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## **New, Innovative Prescription Produce Program Launches in Hartford**

*Food4Moms Program Enrolls First Cohort of Pregnant, Latina, Low-Income Women  
to Participate*

January 16, 2024 (Hartford, Conn.) -- Twenty women who are pregnant, Latina and low-income in Hartford were recently chosen to participate in an innovative new incentive program, "Food4Moms," which offers an equity-centered fruit and vegetable prescription plan to improve health and wellness outcomes for mothers and their babies. Funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Point32Health Foundation, this program is a collaboration among three leading public health organizations, Wholesome Wave, the Hispanic Health Council, and Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center (PRC), to study the success of a new food-as-medicine model. Food4Moms follows a unique and innovative approach that integrates the FED Principle®'s focus on community fidelity, equity, and dignity, a model that Wholesome Wave created and developed in 2021.

"Research shows that Latina women are not consuming enough fresh fruits and vegetables during pregnancy and that there are systemic structural barriers preventing them from doing so," said Yale School of Public Health Professor Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, the lead researcher from the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center in New Haven and Derby, Conn. "Our community-centered approach includes co-designing the produce

prescription (PRx) model together with Latina mothers themselves, the Hispanic Health Council staff, and other key partners to maximize the intervention's impact."

The partners expect this innovative program will lead to improvements in 1) fruit and vegetable intake; 2) household food security; and 3) self-reported health outcomes, such as gestational weight gain, and overall physical and mental health and wellbeing for a cohort of pregnant participants.

The participating Latinas met the following criteria: be 18 years old or older, speak either English or Spanish, live in Hartford County, and be in the second trimester of pregnancy. They must also meet a low-income threshold or qualify for SNAP, WIC or Medicaid, as defined by the State of Connecticut. The women will receive \$100 a month for 10 months to spend on fresh fruit and vegetables. Food4Moms has selected two redemption partners: Fresh Connect, which provides a debit card to be used at local participating stores, and Umoja Food for Health, which delivers a box of produce twice a month.

Participants in the current cohort have provided positive feedback, commenting that the \$100 monthly incentives have motivated them to buy more fresh fruits and vegetables, especially in today's economic climate. One participant, Yeny Miguel Vasquez of Hartford, said she has also benefited from the program's informative nutrition classes and the recommended recipes.

For more than 15 years, Wholesome Wave, a national non-profit organization based in Connecticut that addresses disparities in diet-related disease and enhanced nutrition equity by making fruits and vegetables more accessible and affordable to community members in low-income households, has pioneered and developed innovative produce prescription models that have helped more than two million people nationwide. Most recently, Wholesome Wave contributed to a new study published in American Heart Association's Circulation journal, which demonstrates the potential of Food is Medicine (FIM) interventions to improve health outcomes. The study found that, on average, prescribing fruits and vegetables led to increased produce consumption, weight loss, and lowered blood pressure among patients.

"At Wholesome Wave, we believe people should not only be able to get enough food when times get tough, but to also get the healthy foods they need to thrive and prevent

diet debilitating diseases like diabetes and heart disease,” said Wholesome Wave Co-Founder and Chairman Michel Nischan, an award-winning chef and food equity advocate. “We know that food insecurity and diet-related diseases disproportionately impact communities of color. Our goal is for produce prescription programs like Food4Moms to be fully integrated in Husky Health, Connecticut’s Medicaid program.”

Sofia Segura-Pérez, MS, RD, who leads the project implementation as the Chief Program Officer and Chief Research Officer of the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford said, “Pregnant women served by the Hispanic Health Council will have the unique opportunity to benefit from a community-engaged, person-centered produce incentive program. In addition to the incentives, they will participate in engaging hands-on culturally appropriate nutrition sessions delivered by a bilingual Latina nutritionist, complemented with supportive text messages.”

Wholesome Wave’s FED model integrates:

1. Fidelity to Community - Food4Moms uses a multi-phased participant approach to garner experiences and feedback to improve the program’s next phase.
2. Dignity of Choice - Participants choose their preferred language and their preferred produce incentive vendors.
3. Equity - Every mother deserves food security.

In addition to the close partnership among these leading Connecticut public health organizations, this three-year project was made possible by financial support from Point32Health Foundation and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).

### **About Wholesome Wave**

[Wholesome Wave](#) is a national non-profit established on the belief that everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, geographic location or income, has a fundamental right to choose healthy food. Wholesome Wave’s mission is to address disparities in diet-related disease and enhance nutrition equity by making fruits and vegetables more accessible and affordable to community members in low-income households through systems change. Founded in 2007 by James Beard Award-winning Chef Michel Nischan and former USDA Undersecretary of Agriculture Gus Schumacher, Wholesome Wave successfully established the legal framework and advocated to fund the doubling of

SNAP benefits when spent on fruits and vegetables—a program that has reached millions of community members across the country and has been established as a permanent program in the 2018 Farm Bill, named the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program.

### **About the Hispanic Health Council**

The [Hispanic Health Council](#) (HHC) is a non-for-profit community-based organization funded in 1978. Its main mission is “To promote equity and address health disparities among Hispanic/Latinos, and other vulnerable communities through research, advocacy, and culturally resonant services.” HHC achieves its mission co-designing its evidence-based services, research and advocacy efforts with strong community involvement and engagement. HHC has also established strong partnerships with academic, clinical, community agencies, foundations, and government partners in its efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of socially disadvantaged communities.

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