

# Researchers find fewer hospital and nursing home admissions among recipients of medically tailored meals

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Seth A. Berkowitz, MD, MPH. Credit: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine

A new study led by Seth A. Berkowitz, MD, MPH, a physician and

assistant professor in the division of general medicine and clinical epidemiology at the UNC School of Medicine, has found that participation in a medically tailored meals program was associated with fewer hospital admissions and nursing home admissions, and less overall medical spending.

The study, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Evidence for Action Program and utilizing Massachusetts' insurance claims database, estimated a 16.4 percent difference in average monthly medical costs (\$3,838 versus \$4,591) for individuals receiving meals from Community Servings, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit provider of medically tailored meals and nutrition services to individuals and families living with critical and chronic illnesses.

The study was published April 22 in *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

"The evidence that medically-tailored meal delivery programs may be a useful intervention for vulnerable individuals continues to grow," said Berkowitz. "The next step will be to test these interventions in randomized trials to help better understand in what situations medically-tailored meal delivery programs should be used."

The researchers linked data at the individual level from the 2011-2015 Massachusetts All Payer Claims Database with the meal delivery records of Community Servings, which prepares and home-delivers meals tailored by registered dietitian nutritionists to recipients' [medical condition](#). Community Servings provides 15 different meal plans that are culturally appropriate and customized into 50 diet combinations based on primary illness, comorbidities and medication regimens. Clients are referred to the program by a medical professional and receive a weekly home delivery of 10 medically tailored meals.

"We are heartened to have such strong, new evidence of health benefits

and cost savings associated with medically tailored meals programs," said David B. Waters, CEO of Community Servings. "Given that diet and [food security](#) are central to preventing complications and improving health for those with costly chronic medical conditions, we hope that the impact of these outcomes will spur policymakers, providers and payers to support widespread adoption of the medically tailored meal delivery model."

The latest research is consistent with a 2018 [study](#) published in the journal *Health Affairs*, which was also led by Dr. Berkowitz and involved Community Servings' medically tailored meals and also found [cost savings](#) in the form of fewer emergency department visits and hospitalizations. The main difference is the study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* features a larger-scale evaluation with a broader data set and even more rigorous research methodology than other studies to date.

While the earlier study was underway, Berkowitz was an assistant professor at Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical School, in Boston. He has since joined the faculty at UNC.

**More information:** Seth A. Berkowitz et al. Association Between Receipt of a Medically Tailored Meal Program and Health Care Use, *JAMA Internal Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.0198](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.0198)

Seth A. Berkowitz et al. Meal Delivery Programs Reduce The Use Of Costly Health Care In Dually Eligible Medicare And Medicaid Beneficiaries, *Health Affairs* (2018). [DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2017.0999](https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2017.0999)

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