Medical Policy: MEDICALLY TAILORED MEALS (MTM)/MEDICALLY TAILORED GROCERIES (MTG) AND/OR MEDICALLY SUPPORTIVE FOOD (MSF)

Benefit Type: Medi-Cal

Original Date: Sept. 4, 2025 | **Last Review Date:** May 20, 2026 | **Effective Date:** Sept. 3, 2026

Policy Statement

In accordance with the state Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), it is the policy of Gold Coast Health Plan (GCHP) to include medically necessary Medically Tailored Meals (MTM) / Medically Tailored Groceries (MTG) and/or Medically Supportive Food (MSF) as a covered benefit under Medi-Cal for all eligible beneficiaries.

Medically Tailored Meals (MTM) / Medically Tailored Groceries (MTG), and/or Medically Supportive Food (MSF) services are designed to address individuals' chronic or other serious nutrition sensitive health conditions to support improved health outcomes and reduced unnecessary costs and are not covered soley for food insecurities.

Clinicians should apply medical policy and evidence-based clinical practice guidelines based on their clinical judgment and expertise. When individual circumstances indicate that the guideline(s) may not address the individual patient's needs and/or may be inappropriate, the patient's clinical team (i.e., Primary Care Physician PCP), specialists and other clinical resources) should consider alternatives and make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Purpose

To provide guidance related to the medical necessity, indications and authorization requirements for Medically Tailored Meals (MTM) / Medically Tailored Groceries (MTG), and/or Medically Supportive Food (MSF).

Health Equity Statement

GCHP is committed to the vision in which all Californians equitably benefit from resources and systems that give everyone the opportunity to achieve their optimal health, resulting in communities that thrive.

GCHP adopts the American Medical Association (AMA) and DHCS commitments to whole-person centered, evidence-based and integrated strategies to advance health equity, addressing social and structural drivers of health. Decisions are therefore based on the evidence-based criteria as well as considerations of the members' social and structural drivers of health, and considerations that the decisions create no harm nor exacerbate existing harms.[1, 2]

Definitions

Food Pharmacy: A model that specifically combines MSF and nutrition supports to remove barriers to healthy eating and build the knowledge and skills of participants to cook and eat foods appropriate for their nutrition-sensitive conditions. Food pharmacies are often housed within (or managed by) a healthcare setting, providing a patient cohort with coordinated clinical, food, and nutrition education services targeted at specific nutrition-sensitive health conditions. The healthy food "prescription" includes access to a selection of specific whole foods appropriate for the specific chronic or serious health condition(s) that follow the federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans and meet recommendations for the targeted health condition(s). The food is typically paired with peer support, nutrition education, counseling, and/or culinary classes to build cooking and healthy eating skills and habits.

Healthy Food Vouchers: Vouchers used to procure pre-selected foods that follow the federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans and meet recommendations for the nutrition-sensitive health conditions of the recipients, via retail settings such as grocery stores or farmers' markets.

Medically Tailored Meals (MTM): Meals that adhere to established, evidence-based nutrition guidelines for specific nutrition-sensitive health conditions.

Medically Tailored Groceries (MTG): Preselected whole food items that adhere to established, evidence-based nutrition guidelines for specific nutrition-sensitive health conditions.

Medically Supportive Food (MSF): Defined as Medically Supportive Groceries (MSG), Produce Prescriptions, Healthy Food Vouchers, and Food Pharmacy.

Medically Supportive Groceries (MSG): Preselected foods that follow the federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans and meet recommendations for the nutrition-sensitive health conditions of the recipient to whom they are prescribed.

Nutrition-sensitive health conditions: Medical conditions and illnesses that are caused, exacerbated, or managed by an individual's diet, nutritional status, or environmental factors affecting food intake that are nutrition sensitive, such as (but not limited to): cancer(s), cardiovascular disorders, chronic kidney disease, chronic lung disorders or other pulmonary conditions such as asthma / chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart failure, diabetes or other metabolic conditions, elevated lead levels, end-stage renal disease, high cholesterol, human immunodeficiency virus, hypertension, liver disease, dyslipidemia, fatty liver, malnutrition, obesity, stroke, gastrointestinal disorders, gestational diabetes, high-risk perinatal conditions, and chronic or disabling mental/behavioral health disorders.

Produce Prescriptions: Fruits and vegetables, typically procured in retail settings, such as grocery stores or farmers' markets, obtained via a financial mechanism such as a physical or electronic voucher or card.

Authorization Requirements

Restrictions/Limitations

1. Two meals and/or meal packages per day in combination of Medically Tailored Meals (MTM)/Medically Tailored Groceries (MTG) and/or Medically Supportive Food (MSF).
2. Meals, food, payments and nutrition services eligible for/or reimbursed by alternative programs will not be funded/counted as community support.
    a. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) ans Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and **not** considered duplicative.

Non-Covered Services

Services may not be covered:

1. When the member has previously received Medically Tailored Meals (MT)/Medically Tailored Groceries (MTG) and/or Medically Supportive Food (MSF) for 365 days (12 months) **and**
    a. There is no evidence of an acute health event in the last 30 days or new diagnosis of eligible condition.
    b. Does not meet medical necessity for continuation of services.
2. Member receiving duplicative services.

Indications

Members may be eligible when diagnosed with a chronic or other serious health condition that is nutrition-sensitive such as, but not limited to the following:

Indication	Criteria
Cancer	• Post-hospitalization (within 3 months) • Active Chemotherapy or Radiation Therapy • On appetite stimulant medication
Chronic Lung Disorders	• Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) • Emphysema • Interstitial Lung • Allergic Asthma • Other Severe Lung Disease
Congestive Heart Failure	• NYHA Class 1 to 4
Diabetes	• A1C>=8% on referral ***or*** • Other measures indicating uncontrolled DM (i.e. abnormal fructosamine test results in setting of sickle cell anemia) • Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA) ***or*** • Hospitalization/ED visit for diabetic complications within the past 12 months
Elevated Lead Levels	• Diagnosis of elevated lead level
Gastrointestinal	• Ileostomy/Colostomy • Chronic gastroparesis • Inflammatory bowel disease • Short gut syndrome • Malabsorptive nutrition sensitive conditions
High-Risk Perinatal Conditions While Pregnant	• Gestational Diabetes or abnormal blood glucose during pregnancy • Gestation hypertension or pre-eclampsia • Other concomitant nutrition sensitive condition
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)	• Low CD4 count and detected viral load • Other concomitant nutrition sensitive condition
Hypertension	• Elevated Blood Pressure readings and on antihypertensive • medication • Meets AHA/ACC Hypertension guidelines for stage 2 hypertension or above
Liver Disease	• Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH) • End stage liver disease • Cirrhosis • Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD)

Indication	Criteria
Malnutrition	• Diagnosis of or at risk for malnutrition • Malnutrition Screening Tool (MST) Score of >=3 ***or*** • Positive screening using other malnutrition validated screening tool • Failure to thrive (FTT)
Mental/behavioral health disorders	Conditions displaying moderate to severe distress including: • Moderate to severe functional impairment, on appetite stimulating medication (i.e. Megace, Mirtazepine) and/or • Other concomitant nutrition sensitive c
Obesity	• BMI equal = >30 ***and*** at least 3 cardiometabolic risk factors (e.g. hypertension, dyslipidemia, impaired glucose tolerance, pre-diabetes, diabetes)
Post Hospitalization or acute care event	Post-Hospitalization (within 3 months) when identified: • Nutritional risk (e.g., unintentional weight loss) • Functional impairment
Renal Failure/Chronic Renal Disease	• End-stage renal disease • Chronic Kidney Disease (stages 2-5)
Stroke	• Excluding TIA or RIND
Wounds and other criteria	• Venous stasis ulcers • Decubitus ulcers • Non-healing diabetic ulcers • Actively receiving wound care from a wound care clinic and/or specialist

References

1. American Medical Association (AMA). (2023, Dec. 21). AMA Center for Health Equity Mission and Guiding Principles.
2. DHCS Comprehensive Quality Strategy
3. Community Supports: Select Service Definition Updates. https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/MCQMD/Community-Supports-February-2025-Service-Definition-Updates.pdf
4. Medi-Cal Community Supports, or In Lieu of Services (ILOS), Policy Guide. https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/MCQMD/DHCS-Community-Supports-Policy-Guide.pdf
5. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnpp/dietary-guidelines-americans

Disclaimer

Guidelines provide references identified at the time of review. New guidelines or medical literature may emerge and/or been published. Treating healthcare professionals are solely responsible for diagnosis, treatment and medical guidance. GCHP regularly reviews and updates these guidelines to provide the most current information.

History

CREDENTIALING PEER REVIEW COMMITTEE (C/PRC) GUIDELINE HISTORY			
Adopted By CPRC	**Reapproved**	**Revised**	**Retired**
		June 4, 2026	
		Sept. 3, 2026	