



New York Moves to Guarantee Plant-Based Options at Hospitals Statewide

By Lindsay Morris
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The New York State Legislature [passed a bill](#) last week that would ensure access to plant-based meals and snacks for hospital patients and nursing-home residents. The landmark legislation would apply to all private and public facilities in the state.

The bill, [S1471A/A4072](#), co-sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman and Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard Gottfried, also would require hospitals to list plant-based options on menus and all other written materials provided to patients. It now awaits a signature from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo.

“This legislation reinforces the powerful message that what we eat matters, at all stages of health and recovery,” says Michelle McMacken, MD, director of the [NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue Adult Weight Management Program](#). “Plant-based foods such as whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables play a key role in preventing and treating cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and many other common conditions. Patients deserve to have access to these healthful plant-based options as an integral part of their care in the hospital.”

Part of a growing trend in health care, the New York bill follows [a California law passed last year](#) that requires plant-based options in public hospitals and prisons. Oregon came close to passing similar legislation, but it died in the state Senate last month. Media [speculate](#) that dairy lobbyists may have played a role in the bill’s demise.

States’ moves toward guaranteeing plant-based options for hospital patients aligns with recommendations from the [American Medical Association](#), which in 2017 called on hospitals to improve patient health by providing a variety of healthful foods, including vegan meals, as well as the [American College of Cardiology](#), which has recommended that hospitals offer plant-based meals to patients, staff, and visitors.

“Passage of New York’s plant-based hospital meals bill—as well as the law California passed last year—sends a clear message to other states that lawmakers, hospitals, and health care organizations like the American Medical Association and the American College of Cardiology all agree that providing patients plant-based meals is a critical strategy for fighting many of the nation’s leading chronic disease epidemics,” says Susan Levin, MS, RD, director of nutrition education for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

“This bill is a great first step, but at some point, I hope they’ll go further and make plant-based the default meal option,” says ACC’s Nutrition and Lifestyle Work Group founder and co-chair Andrew Freeman, MD, who serves as director of cardiovascular disease prevention at National Jewish Health in Denver. “Hospitals, as places of healing, should enable and support marked lifestyle changes, like [switching to a plant-based diet](#), to reduce or prevent repeat illness. We do a less-than-ideal job of that right now.”

Update (12/12/2019): On Dec. 6, 2019, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed bill S1471A/A4072 into law.

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