

WellFed Cornwall

WellFed Cornwall is both a network and a test-and-learn project. We're taking a health creation approach to tackling some of Cornwall's significant and well-evidenced challenges around health inequalities, type 2 diabetes, non-diabetic hyperglycaemia, malnutrition, obesity, and access to community and green spaces. We're aiming to do this through food that's good for people and good for the planet, and through food-related activity.

WellFed network

In April 2024, a group of clinicians, health professionals, health coaches, social prescribers, community food organisations and community / regenerative food producers formed the WellFed network. Their aim was to support a shift in focus from sickness-treatment to *health creation* and *sickness prevention*.

The network, supported by Volunteer Cornwall, is open to all who support its aim of creating better human and planetary health through good food. 'Good food' is healthy, nutritious food that is produced in ways that reduce carbon emissions, protect nature and build community, economic and food system resilience.

The network promotes shared learning and collaboration across primary and secondary care, Integrated Care Area (ICA) support services, third sector organisations, local / community food growers and others. The network also supports and contributes to a developing programme of practical trials and pilots (see below). There is [information about the WellFed network here](#) or you can contact ClaireJ@volunteercornwall.org.uk

WellFed programme

The WellFed programme is a practical pilot and research programme. It is partnering local sustainable food growers, community groups and enterprises with people at risk of or with early-stage type II diabetes, through their GP surgery or NHS healthcare service, for food and food-related activity on prescription.

The aim of the programme is to test and evaluate the impacts of providing participants with a weekly box of locally and agroecologically grown vegetables, and a package of support. That support can include vegetable preparation / growing / cooking skills, as well as support to participate in community food activities that can increase social and nature connection, physical activity levels and engagement with good food. The positive impacts could be on diabetes or diabetes risk but also on the wider health and wellbeing of participants, as well as on the local food system and climate / nature.

The WellFed programme has been based on an initial pilot partnership between Narrowcliff Surgery (Watergate Primary Care Network) and Newquay Community Orchard. This pilot ran from 2023-24 and was funded by Cornwall Council Public Health and supported by the Climate Resilience Team at Volunteer Cornwall. While participant numbers were small, results suggested a positive outcome for veg box recipients in terms of weight loss and a reduction in HbA1C (a diabetes marker), potentially reducing the future need for medication. There was also some evidence of greater engagement with / personal agency around good food.

Subsequent pilots in the Coastal Primary Care Network (PCN), in collaboration with Goonown Growers and Community Roots, showed similar promise.

"I'm cooking from scratch and eating more healthily. It's made me love my food even more. Some of the veg I've never seen before and had to google! It's been great being part of a team and has really improved my mental health. I just feel I fit. It's made me look at the environment and what I'm eating. I always leave feeling positive!" WellFed Participant

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From 2025, a new phase of WellFed pilots, funded by Cornwall Council Public Health and the NHS, is being rolled out, including in new areas across Cornwall.

Based on experience from the first trials, these pilots are providing more comprehensive support to participants to use the food they are prescribed and to engage with community growing sites / community food groups to benefit from greater community connection and opportunities to raise physical activity levels.

The new programme of pilots is also underpinned by a comprehensive data collection framework, designed and overseen by researchers from the Universities of Bath and Cardiff in conjunction with the WellFed team. Ethics approval is in place.

The monitoring and evaluation framework draws on expertise from food prescription programmes elsewhere in the UK. The aim is to not only to capture the impacts of the WellFed approach – and hopefully to make the case for commissioning social and food prescription for health creation - but also to learn more about the barriers, what works and how best to ensure the conditions for success. You can [find out more about our evaluation here](#).

You can hear from a participant about his own experience in one of the early WellFed trials in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxHnXC6EKiQ>

WellFed programme core conditions

For anyone interested in participating in the WellFed programme, there are 5 key conditions that are needed to run a WellFed pilot at the current time. The WellFed team may be able to help with establishing one or more of these:

1. **Primary care participation.** GPs, dieticians, health coaches, nurses, social prescribers or other health and wellbeing workers refer participants and undertake clinical data collection.
2. **Availability of a community growing site** to provide the veg box and host / support participants as appropriate. In some cases, this role could be split between a grower and another community food organisation working in collaboration. These organisations also collect some non-health data.
3. **Skills uplift – e.g. support with cooking / food preparation skills.** Our first trials identified this as a key need. In trials to date, this has happened on community growing sites and in community kitchens.
4. **Opportunity for enhanced activity.** This could take a number of forms but might typically entail getting involved in community growing and learning practical skills along the way. Some of the wider co-benefits of WellFed can come from connection with others in the community and being physically active and in nature.
5. **Data collection, monitoring and evaluation.** At this stage, WellFed is a small-scale research trial and pilot. We have a limited 'pot' of funding to evaluate the potential benefits of the approach and to make the case for commissioning it as a service to be available to more people who could benefit. Therefore, it's important that participants (and referring clinicians / supporting growers) are prepared to participate in the research.

WellFed programme steering group

WellFed is run as a partnership programme and is supported by a steering group whose members are currently:

- Emma Rowse - CEO of Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum
- Dr Kath Brown – GP and Partner, Narrowcliff Surgery (Watergate PCN)
- Lorraine Long - Deputy programme of care lead for population health, health inequalities and long-term conditions, CloS Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Matt Sharp – Cornwall Council Public Health
- Will Stableforth – Consultant gastro-enterologist and liver specialist, Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust

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- Gill Pipkin – Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum
- Mark Wilson – University of Bath
- Caroline Verfuert – University of Cardiff
- Paul Critchley - CEO, Active Cornwall
- Jo Cadman – West ICA Development Manager, CloS ICB
- Danielle Kirby – East ICA Development Manager, CloS ICB
- Emma Seward-Adams – Social Prescribing Lead, Petroc Group Practice and Narrowcliff Surgery
- Isabelle Webb – Health Coach, Petroc Group Practice
- Hetty Ninnis – Community Growing Manager, Newquay Community Orchard
- Sophie Bailey – Community Growing Development Worker, Sustainable Food Cornwall
- Claire Judd – WellFed Project Officer, Volunteer Cornwall Health & Climate Resilience Team

WellFed programme FAQs:

Who can take part in the programme?

In most cases, participants will be referred via their GP surgery. During this trial stage, the criteria for referral are:

- Adults with a recent (\leq 12 months) diagnosis of type II diabetes or pre-diabetes
- HbA1c range 42 – 75

Why isn't this available everywhere and to everyone?

At this stage, WellFed is a very small trial rather than a commissioned service. We have limited funding from Cornwall Council Public Health and the NHS to enable small numbers of people, from a limited number of GP surgeries, to test the model, across the Integrated Care System (ICS). The aim is to evaluate the impact of the approach and to see whether it could prevent sickness and save the NHS money in the longer term. This will help encourage allocation of funding 'upstream' to health creation in future.

What are 'agroecologically grown' vegetables and why is this important?

Agroecological food is produced in ways that protect and enhance nature and biodiversity, care for the soil, sequester carbon and ensure high animal welfare. Sometimes the word 'regenerative' is used to mean similar things, so there's some crossover with this and other terms such as 'organic'. Prioritising food produced in this way also contributes to the NHS Net Zero aspirations within procurement and service delivery.

Can participants get their veg at a supermarket?

We're using nutritionally dense food that's grown and supplied as locally as possible, using agroecological methods as outlined above. By partnering participants with community growing sites and local food groups and enterprises, the aim is to create more connection between people and where their food comes from, to build community and local food system resilience and to keep money in the local economy.

For further information contact: ClaireJ@volunteercornwall.org.uk