An abstract graphic in the top right corner of the page. It features several overlapping, jagged lines in shades of teal, yellow, red, and grey. Small circular dots in matching colors are placed at various points along these lines. The lines and dots are set against a light blue, semi-transparent geometric shape that tapers towards the bottom left.

Fair Food WA response

Inquiry into the most effective ways for
Western Australia to address food insecurity
for children and young people affected by
poverty

15 July 2022

Fair Food WA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People Inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty.

Fair Food WA (FFWA) brings together expertise from the not-for-profit and government sectors to address food security in Western Australia. FFWA is funded by Lotterywest and hosted by the Western Australian Council of Social Service, the peak body representing the state's community service sector.

FFWA is a strategic project initiated to improve coordination and effectiveness of the charity food sector in Western Australia and included the development of the Food Relief Framework and subsequent solution focused outcomes.

The Framework Report details the increasing demand for food relief as a result of increased cost of living, stagnant wages, inadequate social security payments and supports and impacts on children. Since the release of the 2019 FRF report, Foodbank continues to report that 1.2 million Australian children have gone hungry in the past year.

Indeed, in your role as local Members of Parliament, you would be aware that food is being increasingly considered as a discretionary item and school breakfast clubs are in high demand to ensure all children get the best educational opportunities. While the need for breakfast clubs seems long standing, Foodbank having delivered the program for 21 years, it is clear such programs remain an indicator of a greater issue in our community.

This last two and a half years of the COVID pandemic have illustrated the importance of a public health response when the health of our community is at threat.

While the hospital system is designed to treat sickness, public health programs are vital in keeping us and our families well. In debating the Public Health Bill 2014 the Minister at the time outlined the introduction of the general health duty, including the responsibility to promote wellbeing, access to affordable and nutritional food is key to health.

WA's Healthy Weight Action Plan (2019-2024) articulated the relationship between health and a family's ability to maintain healthy choices. These choices are undermined and often diminished when confronted with food insecurity and yet the redress falls to the not-for-profit sector.

I congratulate the Joint Standing Committee for showing leadership and recognising the importance of addressing food security in our children and young people. I believe that the committee's investigation will assist the sector better understand who in government must take responsibility for addressing food security, particularly for our children.

As we know through the Food Relief Framework, the not-for-profit sector has such good will in meeting the needs of the community. However, it remains unclear as to which government

agencies (aside from the valuable contribution of Lotterywest) hold the leadership role in mitigating the impact of food insecurity.

Yours sincerely,



Janine Freeman
FFWA Independent Chair

Contact Details

For further enquiries on this Submission please contact:

Ashleigh Gregory
Community Relief and Resilience Coordinator

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Introduction

During the development of the [Food Relief Framework](#), the working group relied on the insights and inputs of people with lived experience, service providers and other local network members to give a comprehensive understanding of the growing social, health and economic burden of food insecurity and its impact on Western Australians.

For the purpose of this submission, we use the food security definition as outlined in the WA Food Relief Framework.

*A truly dignified food system is one where every individual and family has access to adequate, safe and nutritious food without the need for emergency food relief services. Conversely, food insecurity is 'the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in socially acceptable ways (...without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies).'*¹

- Food security is underpinned by four pillars: 1) food availability, 2) access, 3) utilisation, and 4) stability.²
- Food availability is about the supply of food to the community and the commercial systems of access to that food. Availability considers more than the quantity of food but includes the quality and range of foods available.
- Access refers to having economic and physical resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet, utilisation is knowledge of basic nutrition and cooking skills.
- Stability refers to continued access that can withstand climatic or economic disasters or seasonal events. Adequate sanitation and access to housing and health hardware, for example, working stoves, fridges, safe water and utilities, is also imperative to food security.³

¹ WACOSS Western Australian Council of Social Service (2019) *WA Food Relief Framework* <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Food-Relief-Framework-report-sml.pdf>

² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2006). Food Security. FAO's Agriculture and Development Economics Division (ESA)

³ Western Australian Council of Social Service. (2020). Submission to the Commonwealth Inquiry on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities.

<https://www.wacoss.org.au/library/submission-food-pricing-food-security-remote-communities/>

Summary of Fair Food WA Recommendations

- ❖ The Committee recognise the capability of the Food Stress Index and its data collection, to map, measure and monitor the potential risk of food insecurity and need for food relief across Western Australia and hence its value as a tool to combat food insecurity for children. That the committee in its deliberation consider where the index would be best placed in government, in terms of hosting and resourcing to ensure its useful application.
- ❖ Support vulnerable Western Australian families by urging the Federal Government to urgently increase the level of income support payments in line with those outlined in the [Raise the Rate Campaign](#).
- ❖ Support specific WA Government funding of emergency relief as a point in the journey to reducing vulnerability and disadvantage across Western Australia.
- ❖ Work with communities to identify sustainable food system enterprise models that increase access to healthy and affordable food, improve the local economy, and reduce logistics costs.
- ❖ Support State Government developing a comprehensive Logistics and Supply Line Strategy and accompanying action plan.
- ❖ Support State Government establishing a dedicated remote food security and supply chain coordination office to provide oversight to the development of a State Logistics and Supply Line Strategy and corresponding action plan. This office would lead policy transformation to improve coordination and collaboration between commercial, private and government stakeholders for the purpose of building a resilient logistics and supply line system.
- ❖ Support the extension of the relevant food legislation to the provision of charity food as outlined by recommendations in [Fair Food WA's submission](#) to the review of the Food Act (2008).
- ❖ Support the development of outcomes focused service delivery by the sector and ensure adequate funding in service contracts so that this can occur.
- ❖ Support Western Australian place-based services with the appropriate resources to deliver both adult and school-based food literacy programs to improve household food literacy.
- ❖ Appropriately resource and support school-based food security initiatives to enable the provision of evidence-based programs that consider the social determinants of food insecurity and provide additional information to support vulnerable families.

Fair Food WA response to the terms of the Inquiry

The impact of poor nutrition on children and young people and the extent of the problem in Western Australia

The health, education and social impacts of poor nutrition on food insecure children

Western Australian children experience food insecurity in many different ways. It can mean going without meals or fresh food, eating at other family members or friends' homes, or attending school without breakfast.⁴ In Australia, children from food insecure households are at an increased risk of school and extracurricular absenteeism and being food insecure can impact on their ability to achieve academic success.⁵ Previous survey data reported that 67% of students attend school hungry, with an estimation that this contributes to more than 2-hours per day in lost learning.⁶

Good nutrition can be understood as the sustenance and nourishment our bodies obtain through the process of consuming foods. It is essential for the physical and cognitive development of children, and contributes significantly to healthy weight, positive wellbeing, and protection against illness and chronic disease.⁷ Components of good nutrition, such as food knowledge, consumption behaviour, and food preferences, are defined under the utilisation pillar of food security.⁸ Food insecurity compounds both nutritional deficiencies and poor health outcomes⁹ and has also been linked to social, emotional and behavioural issues in children. These cognitive challenges can be displayed by children through changes such as a decline in happiness, irritability, hyperactivity, and misbehaviour.¹⁰

We must also acknowledge that the social stigma of food insecurity can contribute to underreporting of this issue by children and their families. Caregivers may keep household food insecurity hidden, due to fear of having ones parenting criticised, having their children removed from their care, or breaking socially acceptable norms of not accepting charity

⁴ Bowden, M. (2020). Understanding food insecurity in Australia: CFCA Paper No. 55. Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁵ Seivwright, A., Callis, Z., & Flatau, P. (2020). Food insecurity and socioeconomic disadvantage in Australia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(559). doi:10.3390/ijerph17020559

⁶ Foodbank. (2015). Hunger in the classroom. <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Foodbank-Hunger-in-the-Classroom-Report-May-2015.pdf>

⁷ National Health and Medical Research Council (2013) Australian Dietary Guidelines. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council.

⁸ New South Wales Council of Social Service. (2018). Access to healthy food: NCOSS cost of living report. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018-09/apo-nid194901.pdf>

⁹ Seivwright, A., Callis, Z., & Flatau, P. (2020). Food insecurity and socioeconomic disadvantage in Australia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(559). doi:10.3390/ijerph17020559

¹⁰ Foodbank Australia. (2018). Rumbling Tummies: Child Hunger in Australia. <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Rumbling-Tummies-Full-Report-2018.pdf>

food.¹¹ These barriers should be considered in our understanding of the prevalence of food insecurity and how we incorporate family and community into effective ways to address this issue.

Food Stress Index

Developed in 2018, the Western Australian Food Stress Index¹² (FSI) *combines multiple socioeconomic data sets, which are designed as a measure of overall advantage or disadvantage, with food affordability. Food affordability is determined by applying the food prices from the WA Food Access and Cost Survey.* The resulting map shows the vulnerability of households in a geographic area to food stress.

The Index identifies the likelihood that households, including those with children, in a particular geographic area are in food stress, using a range of variables to create a single indicator. The FSI can be used as a proxy measure for childhood food insecurity. Research identifies that there are higher levels of childhood food insecurity where families live in poverty.¹³ The *WA Commissioner for Children and Young People Speaking Out Survey 2021* also highlighted this data. The Commissioner's survey found that eight per cent of students reported that there is only sometimes enough food for them to eat at home and one per cent said never. The survey also found that year 4–6 students are more likely to care very much about being physically active and eating healthy food than older students suggesting that there is a window of opportunity to influence healthy eating at a young age that is likely to be compromised by poverty and food insecurity.¹⁴

FFWA maintains that the Food Stress Index would be an invaluable tool in identifying the level of household food insecurity in Western Australian, enabling a coordinated and strategic approach across Government in its capacity to address impact.

At this time there is no ongoing commitment to host and support the necessary datasets of the Food Stress Index. FFWA believe that throughout your deliberations the usefulness of an operating Food Stress Index will be apparent and provide insight into where this is best placed, in terms of hosting and resourcing to ensure that it has ongoing application and usefulness.

¹¹ Dean-Witt, C., & Hardin-Fanning, F. (2020). Exploring the stigma of childhood food insecurity in Appalachia. *Journal of Nutritional Education and Behaviour*, 52(7), 34-35.

¹² Landrigan TJ, Kerr DA, Dhaliwal SS, Pollard CM. Protocol for the development of a food stress index to identify households most at risk of food insecurity in Western Australia. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2018;16(1):79. 10.3390/ijerph16010079. - PMC - PubMed

¹³ Temple J.B., Booth S., Pollard C.M. Social assistance payments and food insecurity in Australia: Evidence from the Household Expenditure Survey. *Int. J. Env. Res. Public Health*. 2019;16:455. doi: 10.3390/ijerph16030455. - DOI - PMC - PubMed

¹⁴ Commissioner for Children and Young People 2021, *Speaking Out Survey 2021. The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2021

Recommendation: The Committee recognise the capability of the Food Stress Index and its data collection, to map, measure and monitor the potential risk of food insecurity and need for food relief across Western Australia and hence its value as a tool to combat food insecurity for children. That the committee in its deliberation consider where the index would be best placed in government, in terms of hosting and resourcing to ensure its useful application.

Challenges for children and young people in accessing enough nutritious food

An adequate income to cover the basics

An adequate household income is necessary to ensure that caregivers can meet basic needs, such as providing their children with enough healthy food to eat. Simultaneously, household income determines other experiences of hardship and is often the primary driver perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. Household income and vulnerability is therefore an indicator of food insecurity in children and young people, and responses to addressing food security should be underpinned by a recognition that household poverty is the primary driver of food stress.

We know that the majority of families who experience entrenched disadvantage are also food insecure. Findings from *100 Families WA*, indicated that two out of three families with children were sometimes or often unable to feed their children a balanced meal because they couldn't afford to; whilst 27% of families with children said that they had cut the size of their children's meals in the past 12 months because there wasn't enough money for food.¹⁵

In contrast, the temporary increase to the JobSeeker payment during the initial COVID-19 outbreak, demonstrated that an adequate income can positively impact the ability for households to purchase enough nutritious food to feed the family. In March 2020, JobSeeker and related payments were almost doubled by \$275 a week under the 'Coronavirus Supplement'. This (and the JobKeeper wage subsidy) rescued hundreds of thousands of people from poverty, and the number of people in poverty fell from 3.0 million to 2.6 million.¹⁶ The Coronavirus supplement added \$550 per fortnight onto the base rate, which allowed families to pay rent, access nutritious food and decrease demand for emergency relief services.¹⁷ With this financial boost, families reported that they were "feeling more

¹⁵ Phillips, S., Seivwright, A., Young, S., Fisher, C., Harries, M., Callis, Z., and Flatau, P. (2021). Insights into hardship and disadvantage in Perth, Western Australia: The 100 Families WA Report. The 100 Families WA project, Perth, Western Australia: 100 Families WA

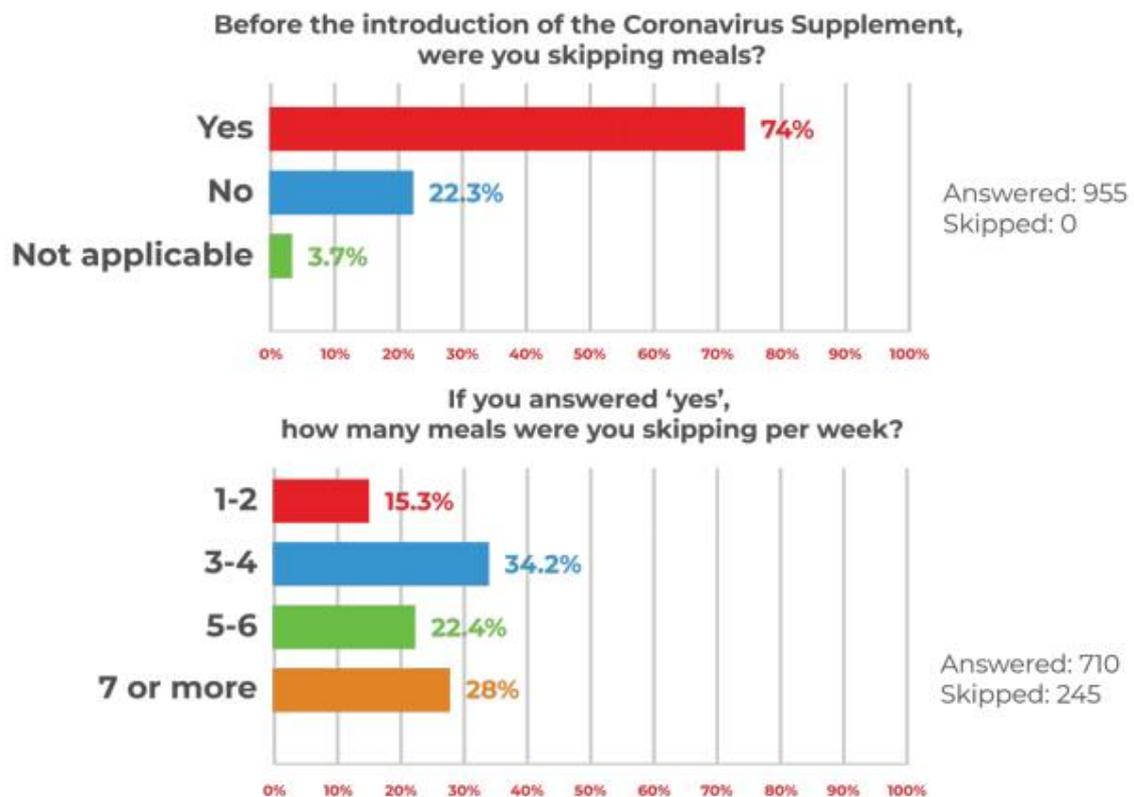
<https://100familieswa.org.au/resources/100-families-wa-final-report/>

¹⁶ ACOSS. (2021). Raise the Rate for Good FAQ. <https://raisetherate.org.au/raise-the-rate-faqs/>

¹⁷ Anglicare WA. (2020). Jobseeker and Coronavirus Supplement.

https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/advocacy/anglicare-wa---jobseeker-summary.pdf?sfvrsn=39bfbc60_2

comfortable to stock the cupboards and fridges with groceries, being able to afford healthy food, especially with the children.”¹⁸

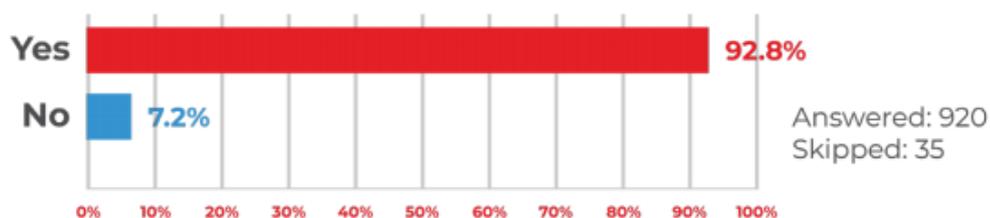


Source: ACOSS (2020) [I Can Finally Eat Fresh Fruit and Vegetables](#)

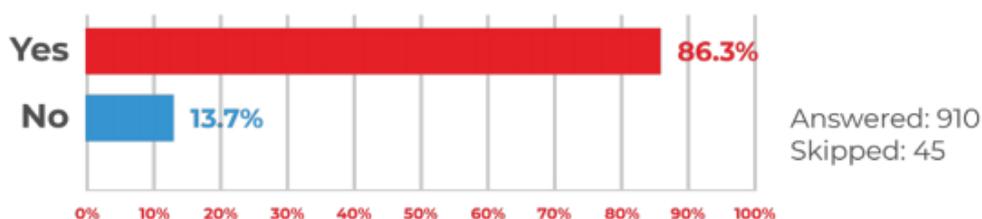
A survey conducted by the Australian Council of Social Service in May 2020 reported a 56 per cent decrease in the number of people skipping meals because of a lack of funds since the start of the Coronavirus Supplement. Nearly 93 per cent of survey participants reported that they were not able to afford fresh fruit and vegetables prior to the increase, with 83 per cent reporting that they were now able to eat more healthily and more regularly with the income supplement.

¹⁸ Anglicare WA. (2020) The Impact of the Jobseeker Coronavirus Supplement. https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/advocacy/anglicare-wa---jobseeker-supplement-stories.pdf?sfvrsn=a21f6eb8_2

Have you been able to afford to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables since the introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement?



Have you been able to afford to eat more meat since the introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement?



Source: ACOSS (2020) [I Can Finally Eat Fresh Fruit and Vegetables](#)

The Coronavirus Supplement was cut by more than half in September 2020, and removed by April 2021, then replaced with a small increase in the base payment rate – which remains well below the poverty line. Without addressing the systemic levers which afford all families an income that is above the poverty line, parents will be unable to relieve financial stress, forcing them to choose between feeding their children an adequate nutritious meal, or meeting other necessary living expenses. At a time when the cost of living is unmanageable for many, increasing income support payments to a level above the poverty line is paramount.

While income poverty is an important indicator of food insecurity, an increasing proportion of working families are faced with factors that impact on their capacity to afford food. Not least being wages that have not kept pace with the rising costs of maintaining a place to live, rental or home repayments, petrol, utilities and education.

These pressures are affecting a range of Western Australian workers and households with varying income levels. The Foodbank Hunger Report 2021 reveals that 64 per cent of food insecure Australians are employed. That is, food insecurity in Australia affects more working people than unemployed persons.

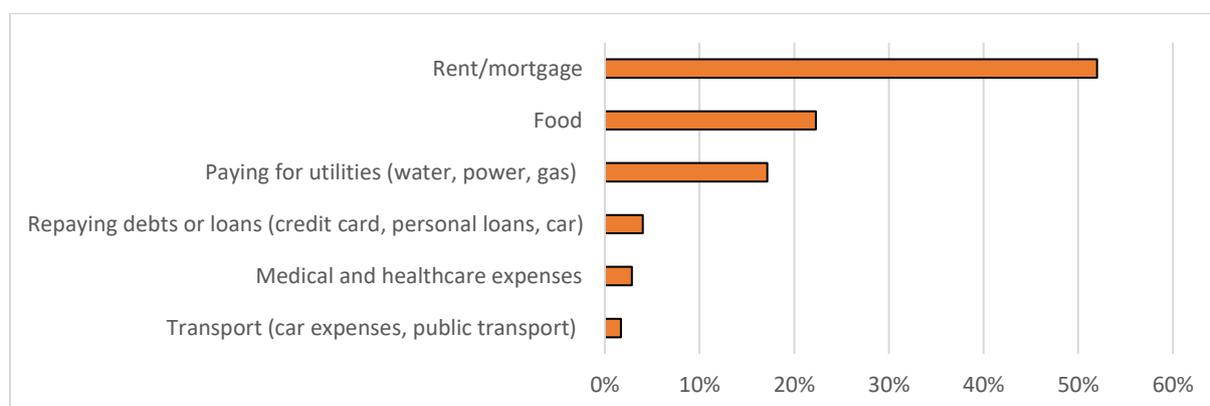
According to the UBS Evidence Lab Grocery Study, Woolworths prices have increased by 4.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2022, while Coles' prices have gone up 3.2 per cent.¹⁹ Food

¹⁹ Hales, H. (2022) [Reason for hike in Australian grocery prices revealed](#). The West Australian.

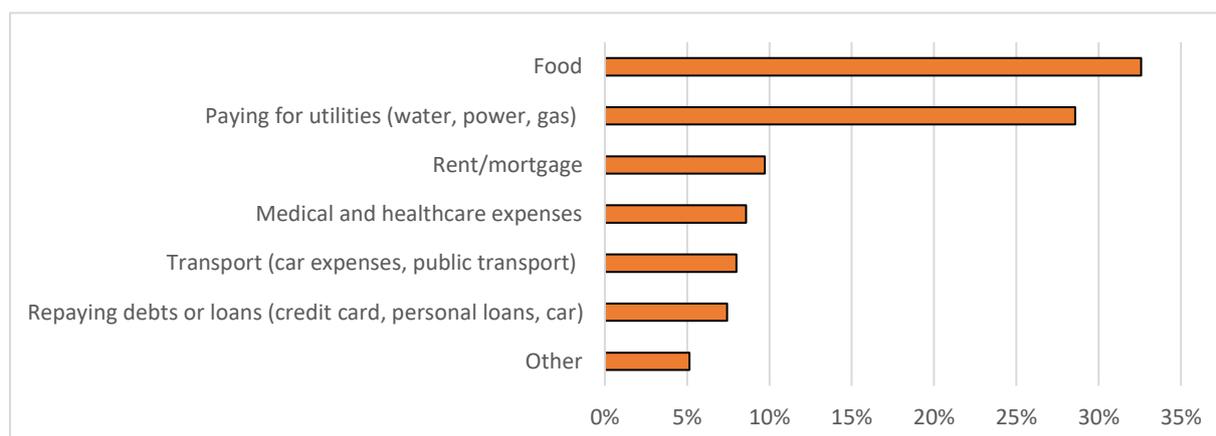
manufacturer SPC are raising the prices of 100 Australian staple food items, such as baked beans and spaghetti, canned tomatoes and fruits, by as much as 20 per cent.²⁰

The *West Australian* examined a broad range of grocery items commonly purchased by consumers and found the total cost had jumped from \$90.26 in 2019 to \$141.68 in 2022, indicating a **57** per cent increase.²¹ An increase in food prices of any magnitude will impact low-paid working households already engaged in strict budgeting measures who spend a large share of their income on food. Analysis from the *Low Pay Report 2022*,²² conducted by WACOSS and Unions WA, reveals that food is the highest weekly budget priority for 22 per cent of households with annual income lower than \$52,000, and the second highest weekly budget priority for 35 cent of households with annual income lower than \$52,000.

Top weekly budget priority for households with annual income lower than \$52,000 (n=175)



Second highest weekly budget priority for households with annual income lower than \$52,000 (n=175)



²⁰ Mizen, R. (2022) [Baked beans, spaghetti up 10-20pc as inflation bites](#). Australian Financial Review.

²¹ Enciso, C. (2022) [Cost of living: The shock increase in total cost of a grocery shop since 2019 revealed](#). The West Australian.

²² Perroni E. and Hansen, G. (2022) *Low Pay Report 2022*. Western Australian Council of Social Service and Unions WA.

Source: Perroni E. and Hansen, G. (2022)

It is evident that the cost of food is increasing for Western Australian households. Not only will this disproportionately impact low income households, but is driving a new cohort of families into food stress. As cost of living pressures increase, we are increasingly concerned about the impact that this will have on the food security of children and young people as parents and caregivers are forced to stretch their income to make ends meet.

Recommendation: Support vulnerable Western Australian families by urging the Federal Government to urgently increase the level of income support payments in line with those outlined in the [Raise the Rate Campaign](#).

Access to commercial and charity food

Western Australia's charity food sector comprises a diverse cohort of not-for-profit organisations providing food relief through a range of models. The high demand for charity food is indicative of the prevalence of food insecurity in our community and should not be seen as the primary solution to addressing this issue.

Despite playing an integral role in supporting vulnerable community members, the charity food sector relies largely on a volunteer workforce, often with shrinking resources and short-term funding. Food insecurity is rarely experienced as a once-off, and despite their best intentions, the charity food sector is not equipped to provide ongoing food relief at a time when demand for services continues to increase with the rising costs of living.²³

Research has demonstrated that families who experience food insecurity will access charity food as the very last resort. Families will first look towards their natural support networks of family and friends, and may instead purchase low nutrition, cheaper and more calorie dense food, or even go hungry before accessing the charity food system.²⁴

Anecdotal evidence from WACOSS member organisations providing food relief suggests that there has been a significant recent increase in people requesting emergency food relief across the state.

"Vinnies are witnessing unprecedented demand for food relief and has seen a significant increase in requests for food support over the last few years. From 30,000 people in 2017-18 to 45,000 in 2019/20 to an estimated 60,000 plus people in 2021/22. Our capacity is limited to 55,000 people for food relief based on existing resources. In real terms and referrals, our actual need is around 110,000 across the state.

²³ WACOSS. (2019). Food relief Framework. <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Food-Relief-Framework-report-sml.pdf>

²⁴ Pollard, C.M.; Mackintosh, B.; Campbell, C.; Kerr, D.; Begley, A.; Jancey, J.; Caraher, M.; Berg, J.; Booth, S. Charitable Food Systems' Capacity to Address Food Insecurity: An Australian Capital City Audit. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2018, 15, 1249. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15061249>

At the moment Vinnies is doing around \$100,000 a month in Food Cards and around \$100,000 worth of food in donated hampers. An increasing area of concern is people who are homeless, living in caravan parks or crashing with other families, which is tied up in the ongoing and increasing cost of housing.”²⁵

The Emergency Relief and Food Access Service (ERFAS) reports that emergency food relief needs in Western Australia have been steadily increasing over the past 12 months. The Service was launched in late April 2020, and is designed to provide an easy access point between individuals seeking emergency relief and a local emergency relief (ER) provider. To date 16,743 clients with 10,670 children have been provided with 21,178 ER pathways worth \$867,036. Food relief requests have remained consistently high across the year-to-date.

A number of WACOSS member organisations, including emergency relief, charitable food, financial counselling and family and domestic violence services, have reported to WACOSS month-on-month increases in people accessing their services due to rising levels of financial stress and hardship, likely compounded by the ongoing financial, social and health impacts of COVID-19.

These agencies consistently report a number of issues in relation to people living in financial hardship in Western Australia, including:

- The number of people seeking assistance with poverty-related issues is growing;
- There is an increase in new groups of clients, i.e. people seeking assistance who have not previously sought assistance, and in particular a growth in the number of ‘working poor’ approaching agencies for assistance;
- A large number of clients are returning to emergency relief services who have not requested assistance for more than 5+ years; and
- Rising cost-of-living pressures, particularly housing costs, are severely impacting vulnerable groups, with households having to choose between meeting housing costs and other items of essential expenditure such as food.²⁶

WACOSS operates a free online directory of community service providers for people looking for emergency relief and assistance, called *WACconnect*. The directory allows us to track real time search results of emergency and community relief providers, including food relief, financial counsellors, emergency accommodation and other services as well as searches by individuals in hardship seeking assistance.²⁷

From 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022, the portal registered a total of 23,200 visits from 15,600 users, generating 86,700 searches for services. When comparing these statistics to the numbers registered same period last year (2021), the number of users have increased by 46.5

²⁵ WACOSS/St Vincent de Paul Society (WA), email correspondence, 22 April 2022.

²⁶ C Twomey, E Perroni, G Hansen, C Stephens and A Gregory (2021) *Beyond Recovery*. Submission for the WA State Budget 2022-23. Western Australian Council of Social Service.

²⁷ <https://wacconnect.org.au/>

per cent, the number of visits to the site by 43 per cent, and the number of searches for services within the portal increased by 35 per cent (equivalent to ~22,000 more searches for services).

The most searched for services included: help with food (~ 7,800 searches); help with money, including overdue bills assistance, financial debt and debt services, rent assistance and more (~4,400 searches); help with accommodation (~ 3,500 searches); and help with fuel and related expenses (~2,000 searches).

This increase in the platform's usage registered year after year reflects both increasing awareness of the platform and the continued impact of the cost-of-living increases in the Western Australia.

As evidenced across the sector, compounding cost of living pressures will continue to force Western Australian families into making difficult choices when paying for non-discretionary items. Reliance on the charity sector, particularly for food relief, is expected to increase as we continue to see these financial pressures rise.

FFWA welcomes the recent announcement by the Premier that *"Lotterywest (is) providing an additional \$10 million per year for the next two years... to support those organisations who are helping WA's most vulnerable"*

The WA community through their purchase of Lotterywest products has assisted emergency relief agencies for decades. Indeed, in 2023 Foodbank will celebrate the Lotterywest grants that made the construction of their first warehouse, in response to growing demand, a reality some 30 years ago.

Additional resource allocation directly from State Government agencies, such as in NSW and Victoria would underpin this Lotterywest grant based funding with a view to making strategic improvements that can alleviate food insecurity.

Recommendation: Support specific WA Government funding of emergency relief as a point in the journey to reducing vulnerability and disadvantage across Western Australia.

Geographically isolated communities

The food security of Western Australian children should be considered within the unique social, economic, and geographical context of this state. Evidence demonstrates that the further one lives from the metropolitan centres, the higher one's risk is to food stress and insecurity.²⁸ Recent studies on the prevalence of food insecurity amongst regional and

²⁸ National Rural Health Alliance. (2016). Food security and health in rural and remote Australia. <https://www.agrifutures.com.au/wp-content/uploads/publications/16-053.pdf>

remote Western Australians also found that children in those areas are especially vulnerable to being food insecure.²⁹

Across the range of solutions needed to address food supply issues in regional and remote areas, it is recognised that food access for children remains dependent on parents and caregivers as the gatekeepers of food and good nutrition. Our recommendations regarding food security in remote Indigenous communities are outlined in the submission to the [2020 Inquiry into Food Pricing and Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities](#). These include addressing the systemic drivers of food pricing, ensuring adequate community infrastructure, and prioritising locally led solutions that are culturally appropriate.

The impacts of COVID-19 and extreme weather events which shut down the north-west rail link in early 2022, highlighted the state's supply chain susceptibility to severe disruptions to food supply. Fair Food WA have put forward a range of recommendations regarding food security in our submission to the [State Shipping and Supply Chain Taskforce](#). We call on the State Government to develop a comprehensive Logistics and Supply Line Strategy and accompanying Action Plan, which considers both the charity and commercial food sectors, and is informed by mapping of logistics, infrastructure, supply and demand. It is essential that our states food supply chain is both robust and scalable in times of disaster.

Prioritising nutritious and affordable food access for families living in geographically isolated parts of the state, will ensure that children living in regional WA are afforded the same opportunity to live healthy and fulfilling lives, as those young people residing in metropolitan areas.

Recommendation: Work with communities to identify sustainable food system enterprise models that increase access to healthy and affordable food, improve the local economy, and reduce logistics costs.

Recommendation: Support State Government developing a comprehensive Logistics and Supply Line Strategy and accompanying action plan.

Recommendation: Support State Government establishing a dedicated remote food security and supply chain coordination office to provide oversight to the development of a State Logistics and Supply Line Strategy and corresponding action plan. This office would lead policy transformation to improve coordination and collaboration between commercial, private and government stakeholders for the purpose of building a resilient logistics and supply line system.

²⁹ Goodrich, S., et al. (2017). Prevalence of socio-demographic predictors of food insecurity among regional and remote Western Australian children. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health.

Charity food service models, standards and safety

Charity food providers respond to the need for food assistance within the limitations of the charity sector. Currently there are no regulatory frameworks or standards to maintain the quality and availability of food relief to those who need it most. The Food Relief Framework, recognises that this contributes to a number of factors that can prevent some in the charity food sector from providing safe and ongoing access to healthy and nutritious food. Donated foods may be poor in nutritional value, or not meet the social and cultural needs of consumers. Workforce capabilities, reliance on volunteers and an absence of practice oversight means that consumer-led service models are sporadic. Without this sector being appropriately supported with governance, there is limited capacity for charity food services to provide a comprehensive response to food insecurity.

Food relief services are typically provided by the charity food sector to vulnerable communities. These communities may be more at risk of various medical problems, including nutritional deficiencies and other diet-related diseases such as heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.³⁰ Currently, third-party audits are required for higher-risk activities such as food service to vulnerable people in hospitals, nursing homes, aged care facilities, and childcare centres, and for licensed dairy, seafood, and meat businesses. Food redistribution and food relief organisations also cater to vulnerable groups, yet are not subject to similar third-party audits or food safety legislation. People who are at the highest risk of long-term complications of foodborne illness such as rough sleepers and people living in overcrowded housing may be placed at further risk due to the under-regulation of the food they receive from food relief services. Food that is directed to vulnerable populations should have the same protective measures as food prepared and served to paying consumers. Food safety and quality are an integral aspect of managing food donations and distributions and it is paramount to minimising the risk of distributing or serving unsafe foods. For more on this, you can read [Fair Food WA's recent submission](#) to the review of the Food Act (2008). Ensuring that the charity food sector is able to uphold food quality standards is an important consideration to address one of the many challenges for low-income households accessing nutritious food.

Recommendation: Support the extension of the relevant food legislation to the provision of charity food as outlined by recommendations in [Fair Food WA's submission](#) to the review of the Food Act (2008).

The extent to which food relief:

³⁰ Hudak KM, Friedman E, Johnson J, Benjamin-Neelon SE. (2020) Food Bank Donations in the United States: A Landscape Review of Federal Policies. *Nutrients*.12(12):3764. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12123764>

- a. Is currently accessed by children and young people, including at school and in early childhood education and care settings**
- b. Is effective**

Currently, there are no evaluation systems to map, monitor and measure the need for, or impact of, food relief services. Most charitable food services are evaluated through a combination of inputs and outputs, for example how many clients are seen and how many kilograms of food is delivered. This type of data capture is insufficient to monitor the impact of charity food service delivery because it doesn't tell us anything about how the food delivery is enhancing the client's capacity, capability, or quality of life.

Fair Food WA draws attention to the Whole of Government Outcomes Framework which orients funded services towards outcomes approaches. Outcome based approaches identify the quality of change a person experiences as a result of the service or program. In the context of charity food delivery, this may look like the referral pathways a client is offered after presenting with food insecurity. These referral pathways may be to financial counsellors, nutrition literacy, or other whole of life services. With the outcome being that a client is in a better position to address the underlying causes of food insecurity.

Some large agencies have been able to implement outcome focused evaluation systems however, much of the charity food sector is under resourced, volunteer coordinated and are not funded to take a more sophisticated approach to measure service impact. During the development of the WA Food Relief Framework an outcomes-based assessment and referral tool was designed to support the charity food sector to take a whole of life approach to the delivery of charity food (Framework Pg 35).

To measure the extent and effectiveness of the charity food relief sector, Western Australia needs to integrate monitoring and evaluation systems within the Whole of Government Outcomes Framework. Recognising that the charity food sector is largely funded outside of government mechanisms, in particular through donations and grants (particularly from Lotterywest), grant contracts should make additional provision to support outcomes integration.

The evaluation should also ensure it is based on lived experience of those relying on food charity, in this case children, to gain an understanding of demand, with a view to being consumer driven not supply driven as is currently the situation.

Recommendations: Support the development of outcomes focused service delivery by the sector and ensure adequate funding in service contracts so that this can occur.

The Terms of Reference point 3 asks for consideration regarding the effectiveness of the provision of food in both education and care settings. We make the distinction that the provision of food via the purchase of services that is often seen in education and care settings, is not charity food. Issues regarding the provision of food to children in education and care settings have been outlined in the United Workers Union (2022) [Children Going Hungry Report](#), which includes both food budget and nutritional shortfalls. Food supplied under fee for service models such as in this example, is governed by the Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Childcare and is regulated by the National Quality Framework. Despite the legitimacy of these concerns, the consideration of these fee for service scenarios, should not be confused with the effectiveness of the provision of free or low-cost food that is supplied via the charity food sector.

The extent to which food literacy programs aimed at children and young people and/or their parents/ carers:

- a. Are currently accessed**
- b. Are effective**

Food literacy intersects with food utilisation and is therefore an essential component in addressing drivers of food insecurity. School-based food literacy programs have been shown to contribute towards positive outcomes for both students and the broader school community. The School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program (SBP) delivered in several WA schools, aims to improve the nutrition and wellbeing of children who are vulnerable to poor diet and health, by aiding access to a variety of healthy foods in schools and improving food literacy and basic cooking skills.

The Program is delivered by a local provider who holds a comprehensive understanding of the unique social, economic and geographic considerations that impact the food security landscape in Western Australia.

Evaluation data from the program indicated that over 70% of respondents from stakeholder and student surveys, strongly agreed that the program contributes to the overall health promoting environment of the school and the school community. Schools reported that involving students in preparing and/or serving food in the SBP, further enhances their ability to choose and prepare healthy breakfasts, and provides them with important knowledge and skills relating to food handling and hygiene.³¹

A comprehensive overview of the positive outcomes that the program enables are available in further detail in the [latest evaluation](#).

³¹ Byrne, M., Hill, S., Wenden, E., Devine, A., Miller, M., Quinlan, H., Shaw, T., Eastham, J., & Cross, D. (2018). Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Program Final Report. Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA

Adult food literacy programs also play an equally important role in the food security of children and young people. Those such as Foodbank WA's, Food Sensations for Adults, build the capacity of parents and caregivers to plan and prepare healthy meals for themselves and their families.

Food sensations reported that 73% of participants agreed that the program made an overall change in their food literacy confidence and behaviours.³² Despite these invaluable differences, such programs may only achieve minimal impact if the ability to obtain healthy and nutritious food is short-lived. The effectiveness of these programs should therefore be considered alongside the necessary policy changes that will allow families the financial resources to purchase culturally appropriate and nutrient rich foods on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation: Support the Western Australian community service sector with the appropriate resources to deliver both adult and school-based food literacy programs to improve household food literacy.

Whilst providing school lunches to children across Western Australia, Eat Up has demonstrated the impact that school-based lunch programs can achieve. From their 2021 evaluation, Eat Up reported that by participating in the program, student nutrition increased by 133%, concentration levels by 75%, and school attendance by 40%.³³ Like much of the food relief sector, programs such as Eat Up are reliant on short-term and piecemeal funding which limits their ability to provide a comprehensive food relief model and expand their reach into areas of need. Recognising that policy level responses to addressing food insecurity take time and coordination, adequate funding of both school and community-based food relief programs is vital to ensure children and young people don't go hungry. There remains a need to focus on solutions which empower the entire family unit to address the underlying drivers of food insecurity. Models which extend beyond the provision of food relief and build the resilience of families via whole of life referral pathways, are both necessary and favoured within the context of addressing food insecurity in our young people.

Recommendation: Appropriately resource and support school-based food security initiatives to enable the provision of evidence-based programs that consider the social determinants of food insecurity and provide additional information to support vulnerable families.

WA obligations and responsibilities to monitor and address food security as an aspect of child wellbeing

³² Foodbank WA. (2021). 2020 Impacts: Food Sensations for Adults. <https://www.foodbank.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WA-FSA-Impacts-2020-Final.pdf>

³³ Eat Up Australia. Learn, Grow & Succeed Evaluation Report. Melbourne: Eat Up Australia, September 2021.

Human rights-focused approaches have the potential to address the impact of government action or inaction, including the structural causes, not just the symptoms, of social inequities. The [Declaration of the Rights of the Child](#), defines children’s rights to protection, education, health care, shelter, and good nutrition. Australia is a signatory and therefore committed to a human rights approach which addresses the structural causes not just the symptoms of social inequalities.

Article 24 C of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the right to food, stating,

(c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;

A sense of urgency to address food insecurity is equally explicit in the Global Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 2.1 has a target “to end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.”³⁴

We note that the WA Council of Social Service have been calling for the development of a WA Child and Family Wellbeing Framework. Their position is outlined in page 23 of [‘Beyond Recovery: State Budget Submission 2022-2023’](#).

FFWA note the *‘In their own voice’* discussion paper tabled in November 2020 by the then Chair of the Committee, Dr Sally Talbot which outlined a process that could be adopted by the Parliament to enable the participation of children and young people in parliamentary proceedings

Conclusion

As outlined it is important that we go beyond addressing food security only in terms of feeding hungry people, to addressing the social and economic determinants of food insecurity.

Recognising that addressing the policy drivers of food insecurity is a long-term issue, we do however need to ensure people who experience hunger have access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food.

FFWA remain committed to sharing information, expertise, and resources for a coordinated sector response to address food security across the state, however we argue that solely increasing the funding and availability of charity food will not alleviate household hunger.

³⁴ [United Nations, ‘Goal 2: Zero Hunger’, Sustainable Development Goals](#)

Tackling the social and economic drivers, with a view to mitigating them and stemming the increasing vulnerabilities, is fundamental to children's opportunities to participate and benefit from their education.

Fundamental to this is the role played by government in partnership with the sector to strengthen their input in delivering a sustainable system which builds capacity for people to move out of food insecurity.

Fair Food WA welcomes any recommendations from the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People Inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty and would be happy to give verbal evidence if required.

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