



Baxter Community Center Food and Nutrition Policy

Purpose and Guidelines

The Baxter neighborhood is the densest populated neighborhood in Grand Rapids. Despite the fact that the average household income in the Baxter neighborhood is lower, rent is higher than in Grand Rapids as a whole. This along with other factors such as family dynamics, education, unemployment levels, and language barriers perpetuated by racially oppressive systems have placed additional financial strain on many of the neighbors we serve.

At Baxter Community Center, we recognize the importance that nutritious food plays in our neighborhood's health. In addition to our commitment to building equitable food systems and breaking down barriers to food access, we are committed to offering our neighbors choices that enable positive health outcomes, help prevent diet-related chronic illnesses, and are respectful of cultural needs and dietary preferences.

Our Food and Nutrition policy will demonstrate our commitment to the quality of food we offer our neighbors and serve as our guiding principles. We will utilize the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines [12](#) as a tool to guide our nutritional priorities and the food we distribute. This policy will primarily guide the priorities and actions within our Marketplace food and clothing pantry, but will provide guidelines to all relevant programs and services provided by Baxter Community Center.

Overall Nutrition Commitments & Food Purchasing Guidelines

Our purchasing practices will reflect our goals of increasing the availability of foods that help our neighbors create culturally appropriate, balanced and nourishing meals. We will continue to prioritize fresh vegetables and fruit, meat and protein options, healthier shelf stable items, and items on the "choose often" list of the HER guidelines.

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We will continue to prioritize produce grown in our on-site greenhouse and raised bed gardens to provide fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables to neighbors who use our Marketplace.

When available, we will continue to prioritize purchasing CSA and produce shares from local farmers and growers to supply produce to neighbors who use our Marketplace.

Food Donations

Though donations that do not meet these guidelines will still be accepted, we will continue to guide donors towards items that do fit our guidelines and meet our needs. We have created a food donation guide and wishlist that can be sent to donors and used for food drives. This wishlist, which is also available on our website, highlights low-sodium, low-sugar, high fiber/whole grain options, as well as highly requested produce, meat and dairy products.

In addition to our unwavering dedication to nutrition, we recognize the significance of balance and celebration in our neighbors' well-being. Rather than opting for conventional "party food" items such as cake mix and soda, we've curated a special occasion donation list. This allows individuals to contribute towards enabling our neighbors to enjoy these special moments without compromising the availability of healthier options when they visit our pantry.

Special Programs

Along with our Marketplace food pantry, we prioritize culturally relevant and age appropriate nutrition within all of the programs and services at Baxter Community Center:

- Our Child Development Center and Out of School programs follow The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) program guidelines [3](#) provided by the USDA [4](#). Additionally, all meals and snacks are made in-house using high quality and nutritionally dense ingredients, including produce from our on-site greenhouse and garden when available.
- Our Child Development Center utilizes a Garden to Early Childhood Education curriculum which prioritizes hands-on learning initiatives to support various aspects of their development, increase the benefits of connecting young children with nature, and promote healthy habits including increasing their palate and excitement for healthy foods at an early age.

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- Our Out of School programs are intentional about offering additional family friendly opportunities and events that promote and provide access to nutrition related healthy practices at school and at home.
- Our Wholistic Health Center encourages patients to adopt healthy lifestyle practices and recommends such interventions to patients as needed. To further increase the health of patients, Health Center staff also refer patients to relevant internal programs as needed.
- In our Diabetes Prevention & Reduction Program, we provide hands-on nutrition education and cooking workshops created and led by local dietitians, professional chefs, and qualified health educators. All ingredients used in our cooking workshops are high fiber, whole grain, fresh and locally sourced when possible.
- In our Meal Preparation & Planning Program, we are intentional about selecting healthier recipes and providing nutrient dense and fresh ingredients to convey our care for their health while teaching participants how to create healthier family friendly meals within their budget.
- In our Healthy Harvest Canning Program, we are intentional about selecting recipes that can be utilized in creating nutritious and balanced meals over recipes that are higher in sugar, like jams. We prioritize using produce from local growers and farmers markets when available.
- For our Holiday Basket Program, where recipients cannot select their own items, we aim to provide culturally traditional food items while seeking healthier ingredients and alternatives as funds allow.

Broader Commitments

Include other information here related to health or nutrition goals that you are striving for, as applicable.

We will continue to engage in programs and activities that meet the needs of our neighbors, students, patients and program participants while promoting the adoption of healthy lifestyle practices. We will work with our on-site Community Health Worker to connect participants to other food resources to fit their needs as appropriate, such as SNAP and WIC programs as well as connect individuals and families with resources connected to social determinants of health, such as housing and employment opportunities.

Adopted: 05/01/2024

Administration and Implementation

This policy, approved by our Executive Director on 04/09/2024, will take effect on 05/01/2024 at which time it will become part of the organizational policies and procedures. Our Executive Director and Director of Community Engagement are responsible for an annual review of the policy in order to keep it up to date with community needs. The Director of Community Engagement will be responsible for training current staff on policy to ensure proper adoption and adherence. All new staff will be provided a copy of the policy in their orientation folder. Relevant volunteers and independent contractors will also be provided with a copy of the policy. A copy of the policy will also be posted in the Marketplace for easy reference.

Supporting Resources

1. [her-food-bank_FINAL.pdf \(healthyeatingresearch.org\)](#)
2. Schwartz M, Levi R, Lott M, Arm K, Seligman H. Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research; 2020. Available at <http://healthyeatingresearch.org>
3. [Nutrition Standards for CACFP Meals and Snacks | Food and Nutrition Service \(usda.gov\)](#)
4. [USDA](#)