

# Food insecurity in post mining boom Western Australia

## – an exploration of the associated factors



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### INTRODUCTION

Historically, Western Australia (WA) has a relatively low prevalence of food insecurity compared to the rest of Australia. This has changed recently (4.8%), with WA now surpassing the national average (4%) (1). Distance and the size of WA have long been recognised in the literature as important barriers to food security (2). Recently, the declining local economy following the end of the mining boom has been highlighted as an emerging negative influence on food security.



### METHODS

The aim of the research was to gain greater insight into the associated factors of food insecurity and how this impacts consumption behaviors specifically in the WA context.



Focus groups (n=6) and semi-structured interviews (n=3) were conducted to investigate a hypothesised shift in traditional drivers as well as an exploration of any emerging issues in terms of food security in WA.

Both stakeholders and people classified as 'at risk' of food insecurity, including students, homeless and refugees were engaged to provide rich contextual information about their experience of food security.

The stakeholders recruited by word of mouth and email invitations. The 'at risk' individuals were recruited based on stakeholder recommendations or referrals of people perceived to be or deemed to be at risk of food security to participate in the focus groups.



Conversations were recorded with permission and transcribed and entered into NVivo software for thematic analysis.

### CONCLUSION

The social structures, dietary patterns, vulnerable groups and economic landscape, as well as the relative importance of the aspects of food insecurity, vary between geographical areas (3). Many of the associated factors highlighted in the focus groups were consistent with academic literature in this area. Nevertheless, new and less frequented themes were also evident. The change in the state's economy was front of mind and most felt it was impacting some individuals' ability to access food.

### RESULTS

Two thirds (68 %) of those at risk and all (100 %) stakeholders thought food insecurity was an issue in Western Australia.

Over half (56%) of those at risk considered food to be expensive or not affordable.

Fruit, vegetables and seafood were the most frequently cited as the least affordable foods by those at risk.

All respondents felt that the price of food in Western Australia remained high despite the fall in wages and elevated unemployment figures, which was perceived to negatively impact access to nutritious food.

### EMERGING THEMES



#### Lack of perceived personal safety is a barrier to food security

'I was in a domestic violence situation. So the person wasn't going to move out of the house. My mom had to pay for us to stay in a caravan park till we could move into this place. I was too scared to go to the shops. I was worried he would find me'

'For me personally it's a big issue, because I have a phobia of outside. I mean if I have to walk to the bus stop or even cross the road. People even ask to help me cross the road.'

'I've got illness. Well I suffer from panic attacks, so I don't like to go to the shops. I like to be able to see the exit and go quick and get out. I don't want to go to the big shops.'

#### The mining boom is over, but costs of living remain high

'The Mining boom goes up then down, but the price of food just stays here'

'I think as the Mining boom is ending a lot of people trying to maintain a lifestyle they don't have the income for anymore.'

'I think overall WA is more expensive than interstate like Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane. Compared to other countries or food cost is much higher... and this thing with the mining boom is probably why all the costs are going up. But then because everyone has been let go in those positions and those jobs, but the cost of food hasn't really come down.'



#### Healthy food may not be a priority

'Well if I only have so much money. I would rather have cigarettes than food. I'll be honest with you.'

'Unless it's affordable. All your health foods like fruit, vegies and nuts are quite expensive. A piece of bread and vegemite might suffice on a particular day. You could go and buy an orange and some nuts, but a vegemite sandwich will fill you up more. You know it's not great, but it will sustain you. You know it's not great over the long term over the long, but on the short term it's cheap. It's not sustaining your health, but it is sustaining your need for food.'



### References

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