



# Food Insecurity

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## What is Food Security?

Food security "... exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences ...".<sup>1</sup> Food secure individuals can access a healthy diet, that does not cost too much, is what they want and need, and is not from a short term supply.<sup>2</sup>

Conversely, food insecurity is "not having sufficient food; experiencing hunger as a result of running out of food and being unable to afford more; eating a poor quality diet as a result of limited food options; anxiety about acquiring food; or having to rely on food relief".<sup>3 (piv)</sup>

## Contributing factors include

Income, access to transport, the cost of nutritious food, geographical and social isolation, and education are some factors associated with food insecurity. Groups more at risk include those who are unemployed, single parent households, young people and the elderly, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities or culturally and linguistically diverse people.<sup>4,5</sup>

## Social justice, health and wellbeing implications

Food insecurity is a social justice issue as it worsens health and educational inequalities in disadvantaged groups. It is associated with reduced academic achievement in children, increased risk of obesity, higher rates of coronary heart disease, type-2 diabetes and some cancers. This is due to reliance on cheaper, processed foods which are often lower in nutritional content.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Ballarat food insecurity snapshot

- Emergency food relief (EFR) data collected from three Ballarat agencies with a shared registration process, showed that:
  - 12,049 individuals (clients plus dependants) received EFR at least once in 2015-16
  - This is approximately 12% of Ballarat's population
  - A conservative estimate of the value of EFR distributed during 2015-16 is \$851,323.
- Community meals programs in Ballarat provided 55,432 meals annually
- 22 local schools are providing an average of 1,716 meals per week (mainly breakfasts).

## Background

As a community health organisation, our interest and commitment is to improve the access of affordable and nutritious food to those at risk of food insecurity in our community by:

- Distributing and supporting food relief partners to distribute food through food relief programs that meet healthy guidelines
- Advocating and supporting efforts to improve coordination and efficiencies in food distribution through the establishment of a food distribution hub in Ballarat

- Advocating and working with the City of Ballarat to ensure that all in the community have access to affordable fresh food outlets and that the establishment of fast food outlets, particularly in socioeconomically deprived areas, is controlled
- Encouraging and supporting the development of localised food security initiatives, particularly in our most disadvantaged communities, such as community gardens and food swap initiatives
- Building food literacy skills (how to choose, prepare and store healthy foods) with a priority focus on our more disadvantaged communities.

Additionally, BCH has an interest in enhancing the sustainability of our food supply through reducing fresh food waste and encouraging and promoting sustainable local food growers and suppliers.

Over the last few years, BCH has taken the initiative to lead, partner and/or coordinate a number of local food security initiatives including:

1. SecondBite at BCH – a food rescue and distribution program
2. Research projects on food insecurity with the support of Monash University dietetics students
3. Raising the profile and understanding of the issue of food security in our community through organising food security forums and workshops
4. Coordinating the Food Access Network (FAN) that works to reduce food insecurity in the Ballarat region
5. Pursuing opportunities to establish a centralised food hub in Ballarat.

### **Key Messages**

- BCH believes that addressing the issue of food security in Ballarat and surrounds requires working collaboratively and systemically, working at multiple levels and delivering a range of interventions
  - BCH knows that the establishment of a food hub in Ballarat will benefit the local and surrounding communities as it will improve logistics, amounts and efficiencies of food relief distribution. It can also provide a focal point for other food security initiatives.
  - BCH fully supports the work of the Ballarat Foundation and other partners to mobilise community effort to establish a food hub in Ballarat.
  - The establishment of a food hub in Ballarat will not in itself ‘solve’ the issue of food security but will be an important step in the multi-pronged approach to addressing the issue
  - BCH currently coordinates the FAN, a strong network of local food relief organisations, to assist in sharing information, coordinating food relief efforts and advocating for solutions to local food security issues
  - BCH has taken a lead and remains active in other food security initiatives and is committed to continuing to do so. These activities include: Food literacy, advocacy and research.
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## References

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- (3) Rychetnik L, Webb K, Story L, Katz T. Food Security Options Paper: A Food Security Planning Framework: A menu of options for policy and planning interventions. 2003.
- (4) Rosier K. CAFCA Practice Sheet. Food Insecurity in Australia: What is it, who experiences it and how can child and family services support families experiencing it? 2011.
- (5) Burns C. A review of the literature describing the link between poverty, food security and obesity with specific reference to Australia. 2004.
- (6) Turrell G, Kavanagh AM. Socio-economic pathways to diet: Modelling the association between socio-economic position and food purchasing behaviour. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005;9(3):375-383.