

# National convening highlights UCSD ¡Más Fresco! and ¡Más Fresco! Plus produce prescription programs as best practice to address food insecurity in southern CA

## October 25, 2022

### Introduction and Overview

On October 25, 2022, the University of California San Diego (UCSD) Altman Clinical and Translational Research Institute, Center for Community Health (CCH) and the UCSD School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, in collaboration with the Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information (NTAE) Center<sup>1</sup>, hosted a multi-site Produce Prescription Program (PPR) convening in Los Angeles and San Diego. The goal of this meeting was to bring together over 20 Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) Produce Prescription Program (PPR) grantees from across the country to learn about existing programs, network, and share solutions and ideas for future programs. **This convening provided an opportunity for food systems, health systems, retail representatives, community partners, and program participants from Los Angeles and San Diego to come together and discuss how they developed multi-sector partnerships to create innovative programs that address food insecurity for underserved populations in their area.**

At this convening, UCSD had the opportunity to share their work on the ¡Más Fresco! Fruit and Vegetable Prescription (FV Rx)<sup>2</sup> and ¡Más Fresco! Plus programs<sup>3</sup>. The San Diego portion of the meeting was held in City Heights at Foodshed's Farm Hub and Northgate Gonzalez Market. **Eight key stakeholders** attended, representing three community partners and including three ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx and ¡Más Fresco! Plus program participants. This summary describes an overview of the day's events and feedback from program participants and attendees.

### Visiting Foodshed's Farm Hub



At Foodshed's Farm Hub, both the ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx and ¡Más Fresco! Plus programs presented their work in partnership with Rady Children's Hospital, Alliance Health Clinic, Foodshed, and UCSD. Blanca Melendrez, Executive Director of CCH, presented on the health equity work of CCH and how these efforts led to the creation of the ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx and ¡Más Fresco! Plus programs, including food security and obesity prevention work with health and food system partners across San Diego County and beyond.

<sup>1</sup> Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information (NTAE) Center is supported by Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program grant no. 2019-70030-30415/project accession no. 1020863 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> ¡Más Fresco! More Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program for Families with T2DM is supported by Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program grant no. 2021-70030-35796 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

<sup>3</sup> By action of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, ¡Más Fresco! Plus is supported by American Rescue Plan Act funding provided through San Diego County Health & Human Services Agency contract number 566097.

### ¡Más Fresco! Fruit and Vegetable Prescription (FV Rx) Program

Dr. Kay Rhee (Professor of Pediatrics, Vice Chair of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Chief of the Division of Child and Community Health, and Medical Director of the Medical Behavioral Unit at Rady Children's Hospital of San Diego) and Sarah Hiller-Venegas (Research Associate at UCSD Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science) shared their work on the ¡Más Fresco! Fruit and Vegetable Prescription program with Rady's Children Hospital and Northgate Gonzalez Market. **Program participants receive up to seven fruit and vegetable vouchers, each worth \$15 each per month, for 12 months. The program will evaluate the impact of this program on change in consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, child metabolic outcomes, and food security levels.**

### ¡Más Fresco! Plus Program Overview

Trixy Joy Manansala, Program Manager at CCH, described CCH's work on the ¡Más Fresco! Plus program alongside food and health system partners, Foodshed and Alliance Health Clinic. **Using a collective impact approach, this program brings together partners from the community, health, and food system to support the health and well-being of community members identified in partnership with Alliance Health Clinic as experiencing health disparities including food insecurity and diet-related chronic disease through the delivery of nutrition incentives.** Program participants receive a home-delivered farm-fresh produce box (valued at \$50 a month) delivered by Foodshed every two weeks for 12 months.

## Rady Children's Hospital

Dr. Rhee and Sarah Hiller presented their work and collaboration with Rady Children's Hospital Type 2 Diabetes Clinic to help low-income families with children with Type 2 Diabetes access the healthy fruits and vegetables they need to improve their health. Many families have commented on the difficulties they have following the recommendations of their child's doctors because of the high cost of healthier foods. The ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx has been able to provide additional resources for these families and will be tracking the impact on HbA1c levels and medication use. Since starting this program, several other clinics at Rady Children's Hospital have expressed interest in expanding this program to their families with nutrition-related illnesses.

## Foodshed (¡Más Fresco! Plus Program Partner)

Ellee Igoe, co-founder of Foodshed, talked about their organization and partnership with the ¡Más Fresco! Plus program. Ms. Igoe highlighted the impact of this program on Foodshed and the local farming community that works with them. She also described their work to cultivate an equitable food system in San Diego while addressing access to healthy food and food insecurity among low-income communities. **With the ¡Más Fresco! Plus contract (which started in Spring 2022), Foodshed has been able to significantly increase the number of customers they can reach, serving more community members living in areas with low Healthy Place Index scores (i.e., areas with less healthy conditions).** Additionally, the ¡Más Fresco! Plus program has helped increase the produce purchased from local farmers. **Overall, this program has the potential to provide \$1.6 million in economic support for Foodshed and the local food system.**

## Alliance Health Clinic (¡Más Fresco! Plus Program Partner)



Dr. Suzanne Afflalo, Medical Director at Alliance Health Clinic (AHC), highlighted the clinic's work in the community and shared their efforts with providing the community members they serve (including refugees, immigrants, and the most vulnerable community members) with the nutrition incentive benefits offered through the ¡Más Fresco! Plus program. **A community-based organization working with AHC and a program participant also**

**provided testimonies about their experiences with the program and its impact on their lives.** Rosemary W. Pope, Executive Director of the Fourth District Seniors Resource Center (FDSRC), shared about how the community residents of San Diego County Board of Supervisor District 4 have benefitted from the program. A program participant, L.W., expressed how the program has helped her consume more fruits and vegetables and manage her health concerns. Their testimonies can be found below.

"I first heard of the ¡Más Fresco! Plus program from the Alliance Clinic's Administrator. I listened but thought 'who would not just give you free food but also deliver it?' For courtesy's sake, I smiled and gave my information. I did not give it another thought. Now, I am an overweight and obese person. I have been all my life. **Healthy eating has been a difficult task, mainly because of the hype that healthy means organic and organic means expensive. With limited money for food, cheap is where I gravitated. I have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and arthritis.** I had been educating myself and building up my courage to make better choices about my diet. Then, I received an email about the program but again I blew it off. One day, about a week later, I received a text, thanking me for enrolling and that I would receive a package soon. Again, I said, 'yes right'. Then, a few days later, I received a text stating my bag of produce was at my door. I checked and it was there. **When I opened that bag, I saw vegetables and fruits. I thought, 'now this might be a sign to help you eat right'. I chopped up the vegetables (carrots, onions, potatoes, etc.) and decided to make a pot of vegetable soup. I then split it into 4 bowls, freezing 3 and leaving 1 out. I, now, did not have to look for a meal which when I did, I tended to throw things together to make something quick. I used the lettuce for sandwiches. It made me want to eat a sandwich.** I also bought egg whites which I use for omelets. My omelets consist of mushroom, parsley, cilantro, and whatever vegetables I have. I eat omelets for breakfast or sometimes dinner. I look forward to the text, all the time. I was so elated when I received a bag on Thanksgiving day. I made pumpkin pie, collard greens and salad. **I am truly grateful to this program because my last 2 cholesterol tests have shown improvement and my blood pressure is not as fluctuating as it had been. I find myself going to produce stores like El Super and Northgate Market in between deliveries and buying more vegetables and fruits.**" - L.W. ¡Más Fresco! Plus Participant

**“San Diego's 4th District Community Residents continue to be plagued with food insecurities.**

Blessed, thankful and overjoyed aptly describe the sentiments of the Fourth District Seniors Resource Center's ¡Más Fresco! Plus Participants. **This Program has been both beneficial and impactful to both the participants and marginalized communities. They receive fresh locally grown produce delivered right to their door. They don't have to drive or use mass transit to shop for produce. They are able to share cultural recipes in preparing/serving fresh produce.**

They are able to learn the concepts of composting, eating nutritiously and starting victory/community gardens. Lastly, growing your own food, helps you recognize that our world should be viewed as a ‘salad bowl’ not a ‘melting pot’. **Thank you for helping San Diego's Seasoned Community Residents Live for Happier and Healthier Tomorrows!**” - Rosemary W.

*Pope, FDSRC's Executive Director*

## Northgate Gonzalez Market Tour and ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx Voucher Demonstration



Convening attendees visited Northgate Gonzalez Market, a partner of the ¡Más Fresco! program. Teresa Blanco, Director of Community Engagement and Wellness at Northgate Gonzalez Market, introduced the history behind Northgate Gonzalez Market and its work with the community, including the ¡Más Fresco! program. Teresa led a tour of Northgate Gonzalez Market, highlighting unique features of the store that address needs in the community including culturally appropriate food not typically found in other grocery stores.

At Northgate

Gonzalez Market, Dr. Kay Rhee organized a voucher redemption demonstration with a ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx program participant at a cash register to show how the vouchers from the ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx program work. The ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx program participant shared her experiences participating in the program with the convening participants and how it has helped her family both access and consume more fruits and vegetables for better health.



## Convening Participant Feedback

Throughout the convening, there were opportunities to share experiences, highlight challenges with developing and implementing these programs, and discuss opportunities to expand and improve upon these programs. A follow-up survey was also conducted by the Technical Assistance and Innovation team for the GusNIP NTAE Nutrition Incentive Hub to assess impact and future needs. The GusNIP NTAE Nutrition Incentive Hub, created by NTAE Center, is a coalition of partners that supports nutrition incentive and produce

prescription projects. To learn more about the GusNIP NTAE Nutrition Incentive Hub and their offerings, please visit <https://www.nutritionincentivehub.org/>.

Survey respondents highlighted several aspects of the ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx and ¡Más Fresco! Plus programs which were commendable and worth replicating, including:

- **The ability of ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx and ¡Más Fresco! Plus to successfully partner with local retailers and farmers such as Northgate Gonzalez Market and Foodshed and support the local food economy.**
- **The programs' ability to reach populations in high need, including seniors and children and their ability to reach individuals who do not qualify for SNAP [CalFresh] benefits, but who are experiencing health disparities including food insecurity.**

Survey respondents also shared input on future opportunities for expanding and building on the work of the ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx and ¡Más Fresco! Plus programs moving forward, highlighting **opportunities to increase utilization of ¡Más Fresco! FV Rx vouchers and reduce barriers to utilization**. Future opportunities include linking vouchers to existing store loyalty cards, engaging additional stores in voucher programs, identifying and outreaching to participants not utilizing their vouchers, and engaging participants themselves in providing feedback regarding improving ease of voucher utilization. Attendees also identified **opportunities to expand the produce box delivery model through ¡Más Fresco! Plus to reach more families who could benefit from home delivery**. In the end, most participants rated their experience at the convening as “Very Valuable” to their work, including the presentations and networking opportunities provided.

## Future Opportunities

This convening allowed representatives from community organizations and programs across the country including staff leading the ¡Más Fresco! Produce FV Rx and ¡Más Fresco! Plus programs to come together and learn how to build better programs to address the health needs of families with nutrition-related conditions. Through sharing current efforts and experiences with existing programs, the convening has opened opportunities to share information about successful program models and promote local, regional, and national learning communities of organizations interested in expanding this work. **Future opportunities include continuing to leverage and expand networks, partnerships and knowledge to develop and improve programs that effectively center and address the food access, nutrition, and health needs of underserved communities.**