



## Smart, Refrigerated Lockers to improve food security in Eaton County

### Why are solutions needed for food security in Eaton County?

The most recent food insecurity data\* indicates that 12.8% of all Eaton County residents do not have enough food for their next few days. For children, that number increases to 15%. And for Black and Hispanic residents in Eaton, the numbers rise to a stark 28% and 19% respectively.

While numerous nonprofits and pantries currently provide food to those who are food insecure, none are open to residents 24-7. Innovations like refrigerated food lockers improve access to nutrition for residents who struggle to have enough food for their household by reducing barriers to access, such as working daytime hours during the weekday when most safety-net food is available. Food lockers allow residents to acquire food when it fits into their schedules or during an emergency. Lockers also allow for discretion when personal safety is a concern.

*\* Data is from Feeding America's 2024 Map the Meal Gap release of statistics from 2022.*

### How are the lockers used to improve food security?

Smart, refrigerated food lockers are an additional “tool in the toolbox” for food insecurity. Lockers can be used by food pantries, nonprofits and other referral organizations to reduce barriers for residents anytime of the day, night or weekend. Lockers allow easy access to food at a convenient location and times. A code is provided to a resident when an order is placed for them, which gives them:

- Secure 24x7 access, 365 days per year
- Choice of time for food pickup
- Individual access, but the ability to serve many residents at a time

### Where are the lockers located?

The lockers are conveniently located outdoors, next to the front entrance of the 123 Lansing St. medical professional building in Charlotte, Michigan. This building is on the campus of University of Michigan Health Sparrow-Eaton.

### Who operates the locker project?

The smart, refrigerated lockers are part of a collaborative program that includes **Eaton Community Health (ECH)**, which owns and manages the lockers; **Greater Lansing Food Bank** and its food pantry partners, which provides the food and the referrals; **University of Michigan Health – Sparrow Eaton**, which is the host site for the lockers; **Barry-Eaton District Health Department**, which provides food security data, nutrition information and other local metrics; and the recently formed **Eaton County Food Council**, which will provide strategic input and guidance. Partial funding for the lockers was provided by an impact grant from the **Capital Region Community Foundation**.

### **How can residents request food through the lockers?**

A resident in need of food assistance will be able to request food through trained nonprofit partners and local referral organizations. With the lockers now installed, referral organizations, training and procedures are in process and the phone numbers will be released later this fall.

### **How does a participating resident get their food from the lockers?**

Once the program has officially launched this fall and an order has been placed for a resident, they will receive a simple code by email, text, phone or in person. They can then visit the locker, enter the code, and a door will open to retrieve the food order.

### **Who is coordinating the referral organizations and training for the lockers?**

Eaton Community Health (ECH) is the nonprofit coordinating the launch of the locker program. This initiative has led to the development of a new Eaton County Food Council, which brings together multiple stakeholders connected in various ways to food programs in Eaton County. The food council will help to guide strategies, new opportunities and plans for the lockers and other initiatives to address food security for county residents.

### **How can I get more information about the food lockers or the food council?**

More information is available by contacting either of the Eaton Community Health (ECH) Co-Executive Directors, Kalli Dempsey ([kalli@ech-eaton.org](mailto:kalli@ech-eaton.org)) or Barbara Fulton ([barbara@ech-eaton.org](mailto:barbara@ech-eaton.org)). There is also information on the ECH website at [ech-eaton.org](http://ech-eaton.org).