

Flint inspires national nutrition prescription program in US Farm Bill

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Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, director of the Michigan State University and Hurley Children's Hospital Pediatric Public Health Initiative, shares a laugh with a patient. Credit: Kurt Stepnitz

A Flint nutrition prescription program, where fruits and vegetables are prescribed to young patients by their pediatrician, will expand nationally as a result of the recently signed U.S. Farm Bill by President Trump.

Managed by the Michigan State University and Hurley Children's Hospital Pediatric Public Health Initiative, or PPHI, the program launched at the Hurley Children's Clinic, a pediatric medical facility, located in the same building as the city's farmers market.

"Healthy [food](#) is the best medicine," said Mona Hanna-Attisha, associate professor of pediatrics in the College of Human Medicine and PPHI director.

"We started this program more than three years ago to make sure that Flint kids had access to nutritious foods they need to grow up healthy. We are so excited that Flint will be sharing this program with the nation."

How does it work? Parents of children receive a \$15 prescription that may be filled for fresh fruits and vegetables at the Flint Farmers' Market or through the Flint Fresh Mobile Market with delivery to a home or business within the city.

To replicate the success of Flint's program on a national scale, U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow included the program in the 2018 Farm Bill, which she co-authored as ranking member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.

"Good nutrition is important to leading a healthy life," Stabenow said. "Produce [prescriptions](#) encourage healthy eating while also fueling our local food economy. Building off the successful work led by MSU and Hurley Children's Clinic, I was very pleased to include this innovative initiative in the Farm Bill to connect even more families with fresh, [healthy food](#)."

MSU researchers in Flint are examining the effect of pediatric nutrition prescriptions on food security, food access and dietary patterns of children.

"Early results indicate that most kids are not meeting dietary recommendations," said Amy Saxe-Custack, assistant professor of food science and [human nutrition](#) at MSU and PPHI's nutrition director. "The mean intake of vegetables is less than one serving per day before receiving a nutrition prescription."

The program is helping children meet their daily fruit and vegetable needs, as well as promoting healthy eating patterns early in their lives.

"Given the evidence that higher fruit and vegetable intake during childhood is associated with reductions in [chronic diseases](#) in adulthood, the immediate and long-term implications of these prescriptions for pediatric patients cannot be overstated," Saxe-Custack said.

Locally, the program also is being expanded to the Akpinar Children's Clinic in Flint.

Support for Flint's [nutrition](#) prescription program has come from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Health Innovation Grant, Rite Aid Foundation and Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

MSU and Hurley Children's Hospital formed PPHI to address the Flint community's population-wide crisis and help Flint children grow up healthy and strong. PPHI is a center of excellence within the university's Division of Public Health and serves as a national resource for best practices.

Provided by Michigan State University

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