



Project Open Hand™
meals with love

PRESS RELEASE

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PROJECT OPEN HAND EXPANDS GROCERY AND MEAL SERVICES TO SERVE WIDER VARIETY OF CRITICAL ILLNESSES

SAN FRANCISCO, July 8, 2014 – [Project Open Hand](#) has expanded eligibility for its grocery and meal services to serve people living with acute symptoms of more than ten additional disease diagnoses, including diabetes, heart disease, multiple sclerosis and hepatitis C, among others. As of June 1, 2014, the new services are available through the agency's Wellness Programs, which provide nutrition and nutrition education to critically ill residents of San Francisco and Alameda County.

"Project Open Hand is returning to our roots, focusing on serving people for whom good nutrition is a key factor in medical treatment and sustained, stabilized and improved health," said Executive Director Kevin Winge. "We are expanding our grocery and meal services to serve a much wider variety of diagnoses. At the same time, we are making our services consistent for all clients we serve, based on the severity of symptoms in our clients' health and how our nutritious food mitigates those symptoms."

While Project Open Hand has provided nutritious, home-delivered meals since 2000 to people who are homebound due to a wide range of illnesses, groceries and pick-up meals were previously available only for people with a diagnosis of HIV or breast cancer. A full list of eligible diagnoses can be viewed on [Project Open Hand's service application form](#).

In its last fiscal year (ended June 30, 2014), Project Open Hand served approximately 8,000 clients, half through its Senior Lunch Program and half through its Wellness Programs. In the coming year, with the expansion of eligibility, the agency anticipates a significant increase in the number of critically-ill clients it serves, particularly home-delivered meals for this vulnerable population.

Project Open Hand is working closely with medical providers and community partners to conduct outreach to disease populations that are newly eligible for services. The agency is also improving collection and analysis of client data in order to better track the impact of its Wellness Programs on clients' health and medical costs.

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Further, Project Open Hand is conducting a [Food = Medicine Pilot Study](#) in partnership with UCSF School of Medicine, aiming to demonstrate that good nutrition can markedly improve the health and wellbeing of people living with critical illness, which in turn, significantly reduces the medical costs of treating their condition.

As Project Open Hand expands services and makes them more consistent for all clients, the agency is also targeting those services for the clients most in need. Project Open Hand is conducting personalized outreach with existing clients to determine how to best handle their needs. In some cases this may mean that a small number of existing clients who are in good health (including some who are HIV-positive) will no longer want or need nutrition services. The new eligibility criteria will be implemented with current clients at the time of their next re-certifications, which are conducted every six months.

“With advances in medical treatment for HIV over the last 20 years, the needs of people living with HIV have changed. We have a responsibility to adapt our services accordingly and refocus our efforts on serving those who need us the most – critically ill neighbors who can benefit the most from the nutritious, life-sustaining meals that Project Open Hand makes,” said Winge. “Some of our existing clients may not need the comprehensive services they currently receive. We will work closely with affected clients over the next several months to refer and transition them to other food resources, including our Senior Lunch Program for those who are over 60 years old.”

“Continually making best use of our resources is not only our responsibility to our clients and funders, it is also critical to preparing us for future demands,” Winge added. “By continuing to expand who we serve, we are able to access new funding opportunities, which can strengthen our agency. This ultimately benefits all of our clients and our entire community. Looking ahead, as our neighbors with HIV continue to age and face a growing number of health challenges, we want to be there and ready to serve them when they need us most.”

As an example, Mark Ebelt, a former Project Open Hand client who is HIV+, decided to stop receiving services several months ago as his health improved. Ebelt said, “I know that I will need help from Project Open Hand in the future, but for now – for me – I want to know that people who are sick and hungry and really need these meals are getting them.”

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Karen Pearl, President & CEO of God's Love We Deliver, a food and nutrition services nonprofit, said, "In New York, our agency successfully expanded our mission to serve people living with all life-altering illnesses in 2001, and our community is stronger for it. Not only do we continue to serve people living with HIV/AIDS whose health challenges require our intensive nutritional intervention, but we are also able to serve so many other critically ill neighbors who are in crisis and need our healthy food."

Like Project Open Hand, God's Love We Deliver was founded in the 1980s in response to the AIDS crisis and, today, provides medically-tailored meals and nutrition counseling to people living with severe illness. God's Love serves 5,000 clients annually, 25% of whom are living with HIV/AIDS.

About Project Open Hand

Project Open Hand is a nonprofit organization that provides meals with love to seniors and the critically ill. Every day, we prepare 2,500 nutritious meals and provide 200 bags of healthy groceries to help sustain our clients as they battle serious illnesses, isolation, or the health challenges of old age. We serve San Francisco and Alameda County, engaging more than 125 volunteers every day to nourish our community. Learn more at www.openhand.org.

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Editors, please note: Kevin Winge is available for comment. Editors/reporters interested in interviewing Mr. Winge, please contact Maria Stokes at 415-447-2426 or mstokes@openhand.org.