

## **Food Is Medicine: How The Food Basket, Hawai‘i Island’s Food Bank, is Supporting Community Health**

By Chelsea Takahashi and Robert Munoz.

Nobody wants to be forced to schedule a doctor’s appointment.

This is especially true for individuals who believe they’re healthy, or young enough that their health is often an afterthought. Doctor visits are even more worrisome if there’s fear that they can’t afford the expenses.

But often is the case that someone will go in for a checkup only to find out that they have an underlying health issue or disease. Sure, annual visits to the doctor may help in preventing health conditions from escalating or occurring; still, there are other preventive measures that can be taken to avoid a surprise at a doctor’s visit. Arguably the most important of those is a healthy diet.

The Biden Administration promotes this idea in recognizing that “food is medicine.” On Sept 27, 2022, it released the “National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health” that highlights the importance of increasing healthy eating “so fewer Americans experience diet-related diseases,” such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and certain cancers. The consequences of these conditions include the stress of paying for ongoing medical treatment, poor mental health, and decreased academic achievement.

One of the issues with sustaining a healthy diet is that healthy food can often be unaffordable for low-income individuals. Receiving federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as “Food Stamps”) can help offset these costs. However, this alone may not be the answer as the U.S. Department of Agriculture projects grocery prices to increase by 8.6% in 2023, and SNAP recipients are seeing an average reduction of \$82 a month in SNAP benefits, due to the Mar 1, 2023 expiration of emergency SNAP allotments.

Throughout the state there are community-based programs to help low-income individuals access affordable healthy foods. One of the largest programs is DA BUX Double Up Food Bucks, also known as DA BUX, and is administered by The Food Basket, Hawai‘i Island’s food bank. DA BUX allows SNAP recipients to receive a 50% discount on Hawai‘i grown fruits and vegetables at participating grocery stores and food hubs when they pay with SNAP food dollars. On Hawai‘i Island, DA BUX discounts are available at KTA Super Stores, Malama Markets, Keauhou Farmers Market, Ho‘ola Farms, Hawai‘i ‘Ulu Cooperative and The Food Basket’s DA BOX Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

“My health has improved tremendously because I have had access to healthy, nutritious, locally produced fruits & vegetables from DA BUX/local farmers,” said Dana Keawe of Kea‘au. “Produce I would not have been able to normally afford or purchase before I had DA BUX, have been and are available to me now.”

The State of Hawaii contracts The Food Basket to offer SNAP Outreach services such as step-by-step application assistance and general SNAP information dissemination. For assistance, please

contact The Food Basket's SNAP Outreach Specialists at 808-933-6030 (East Hawaii) or 808-322-1418 (West Hawaii) or visit [hawaiifoodbasket.org/snap](http://hawaiifoodbasket.org/snap) for more information. For more information on DA BUX, please call 808-437-3044 or visit [DABUX.org](http://DABUX.org).

If you don't qualify for SNAP, no worries! DA BOX is still very affordable at \$80 for a whole month of weekly produce. The next sign-up period will be March 28-31.

The Food Basket recognizes we play an important role in the healthcare landscape. We continue to explore ways to partner with the community to make healthy food affordable and accessible for all

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