

Local Governments, Public Health Planning and Food Security

How local governments
can support food security
in their jurisdiction.

The issue: Food security

Everyone needs good quality foods, in sufficient amounts, to meet their dietary and cultural needs [1]. Guaranteed regular physical, social and economic access to healthy and affordable food is called food security [1]. At a community level, food security refers to everyone in the community being able to obtain nutritious, safe, and personally acceptable food through a system that is sustainable, encourages healthy choices, supports the community, and ensures equal access for all. Food security is underpinned by six dimensions: food availability; access; utilisation; stability; agency; and sustainability [1-5]. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the food security dimensions and their associated determinants.



Figure 1: Determinants of food security

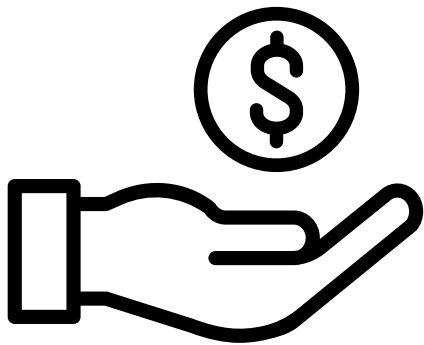
Food insecurity occurs when people do not have regular and reliable access to food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life [6]. Food insecurity may arise when people cannot obtain enough food to support good health, are not able to access food in socially acceptable ways, or are unable to utilise food to meet their nutritional and food safety needs [6].

What we currently know about food insecurity in Australia:

- The prevalence and severity of food insecurity in Australia is often underreported [7].
- 20% of children in regional and remote areas of Western Australia (WA) experienced food insecurity [8].
- 36% of Australian households experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in 2023, a notable increase of over 10% from 2022 [9].

People who might experience food insecurity:

- People experiencing homelessness [10].
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background [11].
- Living in a regional or remote area where food prices are higher [6].
- People from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background [12].
- Single-parent households [13].
- Older Australians [14].
- Children [8].



Some possible causes among families:

- Low incomes [9].
- Unexpected bills [9].
- Children whose families received government financial assistance are 2.6 times more likely to be food insecure [8].

Food insecurity impacts:

The impact of food insecurity among children includes behavioural problems [15], impaired academic performance [16], low self-esteem and low self-efficacy for healthy lifestyle choices such as healthy eating [17], compromised dietary intake, nutrient deficiencies such as iron deficiency, and poor growth and development [10]. The impact of food insecurity among adults includes increased risk of heart disease [18], diet-related disease [19], and malnutrition among older people [20].

Food insecurity has numerous negative physical, mental, and social health implications; these implications are suggested to rise as the severity of food insecurity increases [21].

The Food Community project

The Food Community project utilises a Systemic Innovation Lab approach to identify, map, evaluate, and strengthen government and community-led initiatives that support different dimensions of food security across regional WA. This approach focuses on addressing complex issues (like food security), has a place-based focus and develops strategies with initiative leaders to strengthen their initiatives' contribution towards regional food security systems change. This project is being delivered in partnership with Edith Cowan University, the Public Health Advocacy Institute, Eventide (formerly Wicked Lab), and the WA Country Health Service.



Identify



Map



Evaluate



Strengthen

food security initiatives across WA regions, to support food security action.

The [Food Community website](#) shares food security information through webinars, infographics, fact sheets, a map of existing food security initiatives and an advocacy training course, and showcases the work of existing initiatives operating across regional WA through a series of case studies.



What can local governments do?

Local governments have the opportunity to support food security for their local community through their Public Health Plans. The State Government has articulated a mandated deadline for local governments to have their Public Health Plans completed; 4th June 2026. Below are potential objectives and actions that align with the draft [State Public Health Plan for WA 2024-2029](#) and the [WA Health Promotion Strategic Framework 2022-2026](#) that local governments in WA can adopt. You can also view the [Government of South Australia 'Creating Healthier Local Food Environments'](#) guide for additional support.

State Public Health Plan for WA Objectives and Priorities	Potential Objective	Potential Action	For Example
<p>Objective - Enable: <i>bolster public health systems and workforce, and leverage partnerships to support health and wellbeing.</i></p> <p>Priority - Develop partnerships with key agencies and communities to enable the delivery of public health services.</p>	<p>Support the continued sustainability of the Food Community project mapping and systems change work in your region.</p>	<p>Partner with the Food Community team, and other stakeholders, to progress identified priority food security activities that fill gaps in current service provision.</p>	<p>Contact the Food Community project team (foodcommunity@ecu.edu.au) to discuss specific programs and services identified in your region that will fill gaps in service provision and need.</p>
<p>Objective - Protect: <i>protect against public and environmental health risks, effectively manage emergencies, and lessen the health impacts of climate change.</i></p> <p>Priority - Manage the effects of climate change on people's health and reduce the health system's environmental footprint.</p>		<p>Partner with the Food Community team, stakeholders and community members to establish a Food Action Group in your region to address local food issues in a placed-based manner.</p>	<p>See recommendation 14, page xxvi of the WA Food Security Inquiry Hungry for Change: Addressing food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty report:</p> <div data-bbox="1285 1198 2163 1394"> <p>Recommendation 13 Page 132</p> <p>Relevant State Government agencies and representatives support the investigation of food hubs as a way to address food supply and distribution issues in remote and regional areas, in accordance with Food Community Project research and recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs <i>Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities</i>.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1285 1430 2163 1538"> <p>Recommendation 14 Page 132</p> <p>Local government authorities and State Government departments ensure that they are represented on any Food Policy Councils that are initiated in regional areas.</p> </div>

Objective - Enable:
bolster public health systems and workforce, and leverage partnerships to support health and wellbeing.

Priority - Develop partnerships with key agencies and communities to enable the delivery of public health services.

Objective - Prevent:
reduce the burden of chronic disease, communicable disease, and injury.

Priority - Promote healthy eating and a more active WA to curb the rise in obesity.

Enable people to live healthy lives through enhancing local food security efforts.

Collaborate with existing food security initiatives that promote and support healthy eating patterns through strategic investment of funding to strengthen their work and support program sustainability.

Support the establishment of new food security initiatives to fill existing service provision gaps in your region based on prior Food Community work to identify specific food security initiatives needed.

Advocate for increased availability and accessibility of quality, affordable and nutritious food in your region.

See the Food Community website's '[Connect](#)' section to view a range of existing initiatives operating across regional WA (such as Community Gardens and Food Swapping Groups; Farmers' Markets and Food Events; Food Literacy and Health Promotion Projects; Emergency Food Relief and Community Programs; Policies or Strategic Plans; Private or Social Enterprises and Businesses; First Nations-led Projects). This will provide insight into the types of initiatives that you could focus your support on. You may support these initiatives by:

- Paying water rates for 12 months for your local community garden.
- Offering peppercorn leases for unused land for initiatives such as local farmers' markets or community gardens.
- Making local government-owned mobile food trailers freely available to emergency food relief initiatives to support the delivery of meals to outlying areas.

The Food Community project has identified gaps in current service provision of food security initiatives; local governments could support identified programs to fill gaps such as through investment or other funding. New food security initiatives needed have already been scoped by the Food Community project and are listed in the regional Share Stage reports on the [Food Community website](#).

The Food Community project has showcased existing initiatives operating across the regions through the '[Case Studies](#)' section. Local government can use these case studies to learn about how others operate and gain ideas for new initiatives needed in their region that they could support.

Work with the Food Community team to scope the potential of establishing a [Food Action Group](#) in the local region which may undertake activities such as increasing the availability and accessibility of quality, affordable and nutritious food.

Develop and/or renew existing verge policies to encourage and support edible verge gardens. View the [Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale Urban and Rural Verge Policy Guidelines](#) for an example of a verge policy that incorporates edible gardens.

Objective - Promote:

foster strong communities and healthier environments.

Priority - Improve health literacy by ensuring accessible and appropriate health information is effectively communicated to all Western Australians.

Empower people to live healthy lives through enhancing food security knowledge and understanding.

Increase community members' awareness around opportunities to access quality, affordable and nutritious food through Food Community website resources like the 'Connect' map of food security initiatives.

The Food Community project has created a printable version of the 'Connect' section which can be provided to local government upon request. This can be printed off and distributed through the local government office to increase community members' awareness of the initiatives available in their local area supporting food security. A geographical map of food security initiatives operating across each region is available to print from the [Food Community website](#).

Support the improvement of community members' knowledge and skills necessary to enable healthy dietary choices.

Local governments can collaborate with existing food literacy and health promotion projects through funding prioritisation, to strengthen their work. A range of Food Literacy and Health Promotion Projects are listed on the Food Community website's ['Connect' section](#). You may support these initiatives by:

- Providing in-kind venue hire for community kitchens or food literacy programs to operate out of.

The Food Community project has showcased existing initiatives operating across the regions through the ['Case Studies' section](#). Local government can use these case studies to learn about how local governments operate and gain ideas for new initiatives needed in their region that they could support.



References

1. Committee on World Food Security (2012). Coming to terms with terminology. Rome, Italy.
2. Rychetnik, L., Webb, K., Story, L., & Katz, T. (2003). Food Security Options Paper: A Planning Framework and Menu of Options for Policy and Practice Interventions. Sydney, New South Wales: NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition.
3. Innes-Hughes, C., Bowers, K., King, L., Chapman, K & Eden, B. (2010). Food security: The what, how, why, and where to of food security in NSW. Discussion Paper. PANORG. Sydney, New South Wales: Heart Foundation NSW and Cancer Council NSW.
4. Godrich, S.L., Davies, C.R., Darby, J., & Devine, A. (2017). What are the determinants of food security among regional and remote Western Australian children? Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 41(2), 172-177. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12636>
5. Charlton, K. (2016). Food security, food systems and food sovereignty in the 21st century: A new paradigm required to meet Sustainable Development Goals. Nutrition and Dietetics, 73(1):3-12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12264>
6. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2019). The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2019: Safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns.
7. McKay, F. H., Haines, B. C., & Dunn, M. (2019). Measuring and Understanding Food Insecurity in Australia: A Systematic Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health, 16(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030476>
8. Godrich, S. L., Lo, J., Davies, C., Darby, J., & Devine, A. (2017). Prevalence and socio-demographic predictors of food insecurity among regional and remote Western Australian children. Aust N Z J Public Health, 41(6), 585-590. Godrich, S., et al., Prevalence and socio-demographic predictors of food insecurity among regional and remote Western Australian children. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 2017. 41(6): p. 585-590.
9. Foodbank. (2023). Foodbank Hunger Report 2023. <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2023/>
10. Parsell, C., A. Clarke, and E. Kuskoff, Understanding responses to homelessness during COVID-19: an examination of Australia. Housing Studies, 2020: p. 1-14
11. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: Nutrition results—food and nutrients (Catalogue Number 4727.0.55.005). 2015, Canberra: ABS.
12. Alonso, E., Cockx, L., & Swinnen, J.. Culture and food security. Global Food Security, 2018. 17, 113–127.
13. Vandenberg, M., & Galvin, L. Dishing up the facts: Going without healthy food in Tasmania. 2016, Retrieved from www.healthyfoodaccess.tasmania.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Dishing-up-the-facts-July2016.pdf.
14. Forsey, A. Hidden hunger and malnutrition in the elderly. 2018. London: All Party Parliamentary Groups. Retrieved from www.feedingbritain.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=2e6622e8-c9f6-42a9-be83-1e89f5c2f6a3.
15. Rose-Jacobs, R., et al., Household food insecurity: associations with at-risk infant and toddler development. Pediatrics, 2008. 121(1): p. 65-72.
16. Lindberg, R., et al., Food insecurity in Australia: Implications for general practitioners. Australian Family Physician, 2015. 44(11): p. 859-862.
17. Godrich, S.L., et al., Canadian children from food insecure households experience low self-esteem and self-efficacy for healthy lifestyle choices. Nutrients, 2019. 11(3): p. 675.
18. Vercammen KA, Moran AJ, McClain AC, Thorndike AN, Fulay AP, Rimm EB. Food Security and 10-Year Cardiovascular Disease Risk Among U.S. Adults. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. 2019;56(5):689-97.
19. Thomas MK, Lammert LJ, Beverly EA. Food Insecurity and its Impact on Body Weight, Type 2 Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease, and Mental Health. Curr Cardiovasc Risk Rep. 2021;15(9):15-.
20. Pereira M, Pereira M, Campos G, Molina M. Food insecurity and nutritional status among older adults: a systematic review. Nutrition Reviews. 2022;80(4):631-44.
21. Bowden, M. (2020). Understanding food insecurity in Australia (Child Family Community Australia, Issue.

For more information:



foodcommunity@ecu.edu.au



[@ecufoodcommunity](https://www.facebook.com/ecufoodcommunity)



www.foodcommunity.com.au