



East Kimberley Food Security

Food Security plays a major role in individual and community health and development in the East Kimberley. Strategies need to be put in place to ensure everyone has access to enough affordable, healthy food.

This evidence brief will guide and shape discussion about responses to food insecurity in the East Kimberley. It aims to build a common understanding about causes of food insecurity and potential reforms and community led solutions that could be considered for communities in the East Kimberley region.

“This is very important for Closing the Gap. There is a monopoly on food here. Junk food is cheaper than healthy food.”

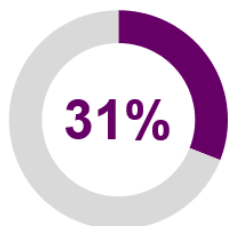
- Halls Creek community member,
Empowered Communities Consultations,
2019

Key Messages:

- **Food security** is when people have access to enough nutritious food for an active and healthy life. **Food insecurity** is when this access is limited or uncertain.
- **One in three** Aboriginal people living in remote areas are food insecure and **one in five** go without food (see over). This causes serious health risks for adults and can impact children's growth, development and learning.
- Food insecurity is most commonly caused by increased **cost of living** and **lack of income**.
- There are **six dimensions to food security** for children in remote WA: availability, access, utilisation, stability of supply, agency and sustainability; and a disruption to any of these may cause food insecurity.
- Literature suggests the most effective intervention to ensure food security is to **increase individual income**.
- In the East Kimberley, 63% of Aboriginal adults are not engaged in work. Increasing employment, increases incomes and in turn, increases food security.
- Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley are calling for the high cost of living to be addressed and **increased access to healthy, affordable food** in local community and town stores. Other suggested community programs includes providing **food and budgeting educational programs** and establishing home gardens, community gardens and kitchens and food co-operatives.

Data Snapshot: Food Insecurity

Food insecurity

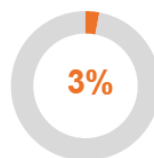


Almost **one third (31%) of Indigenous people** living in remote areas are food insecure, compared to the national average of 4%.

For adults

Food insecure **adults face health risks**, which are more prevalent in the **Indigenous population**, compared to the national average.

- Heart disease: **15% vs. ~5%**
- Diabetes & high blood sugar: **8% vs. ~5%**



3% of Indigenous adults meet the recommended **daily fruit and vegetable intake**.

Causes

Most common reasons:

1. Increased cost of living **65%**
2. Lack of income **42%**



People most at risk:

- Those experiencing material/financial hardship
- Those living in remote areas
- Indigenous people
- Single-parent households
- Older people
- Those experiencing homelessness
- Children



Factors affecting Indigenous people:

- Low income
- Home & overcrowding
- Access to transport, storage & cooking facilities

For children



1 in 5 children in regional & remote WA are food insecure, particularly those whose family rely on support payments or live in low socio-economic areas.

Looks like:

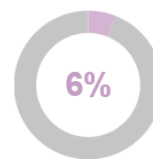
- Going without meals or fresh food
- Eating meals at houses for other family
- Going to school without breakfast

Impacts:

- Growth & development
- Social & emotional well-being
- Behaviour
- Self-esteem & self-efficacy
- Academic achievement



6% of Indigenous children meet the recommended **daily fruit & vegetable intake**.



Unemployment

63% of Indigenous adults in the East Kimberley are **not engaged in the workforce**.



In 2022, **nearly everyone on support payments** in Australia said their shopping bills had increased, and most **were eating less or skipping meals** (62%), and cutting back on meat, fruit and vegetables (71%).

Remote costs



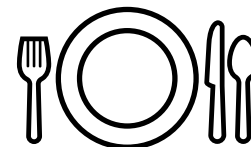
In regional & remote areas, **food may be up to 200% more expensive** than metropolitan areas, due to freight costs.

Sources: [3] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] [18] [22]

United Nations Definition

Food security: when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. [15]

Food insecurity: whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain. [15]



Putting healthy food on the table every day is a fundamental human right. [16]

Dimensions of food security

Research into food security for children living in regional and remote Western Australia has specified six domains of food security. [3]

1. **Availability:** there is enough food being grown and farmed to have enough healthy food for everyone.
2. **Access:** everyone has enough money and a way to get the right foods for a healthy diet.
3. **Utilisation:** everyone knows about healthy food and how to cook it and has a safe way and place to prepare and cook it.
4. **Stability of supply:** food access that stays strong, even during cyclones and floods, or economic disasters.
5. **Agency:** a person's empowerment to choose what food they eat, and having their voice heard in food policy.
6. **Sustainability:** good farming practices that protect Country now and in the future.



Image Source: [1]

Local voices: What's needed

A review of local reports and consultation notes [19] [20] [21] [28] [29] [30] evidence Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley face significant challenges in the high cost of living and access to affordable, healthy food, which has a big impact on health and learning.

Across the region people have identified the importance of food security to enable children to reach their full potential.

People are calling for:

- The high cost of living to be addressed
- Reduced prices of healthy food in local community and town stores
- Healthy and affordable takeaway options
- Food and nutrition literacy educational programs, including cooking, to support healthy living
- Money and budgeting educational programs based on real life eg. Using personal examples of rent and food budgeting and finding innovative ideas specific to personal and family circumstances
- Support for home vegetable gardens
- Strengthening or establishing local community gardens and community kitchens
- Establishing food co-operatives

One suggestion in Halls Creek aspires to develop a community collective hub, which is a one stop shop for services, including mentoring, budgeting and includes a kitchen for food literacy and cooking programs.

One suggestion in Kalumburu aspires for the community to become self-sufficient in fresh food at a cheaper cost.

What we don't know yet: *Household food security*

There is a lack of regular food in/security data tracking, which means we can't properly understand the problem and come up with solutions. [17]

We need more local and timely data to assist decision makers understand and respond to (and prevent) food insecurity.

What we don't know yet: *Local food availability*

Research focusses on food access, particularly a lack of financial resources as cause for food insecurity.

We need more information about food availability as cause for food insecurity in our local region. Particularly around variety and location of outlets, price and quality of available foods.

What we don't know yet: *What has worked in the past*

In the past there have been several food insecurity interventions carried out at the population level in Australia. These have not been followed up with thorough evaluations or reporting on process and program issues. [4]

We do not have evidence on what worked or did not work.

Programs need to include evaluations in order to strengthen future interventions.

Traditional food



A Northern Territory study found Aboriginal people living in remote areas often use traditional food, with purchased food, to lessen food insecurity [31].

In the East Kimberley today, we know Aboriginal people are regularly fishing and hunting to feed their families. This practice not only provides food to eat, but also opportunity to practice culture and tradition and pass it on to the next generation.

Non-Indigenous NGOs distributing food vouchers and hampers run the risk of creating dependencies on them and eroding and displacing cultural food practices. We need to ensure that food security initiatives in the East Kimberley protect traditional food culture.

Literature Review: What Works

It is widely accepted that food insecurity is a serious concern for individual health and well-being, with community-wide impacts [2]. In high income countries such as Australia, food insecurity is underestimated, with slow political response due to a lack of understanding [3].

In Australia, the dominant response to food security has focused on the individual, providing emergency food and financial relief or offering educational programs to increase food knowledge, skills or behaviours [4]. For some people, individual and community focused food programs may provide immediate relief, however these have limited impact and are often only temporary solutions to long-term problems [2]. These programs cannot be delivered equitably and sustainably, nor at the scale or for the duration needed to support most people out of food insecurity [5] [2]. Attempting to address food insecurity with short-term relief is difficult when solutions are likely to be long-term efforts to increase individual income.

Increase employment

Literature suggests there is a need in Australia for policies to address the structural drivers of food insecurity and recognises the potential preventative impacts they could have [4]. In the East Kimberley, 63% of Aboriginal adults are not engaged in the labour force [6]. The data (page 1) evidences a strong link between a lack of income and food insecurity. A key solution to food insecurity in the East Kimberley then, is increasing individual income. Empowering people into paid work and increasing employment opportunities raises incomes and reduces financial access barriers to food, in turn, reducing food insecurity.

Community programs

Although it has been proven that increasing incomes is more successful at addressing food insecurity in the long term, community programs play a role in immediate food relief. Community-level programs are often delivered locally by organisations and support individuals and families. Strategies at this level include community organisations partnering to deliver community solutions, food relief and food education. For Aboriginal people, programs that are supported by the community are more successful [5], which supports local ACCOs leading place-based food security initiatives in the East Kimberley.

Partnering to deliver local solutions [5]

- *Addressing:* Food availability and food access; *Applicable to:* Mild – severe food insecurity
- Local ACCOs, other organisations and community groups, from a range of sectors and include government, NGOs and community, work together to plan and deliver place-based initiatives, addressing local issues. The multidisciplinary collective enables food security to be addressed across the whole local food system and connects households with food resources.

Alleviating hunger through food relief [5]

- *Addressing:* Food access and food use; *Applicable to:* Moderate – severe food insecurity
- Food relief initiatives are the most common response to food insecurity. Examples include food hampers and vouchers, community gardens and kitchens, school breakfast club and café/restaurant meal vouchers. These responses are often the end of the line, and effective in providing immediate, emergency relief support. These initiatives play an important short-term role, but due to their nature, are unable to provide long term food security.

Enhancing food and nutrition literacy [5]

- *Addressing:* Food use; *Applicable to:* All
- Food and nutrition education programs increase level of food knowledge and skills needed to plan and manage food shopping, preparation and cooking and so improve food security. Skills taught include budgeting, getting value for money, balancing food groups and storage and preparation skills.

Case Study: The Mayi Market

Like the Kimberley, remote communities in Cape York face higher food prices than regional hubs and urban areas. In Cape York communities, high costs of quality fresh food lead to food insecurity and contribute to high rates of chronic diseases.

Cape York Partnership is the backbone organisation for Empowered Communities in Cape York, who believe access to affordable, nutritious food is key to improving the health and wellbeing of their communities. In 2020 they took control of their food market and established the Mayi Market, a not-for-profit Indigenous enterprise delivering quality, fresh food to their remote communities at fair prices. [14]

The Mayi Market

- Delivers food boxes to communities every fortnight
- Uses their own refrigerated truck
- Has options to use Centrepay and online pre-orders, to encourage budgets that prioritise fresh food
- Supports local Indigenous employment
- Works closely with producers and distributors to keep prices as low as possible



Key recommendations to improve food security for children in remote WA

Food security dimension & themes	Key recommendations & strategies
Food availability Availability in outlets, price promotion, quality, location of food outlets, variety.	Support the development and promotion of local food supply options to increase food availability, quality and reduce cost. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen reliance on a local food supply using direct retail options i.e. farmers' markets. • Where sourcing local produce is impractical, state and local government facilitation of core food freight subsidies. • Healthy food discounts in-store to increase purchasing of nutrient-dense options.
Food access Social support, financial resources, transport, distance, mobility.	Ensure availability of equitable social support options , with a particular focus on empowerment of community initiatives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote collaboration between social support agencies to ensure efficient and effective service provision. • Support the development of community-based social network groups including local food growing and trading groups.
Food utilisation Nutrition knowledge and cooking skills, children's food preferences, storage facilities, cooking and food preparation facilities, time.	Prioritise experiential food literacy programs that focus on improving attitude towards nutritious food, increase nutrition knowledge and cooking skills. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund and focus parental literacy programs on quick, healthy food preparation and budgeting skills. • Fund and focus children's food literacy programs on increasing palatability and desire for healthy food such as through growing and tasting of produce.

Table Source: [3]

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