR)
- 6% work as policymakers
- 4% work as clinicians

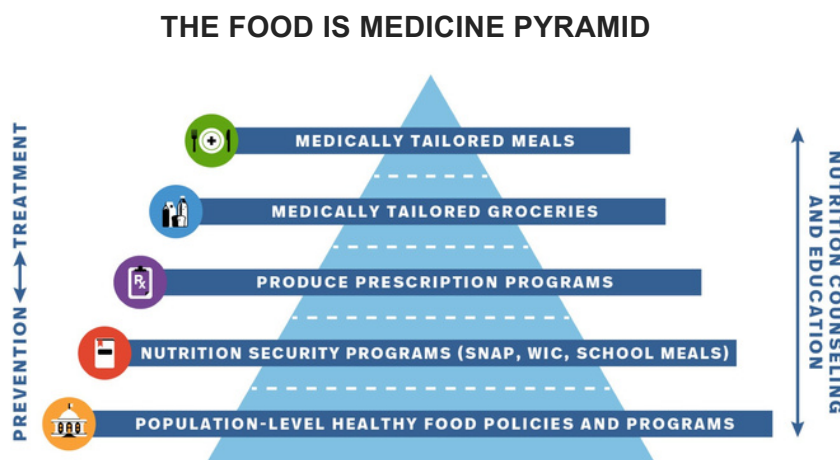
### HIGHLIGHTS

**Michael S. Ramseier**, *Colorado Regional President for Kaiser Permanente*, welcomed attendees to the day by sharing why access to nutritious food is important. A 2020 survey showed that 30% of Kaiser Permanente members saw food insecurity and access to healthy food as a challenge for them. Since then, Kaiser Permanente has been investing to expand access to Food is Medicine programs. He welcomed the audience to join that movement and extend the impact of improved nutrition across Colorado.

The opening keynote address was given by **Kim Bimestefer**, *Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing*, who shared her personal experience with the transformational potential of nutritious food. She spoke about the challenge many Colorado communities have in accessing healthy food and the opportunities ahead to change that.

Bimestefer called on attendees to collaborate to realize change at all levels of the Food is Medicine program pyramid. Specifically, she focused the audience on:

- increasing basic access to food through public and community programs;
- improving nutrition education and knowledge about what we eat; and
- supporting behavior change through better policy and payment methods.



Bimestefer emphasized the opportunity ahead through state government by leveraging Medicaid, including expanded access to healthy school meals and the home-delivered meal expansion, among other programs. She closed by emphasizing the importance of partnership across Colorado.

The rest of the morning's presentations focused on how Food is Medicine programs are being innovated and implemented in our state.



*Giselle Díaz Campagna (left) speaks during the panel, "Expanding Access to Food is Medicine for All Coloradans."*



*Attendees of the first-ever Colorado Food is Medicine Summit.*

**Owen Ryan**, *President and CEO of Project Angel Heart*, and **Erin Pulling**, *President and CEO of Food Bank of the Rockies*, shared on-the-ground examples of how medically tailored meals and healthy food boxes are incorporated into health care and their impact on Coloradans.

**Sara Schmitt**, *President and CEO, Colorado Health Institute*, facilitated the next panel, which showcased the experience of providers and payers. **Annie Lee**, *President and CEO of Colorado Access*, and **Krista Newton**, *Director, Care Coordination at Physician Health Partners*, shared their experience as leaders of Colorado's Regional Accountable Entities. They discussed how clients' lives have been improved and overall costs saved by including Food is Medicine as part of their approach to health care. **Dr. Wendolyn Gozansky**, *Vice President and Chief Quality Officer at Kaiser Permanente*, **Jim Garcia**, *CEO/Founder of Tepeyac Community Health Center*, and **Bob Belknap**, *Executive Director, Public Health Institute at Denver Health*, discussed the quadruple aim in health care: enhance patient experience; enhance provider experience; reduce costs; and improve population and individual health.

**Michelle Barnes**, *Interim Behavioral Health Administration Commissioner and Executive Director of Colorado Department of Human Services*, gave the lunch address and spoke passionately about the human impact of food and nutrition programs, emphasizing the compassion and empathy at the heart of this work.



**Owen Ryan** facilitated the post-lunch panel discussion on the realities and challenges faced by programs seeking to extend the reach of Food is Medicine programs and address equity gaps. **Giselle Díaz Campagna**, *Executive Director of GrowHaus*, **Shannon Francis**, *Executive Director of Spirit of the Sun*, and **Patience Kabwasa**, *Executive Director of Food to Power*—all community-based providers of Food is Medicine programs—shared the challenges faced by community members to access culturally relevant, healthy food. **Sarah Hoerle**, *HCBS Unit Supervisor, Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing*, discussed her department's efforts to extend nutrition benefits to Coloradans receiving benefits through home and community-based services. Finally, **Lynnette Namba**, *Senior Community Health Specialist, Housing Lead*, shared how *Kaiser Permanente* is working to combine housing and nutrition programs to address the health needs among the unhoused.

**Jeff Bontrager**, *Director of Research and Evaluation, Colorado Health Institute*, facilitated the final panel of the day, which focused on recent research evaluating the impact of Food is Medicine programs and future opportunities to improve our understanding of their potential. **Astrid De la Cruz**, *Nutrition Services Manager at Project Angel Heart*, and **Luis Perez**, *Advanced Health Services Research Dietitian Fellow, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, both shared research with which they are involved, and how the research shapes current programming. **Shepard Nevel**, *Director of Policy and Research, Office of Governor Jared Polis*, and **Dr. John Steiner**, *Senior Investigator, Institute for Health Research, Kaiser Permanente*, discussed opportunities for additional research focused on four levels of outcomes: person-centered, clinical, social, and cost utilization.

The panel discussed the importance of sharing with policymakers the cost–benefit analysis and the lived experience of Coloradans receiving Food is Medicine programs.



## EVALUATION

Participants received a follow-up survey to evaluate their experience. **Ninety-four percent** of survey respondents rated their experience and the content at the Summit as either “**excellent**” or “**very good**.”

### Comments:

- “The selection of speakers was dynamic, expert, approachable, and diverse.”
- “Absolute slam dunk of an experience. Hearing both grassroots leaders and executive directors discuss Food is Medicine at the same summit made the discussion well-rounded and provided a wealth of information.”
- “Amazing summit! It was so well organized, it felt like it was the tenth year in. Great work to everyone who helped!”
- “The panel ‘Expanding Access to Food is Medicine for All Coloradans’ provided new introductions to FIM organizations in Colorado that I was unaware of previously. I particularly found strength in this all-female panel and their direct, pragmatic recommendations for ways to improve experiences and limit barriers to food access.”
- “Felt like the latest, most cutting-edge information on Food is Medicine and current issues. Great statistics were provided.”

## WHAT'S NEXT

### The next Colorado Food is Medicine Summit

- We received many requests for additional convenings of the Colorado Food is Medicine Summit, with more speakers and focused topic tracks. We look forward to making this a recurring event intended to increase access to nutrition interventions in our state. Watch for more information about how to get involved in the planning process, and how to attend future events.
- We will take into consideration post-event feedback we received, including suggestions for content and logistics.



*The Colorado Food is Medicine Summit event organizers from Kaiser Permanente, Food Bank of the Rockies, Colorado Health Institute, and Project Angel Heart.*

### Advocating for pathways to increased access to nutrition interventions

- The Summit led to great discussions about how much data is available that shows the positive impact of FIM interventions. We will work on combining available data and research to demonstrate a compelling case to include food and nutrition in future policy changes, including Medicaid 1115 waivers.
- If you have data or research that you would like to share, or would like to be included in this report, please contact Nic Soucy, [nsoucy@projectangelheart.org](mailto:nsoucy@projectangelheart.org).

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