**SelfMade Health Network Op-Ed**

**Reducing Shared Risks: Addressing Food Insecurity Can Improve Cardiovascular Disease Risk and Prostate Cancer Outcomes**

**Who should use this Op-Ed?**

The following Op-Ed is designed to help professionals and organizations share crucial information about men’s health in their community. The Op-Ed is for use by organizations nationwide, including:

* Community-based organizations,
* Non-profit organizations,
* Faith-based organizations,
* Community health workers,
* Health coalitions,
* Health plans,
* National Comprehensive Cancer Control Programs,
* National Tobacco Control programs, and
* Local health departments.

**How can I customize this Op-Ed?**

Throughout this Op-Ed are red sections set off by arrows. These sections are intended to be customized to your state or locality and to showcase your local resources. To customize the Op-Ed:

* change <state name> to the name of your state or community,
* use the references linked in the comments of the document to find relevant community-level data to fill the <xx> spaces, and
* customize the [insert example here] and <insert local Food is Medicine initiative or food access program>, and <insert brief description of program> spaces with relevant examples from your own community or some of the suggested resources.

**Where can I share this Op-Ed?**

Once you have customized the Op-Ed with data relevant to your community, you can share all or a portion of the Op-Ed with decisionmakers and community members in any way you would like. When you share the Op-Ed, be sure to include any of the sources linked in the document. Some ideas of where to share the Op-Ed include:

* In newsletters,
* On websites,
* On social media (specific sections or even sentences),
* In newspapers,
* In briefs,
* In emails to constituents, and
* In news releases.

Questions? Contact info@selfmadehealth.org or visit <https://selfmadehealth.org/> for more resources and information.

**Reducing Shared Risks: Addressing Food Insecurity Can Improve Cardiovascular Disease Risk and Prostate Cancer Outcomes**

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) and prostate cancer are two of the most prevalent chronic diseases facing men in the United States. An estimated 65.4 million American men aged 20 and older had CVD as of 2020, the last year for which data is available.1 Additionally, 1 in 8 American men will receive a prostate cancer diagnosis in their lifetimes.2 Each year, the United States spends $254 billion on CVD and more than $20 billion on prostate cancer care.1,3

In <state name>, the burden on men’s health caused by CVD and prostate cancer is immense:

* <xx> men in <state name> died of CVD in 2022, the most recent year for which data is available.4
* An estimated <xx> men will die of prostate cancer this year in <state name>.5

Fortunately, there is one action that can help with both CVD and prostate cancer: healthy eating, defined as following [U.S. dietary guidelines](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf). Research shows that a healthy diet can help prevent CVD, both before and after a cancer diagnosis, and may improve prostate cancer outcomes.6,7 Supporting healthier diets for men will not only decrease health issues, but it could also decrease healthcare costs: a relatively small improvement in healthy eating measures—about 20% more people following U.S. dietary guidelines—would save the United States up to $31.5 billion per year.8

**Cardiovascular Disease and Prostate Cancer Often Occur Together**

Many men have both CVD and prostate cancer at the same time, and the two conditions are highly interrelated. Men with prostate cancer have a higher risk of CVD, and common treatments for prostate cancer may also increase the risk of CVD.9,10 CVD and prostate cancer also share risk factors:

* **Smoking** affects nearly every organ in the body, increasing the risk of CVD and worsening prostate cancer outcomes.11,12
* **Obesity** affects both CVD and prostate cancer. People who are overweight or obese are more likely to have CVD, and obesity increases the risk of developing prostate cancer, experiencing adverse prostate cancer treatment side effects, experiencing a recurrence of prostate cancer after treatment, and dying from prostate cancer.13,14 Additionally, obesity may decrease the effectiveness of prostate cancer treatments.14

**Food Insecurity Keeps Many Men from Accessing Healthy Foods**

Despite the importance of access to healthy foods, men with low socioeconomic status (e.g., those with low income or lower levels of education) often experience barriers to accessing healthy foods that limit their ability to eat a healthy diet.

In <state name>:

* <xx>% of households are food insecure.15
* <xx>% of men live in low income and low access areas where accessing healthy foods may be difficult.16
* The excess annual healthcare costs caused by food insecurity in our community is a staggering $<xx>.17

**Promoting Health for Men in Our Community**

Our community can use nutrition to improve outcomes for many connected chronic conditions, including CVD and prostate cancer. On a national level, the [Food is Medicine](https://odphp.health.gov/foodismedicine) initiative engages healthcare and public health professionals to advocate for food as a means to treat and prevent diseases. At a local level, our community has implemented <insert local Food is Medicine initiative or food access program>, which <insert brief description of program>.

In <state name>, we can improve policies to ensure more men have access to nutritious foods. Policies to help improve nutrition and food security in our state include:

* Expanding food is medicine programs and food prescription programs,
* Ensuring coverage of food prescriptions through [Medicaid and Medicare](https://odphp.health.gov/foodismedicine/promising-practices-and-tools/state-health-care-structures?State=All&data=1),
* Supporting research on nutrition and health care,
* Supporting local food programs, and
* Implementing additional [policies](https://www.feedingamerica.org/advocate/policy-recommendations) to support food security and nutrition.

To improve access to healthy foods and to support men’s health in our community, we recommend:

* [insert example here]
* [insert example here]
* [insert example here]

Together, we can address chronic diseases, including CVD and prostate cancer, for men in our community. Policies and programs that improve access to healthy foods have the ability to shape health in our community, allowing more men to live longer, healthier lives and lowering the economic burden of chronic disease in our community.

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Food Insecurity Resources

* CDC’s [Food Assistance and Food System Resources](https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/php/resources/food-and-food-system-resources.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/resources-publications/food-and-food-system-resources-during-covid-19-pandemic.html)
* U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Resources
	+ [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations](https://www.fns.usda.gov/fdpir/food-distribution-program-indian-reservations)
	+ [SNAP Eligibility](https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility)
* Feeding America’s Resources
	+ [Free Food and Resources](https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/hunger-relief-programs)
	+ [Mobile Pantry Locator](https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/hunger-relief-programs/mobile-food-pantry-program)
	+ [Food Insecurity Among Overall (All Ages) Population in the United States Map](https://map.feedingamerica.org/)
	+ [The Healthcare Costs of Food Insecurity](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/feeding.america.research/viz/TheHealthcareCostsofFoodInsecurity/HealthcareCosts)
* FoodFinder’s [Interactive Map](https://foodfinder.us/)
* United Way’s [211 Program](https://www.unitedway.org/our-impact/featured-programs/2-1-1)
* Meals on Wheels’ [Find a Meals on Wheels Provider Near You](https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/find-meals)

Healthy Eating Resources

* CDC’s [Eating Healthy](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer-survivors/healthy-living-guides/eating-healthy.html)
* Food is Medicine’s Resources
	+ [Promising Practices and Tools](https://odphp.health.gov/foodismedicine/promising-practices-and-tools)
	+ [Food is Medicine Landscape Summary](https://odphp.health.gov/sites/default/files/2025-02/Food%20Is%20Medicine%20Landscape%20Summary%20FINAL%20508%20EO%20Compliant%202%204%202025_0.pdf)
* United States Department of Agriculture’s [Dietary Guidelines for America 2020-2025](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf)
* American Heart Association’s Resources
	+ [Health Care by Food](https://healthcarexfood.org/)
	+ [Healthy Recipes](https://recipes.heart.org/en)
* University of California San Francisco Health’s [Nutrition and Prostate Cancer](https://www.ucsfhealth.org/education/nutrition-and-prostate-cancer)
* Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics’ [Find a Nutrition Expert](https://www.eatright.org/find-a-nutrition-expert)
* MSKCC’s [Food to Overcome Outcome Disparities Program](https://www.mskcc.org/departments/psychiatry-behavioral-sciences/immigrant-health/addressing-socioeconomic-determinants-health/food-overcome-outcome-disparities)
* Stanford Medicine’s [Nutrition Services for Cancer Patients](https://stanfordhealthcare.org/medical-clinics/cancer-nutrition-services.html)
* Giant Food’s [Healthier Together: Food as Medicine Resources](https://giantfood.com/pages/healthier-together)
* Administration for Community Living Nutrition and Aging Resource Center’s [Medically Tailored Meals](https://acl.gov/senior-nutrition/medically-tailored-meals)

Additional Resources

* CDC’s
	+ [Tips From Former Smokers Campaign](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/index.html)
	+ [Smoking and Cancer: What Healthcare Professionals Need to Know](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/patient-care/care-settings/pdfs/cdc-osh-hcp-oncology-factsheet-508.pdf)
* National Cancer Institute’s [Cancer Support Services](https://supportorgs.cancer.gov/home.aspx?js=1)

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