

How Community Partnerships Are Revolutionizing Hospital Food





Hospitals are essential pillars of modern communities.

Hospitals meet the vital health needs of diverse local populations. They provide employment for over 5 million Americans. They organize public health campaigns, host educational events, participate in local advisory councils, and provide social services.

Our communities wouldn't be the same without them.

Community engagement is, in fact, central to hospitals' mission. And increasingly over the past few years, hospital administrators are finding new ways to involve the community while delivering better services to patients, staff, and visitors.

This has come alongside a realization that hospitals are not only centers of physical health, but economic health, as well. As significant drivers of the local economy, hospitals can use their purchasing power to drive economic growth in the community. Building local economic equity has many positive downstream effects, both health-related and otherwise.



Supporting community businesses & offering better food service

While traditional methods of community engagement are still needed, modern hospitals are thinking about new ways to involve and build equity for more members of their communities.

One of the ways they're driving this engagement is through food.

Even in today's fast-paced, high-tech society, food remains an effective way of building community and deepening interpersonal connections. How can hospitals use this fact to both serve and engage their community?

Some hospitals are partnering with local organizations to distribute surplus food or host food banks for the surrounding area. You might pick up your monthly community supported agriculture (CSA) box at a hospital. Or visit a local farmer's market hosted by your local hospital.

Other forward-thinking hospitals are partnering with local restaurants to provide high-quality meals that delight staff and visitors while supporting local businesses. And the results are impressive.

For example, one large Midwestern hospital has featured 90 different partner restaurants on campus, greatly expanding the variety and quality of its food service while funneling over \$1.5 million back into the community.

The owner of one of the partner restaurants says that his customers at the hospital tell him, "You always make our day when you come here." He even gets texts from regular customers asking when he'll be back. Staff and visitors loved it.

Another national hospital group averages 50 unique restaurants per hospital and has generated over \$3 million in revenue for its partners over the course of a 4.5-year partnership. Over 400,000 meals have been served through the program at this network.

These hospitals are improving their service, supporting local businesses (especially women- and minority-owned ones), and seeing operational benefits by partnering with companies like Fooda to bring local restaurants onsite to revolutionize their cafeterias.

Let's see what that looks like in practice.



Flexible Restaurant options improve service for staff & visitors

Imagine walking into your cafeteria as it is right now. There might be a few food stations, a few vending machines, a salad bar, and some prepackaged meals. It's adequate, but is it delightful? Will it put a smile on the face of a staff member or a visitor? To be fair, we acknowledge that your cafeteria might be great – hospital cafeterias have indeed come very far from where they once were.

Now imagine walking in and seeing a favorite Thai restaurant next to a salad and sandwich bar from a local deli. Smelling fresh-roasted coffee from the café down the street, served by a barista who knows not just about the origin of the beans, but the names of your staff, and desserts from a bakery that's been part of your community for decades.

Doesn't that seem more likely to improve someone's hospital experience?



[Watch the video »](#)



Local restaurants can also serve areas of your campus that are far away from the cafeteria, removing the need for a long walk or shuttle ride. They can provide service when your cafeteria is typically closed, too, providing better options for your late-night and early-morning staff.

81% of millennials and members of Gen Z advocate for subsidized meals.

If you're trying to attract millennial and Gen Z employees, you should know that providing food at work is a big deal to them. And that over 80% of them encourage employers to provide free or subsidized meals.

With Fooda's flexible subsidization options, you can give back to your employees by paying for a healthy meal or providing a stipend that goes toward food from a local restaurant featured at your hospital.

This benefit is hugely popular among employees of all ages, and Fooda has many flexible options for helping you make the most of your subsidy budget.

Food and nutrition teams can focus on better serving patients

Of course, not everyone in the hospital is eating at the cafeteria. Visitors, family members, medical staff, and administrators may frequent the cafeteria, but patients might not have this option.

Partnering with local restaurants has benefits for patients, too – it frees your food and nutrition team to focus more on patient meals. Instead of dividing their attention between the cafeteria, any satellite sites, and patient meals, they can focus on serving the people who need the most nutritional attention: patients. Your nutrition professionals are the experts here, and Fooda leaves this crucial function to them.

A meta-analysis published in 2022 found that “[n]utritional deterioration is common among previously well-nourished and nutritionally compromised patients” in hospitals. Taking pressure off of your food and nutrition team lets them focus on fostering positive health outcomes among patients, who need sufficient nutrition for recovery.



Food service professionals at hospitals are often overtaxed, and offloading some of their workload with local partnerships will help them focus on the most important part of their job.

That's not the only way that a food partnership can help your hospital work better.

Community restaurant partnerships unlock operational efficiencies for hospitals

Many hospitals run under intense operational pressure. Staffing shortages, low cafeteria participation, and inflexible contracts with third-party food service providers make it difficult to provide great food service.

Local partnerships have solved this problem for dozens of hospitals around the United States. Employee hours are repurposed to where they're most needed, as mentioned in the last section with food and nutrition teams.

These hospitals have seen increased employee participation and satisfaction by providing fresh, authentic food from a variety of local restaurants. Retail sales have gone up. In fact, some hospitals have transformed their cafeteria from a cost center to a cost-neutral or even profitable service.

Not sure if your hospital is ready for a full cafeteria partnership? No problem.

Fooda works with each individual organization to find the right level of service. Our hybrid solutions can replace your current cafeteria with multiple local restaurants, or you can start with a single restaurant once or twice a week. You can then scale your level of service to add more restaurants, or additional stations like a barista. We even manage 24/7 markets.

Whatever the needs of your hospital, we'll work directly with your team to ensure that the local partnerships we bring fit your requirements.



Fooda can partner with your hospital to engage your community, improve your food service, and ease operational headaches

In 2024, hospitals are finding innovative ways to support their communities, improve food service offerings, foster positive health outcomes, and become more operationally efficient. All through local partnerships that help build community equity.

Working with Fooda, you can leave the scheduling and operational details to us — whether we start with a simple once-weekly option or run the entire cafe with local restaurants.

With a host of benefits for administrators, staff, visitors, patients, and the community at large, local partnerships are revolutionizing the world of hospital food. Why not find out what they could do for your community?

See how Fooda can partner with your hospital to foster equity-building community food partnerships »



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