

The new model analyzed the effects of two policy scenarios: In the first, 30 percent of the costs of fruits and vegetables would be covered under Medicare and Medicaid; in the second, 30 percent of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods like whole grains and seafood would be covered. The model incorporated things like socioeconomic demographics and health risk factors of people enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid, data on the way price decreases change healthy food purchasing behaviors, and subsidy costs.

The study team found that subsidizing fruits and vegetables would prevent 1.93 million cardiovascular events, like heart attacks, and 350,000 deaths from the conditions. Subsidizing fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods would prevent 3.28 million cardiovascular events, 620,000 deaths, and 120,000 cases of diabetes. The fruits and vegetables program would save nearly \$40 billion in healthcare costs, and the addition of other healthy foods would save over \$100 billion.

“It costs money, but most of that is offset by lower healthcare costs,” Mozaffarian says. “When you look at the cost per year of life saved, all of the interventions were extremely cost effective.” It’s just as cost effective, he says, as paying for drugs to prevent high blood pressure.