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# Rumbling Tummies

Child Hunger in Australia

APRIL 2018



mccrindle

# Contents

Message from the CEO	3
Executive summary	4
The scale and causes of the issue	6
The impact of food insecurity	11
Coping with food insecurity	16
Methodology	21
Respondent characteristics	22

# Message from the CEO

Every day there are people in our community dealing with the anguish and despair of not knowing where the next meal will come from for themselves and their families.

Foodbank works tirelessly with its many partners across the food and grocery sector to provide food for 183,000 meals a day to over 2,400 charities to ensure all Australians have access to food no matter what their circumstances.

In addition to our food relief work on the ground, we are also leading the research effort to explore and better understand hunger in Australia. Food insecurity can be defined as “a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life”<sup>1</sup>.

Despite Australia’s reputation as the ‘lucky country’, hunger is a reality for 15% of Australians<sup>2</sup>. In our annual research report, *The Foodbank Hunger Report*, we uncovered the

seriousness of the situation in Australia and the impact it is having on our community.

Foodbank is now seeking to uncover the reality of child hunger in Australia. Previous research has found that more than a quarter (27%) of those seeking food relief are children<sup>3</sup>. This study aims to understand the scale of child food insecurity and determine the impact this has on the wellbeing of children, families and the broader community.

As a mother myself, I find the picture that emerges both heart breaking and unacceptable. As a community, we might be excused for not hearing one stomach rumbling, but we simply cannot ignore the sound of the rumbling tummies of hundreds of thousands of children going hungry in Australia each year.

If we want all our children to thrive and succeed, we can’t let their hunger go unheard. That’s why Foodbank is listening and striving every day to answer the call with the food our children so desperately need.



Brianna Casey,  
CEO, Foodbank Australia

<sup>1</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

<sup>2</sup> Foodbank, *The Foodbank Hunger Report*, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

# Executive summary

## **More than one in five children in Australia live in a food insecure household.**

In fact, it is more likely for a child to live in a food insecure household than an adult. Research conducted in 2017 found that 15% of Australians experienced food insecurity in the previous 12 months<sup>4</sup>, while 22% of children experienced food insecurity over the same period.

Going hungry is a common occurrence for many children. One in three parents living in food insecure households (32%) say their children do not have enough to eat at least once a month because they cannot afford to buy enough food. One in five parents living in food insecure households (22%) say their child goes a whole day without eating any fresh food at least once a week. Devastatingly, almost one in ten of these parents (9%) say their children go a whole day without eating at all at least once a week.

## **The cost of living is the main cause of household food insecurity.**

Unexpected expenses or large bills (52%) and housing payments (38%) are two of the most prominent causes of food insecurity in households with children under the age of 15. The cost of living forces parents to choose between paying their bills and feeding their family. More than half of parents (56%) have not paid bills in order to have enough money to buy food for their household.

## **Parents expect even greater challenges in the future.**

More than half of parents in food insecure households (51%) expect it to become more challenging to provide food for their family in the future as the cost of living continues to rise. For these parents, bills (32%) and housing costs (18%) seem to be getting more expensive.

## **Parents notice a number of changes to their children's wellbeing as a result of food insecurity.**

Eating enough food is crucial for healthy growth and development, particularly amongst children. If a child does not have enough food, or enough healthy food, parents notice changes in their behaviour, and in their emotional and physical wellbeing.

More than half of parents (54%) report changes in their child's emotions as a result of being hungry, such as more outbursts or tantrums (24%) and a decline in their child's happiness (24%). One in five parents (22%) say their children become agitated and irritable if they do not have enough to eat. One in six parents (17%) notice their children acting up at school or at home as a result of not having enough food.

## **Parents skip meals, so their children can eat.**

Almost nine out of 10 parents in food insecure households (87%) have skipped a meal so their children can eat and for 36%, this is a weekly occurrence. At least once a week, three in 10 parents (29%) go a whole day without eating.

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<sup>4</sup> Foodbank, *The Foodbank Hunger Report, 2017*

In addition to sacrificing their own physical needs, three in four parents living in food insecure households (74%) feel embarrassed or ashamed because they have struggled to provide food for their children (somewhat/strongly agree).

**Parents tend to rely on family and friends to ensure their children have access to food.**

When it comes to having enough money to buy food, three in five parents say they borrow money from family and friends (59%).

Parents protect their children from hunger by cutting down on the size of the family's meals to make the food last longer (49%). In addition, parents may take their children to a family member's house for a meal (38%), seek food assistance from a charity (34%) or have their children go to a friend's house for a meal (16%).

**Food assistance provides significant benefits for families and children experiencing food insecurity.**

Just over half of parents living in food insecure households (54%) have sought food assistance from a charity, with two in five (40%) seeking food assistance in the last 12 months. The provision of food can improve household wellbeing, with almost half of these parents (48%) indicating food assistance helped them to feel less stressed as a family. It can also create positive social relationships, with more than two in five households (45%) feeling supported by their community.

On an individual level, food assistance can also significantly benefit children living in food insecure households. Parents most commonly notice that their children feel less hungry (34%) and are happier (33%) when they receive food assistance. One in five parents (20%) also suggest their children have more energy and their behaviour improves.

# The scale and causes of the issue

## More than one in five children live in a food insecure household

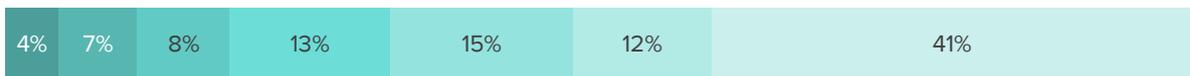
Although the problem of hunger is largely unnoticed in Australian society, more than one in five children (22%) live in a food insecure household. A child, therefore, is more likely to live in a food insecure household than an adult (15%)<sup>5</sup>.

Almost half of parents in Australia (47%) who have faced food insecurity in the last year, suggest their household runs out of food, without the ability to buy more, at least once a month. Devastatingly, a proportion of parents

are even struggling to feed their family every day (4%) or a few times a week (7%).

Children tend to go without food less frequently than their overall household. This means parents are likely to be bearing the brunt of household food insecurity so that their children can eat. Despite this, one in three parents in food insecure households (32%) still report that their children do not have enough to eat at least once a month.

Q. How often is your household in the situation where you do not have enough food and you cannot afford to buy more food? (n=602)



■ Daily ■ A few times a week ■ Once a week ■ Fortnightly ■ Monthly ■ Quarterly ■ Once or twice a year

Q. How often does your child or children not have enough to eat because you ran out of food and did not have enough money to purchase more? (n=602)



■ Daily ■ A few times a week ■ Once a week ■ Fortnightly ■ Monthly ■ Quarterly ■ Once or twice a year

<sup>5</sup> Foodbank, *The Foodbank Hunger Report*, 2017

## Some households are more vulnerable

Overall, 21% of Australian households with children under the age of 15 have experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. The likelihood that a child will experience food insecurity is even higher amongst some demographics.

Food insecurity is more common in households outside capital cities (25%) and is also more

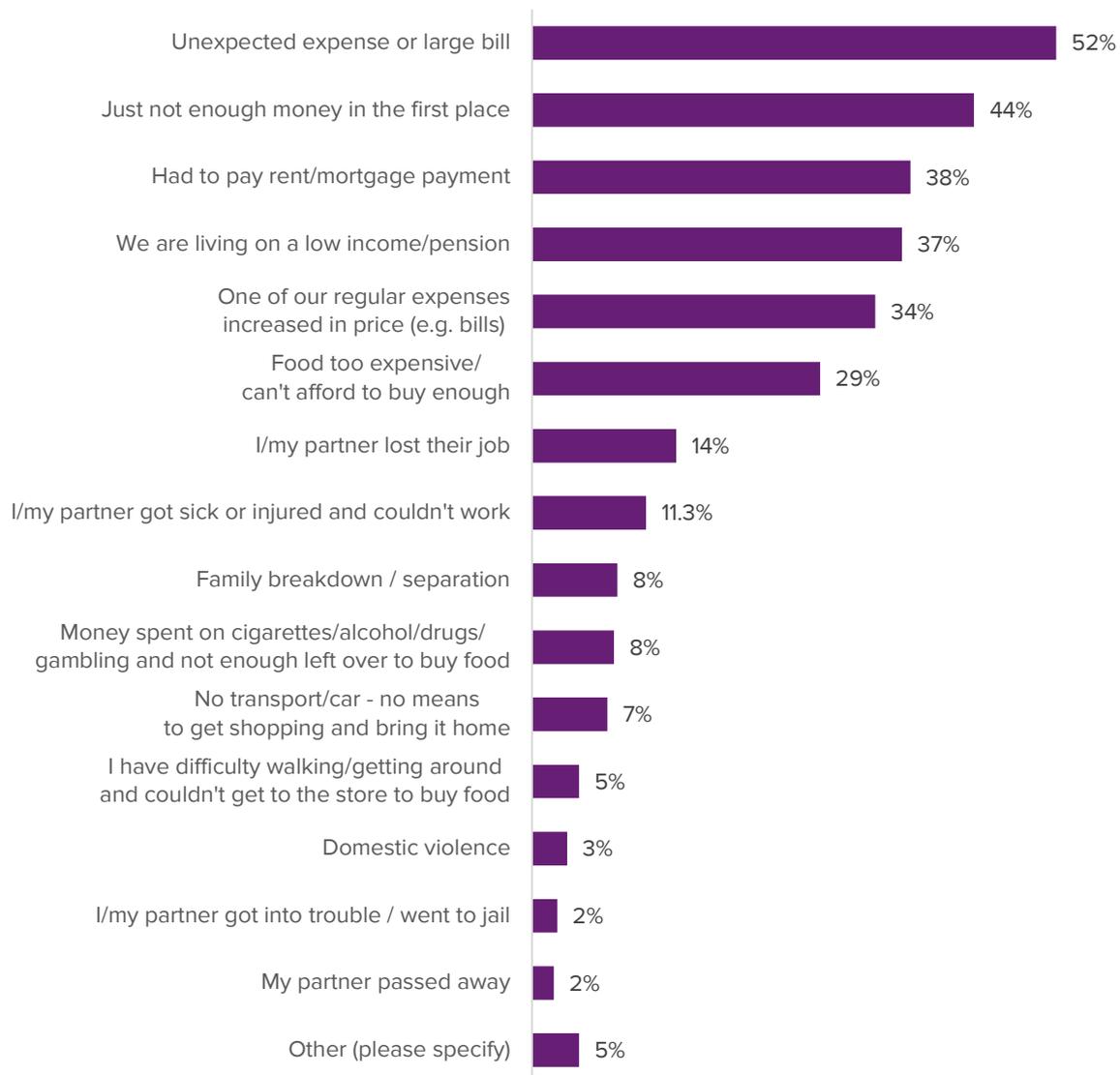
likely to occur in households with younger parents (33%) and single parents (44%). More than half of parents who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (58%) have experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. Children living in these households are more likely to experience food insecurity too.

## The struggle of managing bills on a low income

The cost of living is closely linked to food insecurity. An unexpected expense or large bill (52%) and housing payments (38%) are two of the most prominent causes of food insecurity in households with children under 15. Not only do families have significant bills to manage, many

also struggle with low incomes, either receiving low wages or living on a pension (37%). Almost two in five parents (38%) suggest they cannot afford enough food because there is just not enough money in the first place.

Q. Which of the following are reasons why you did not have enough food in your household and could not afford to buy more food? (n=602)  
Please select all that apply.

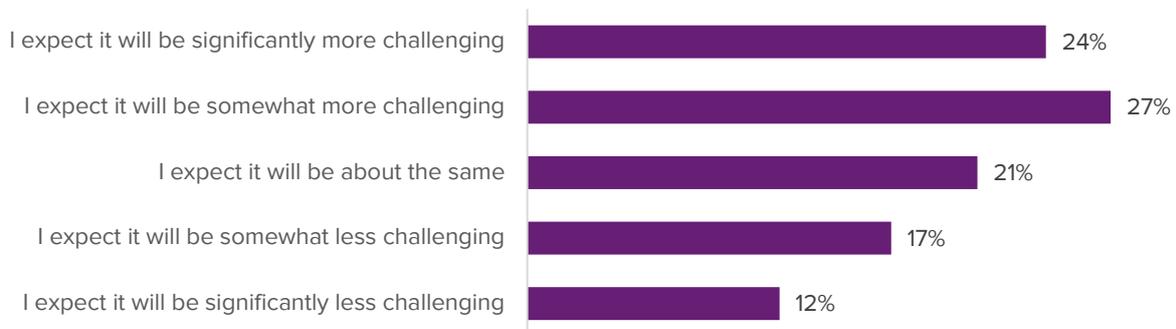


## Parents expect even greater challenges in the future

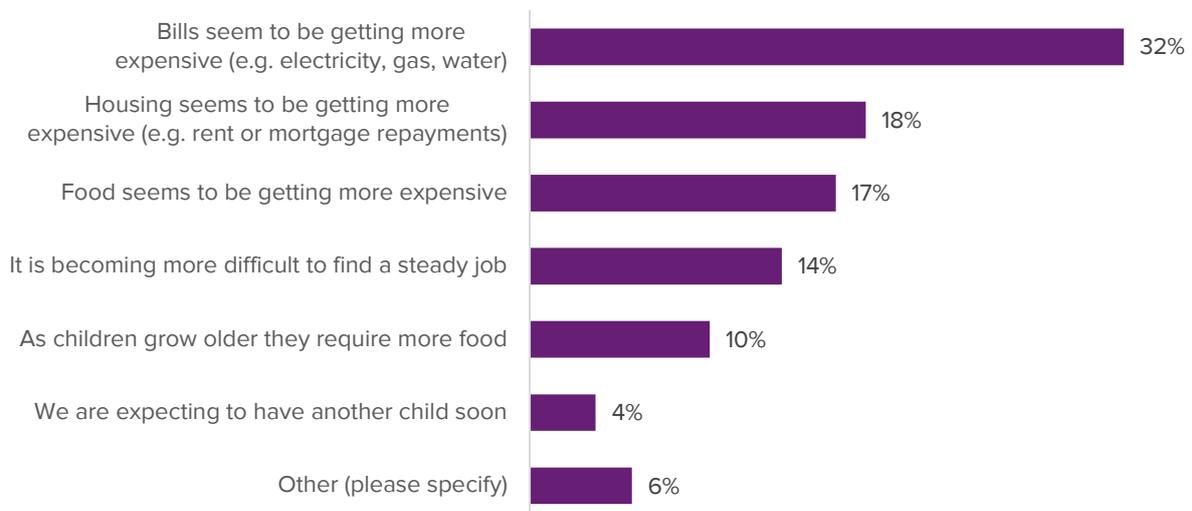
Just over half of parents living in a food insecure household (51%) expect it will be a greater challenge to provide food for their family in the future. On top of this, another one in five (21%) expect it will be about the same. Therefore, only a small proportion (29%) of parents expect the struggle to afford food to ease in the coming months.

Parents who think it will become more challenging to provide food for their family suggest bills (32%), housing (18%) and food itself (17%) all seem to be getting more expensive. These parents share the feeling that the cost of living is becoming increasingly untenable and is the main reason they will struggle to feed their families in the future.

### Q. Do you think it will be more or less challenging to provide food for your family in the future? (n=602)



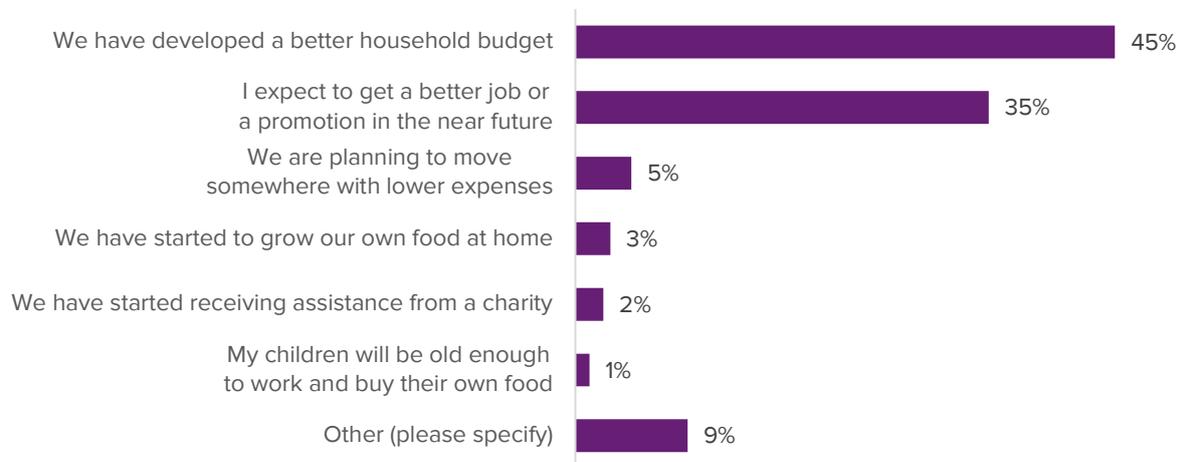
### Q. What is the main reason you expect it to be more challenging to provide food for your family in the future? (n=306)



Parents who expect it to be less challenging to provide food for their family in the future suggest they have developed a better household budget (45%) or are expecting to get a better job or a promotion in the near future (35%).

Parents who selected 'other' (9%) expect it to be less challenging to provide food for their family in the future because they are returning to work after an injury, studying or maternity leave or are expecting to be out of debt soon.

Q. What is the main reason you expect it will be less challenging to provide food for your family in the future?  
(n=171)



# The impact of food insecurity

## Children go without entire meals

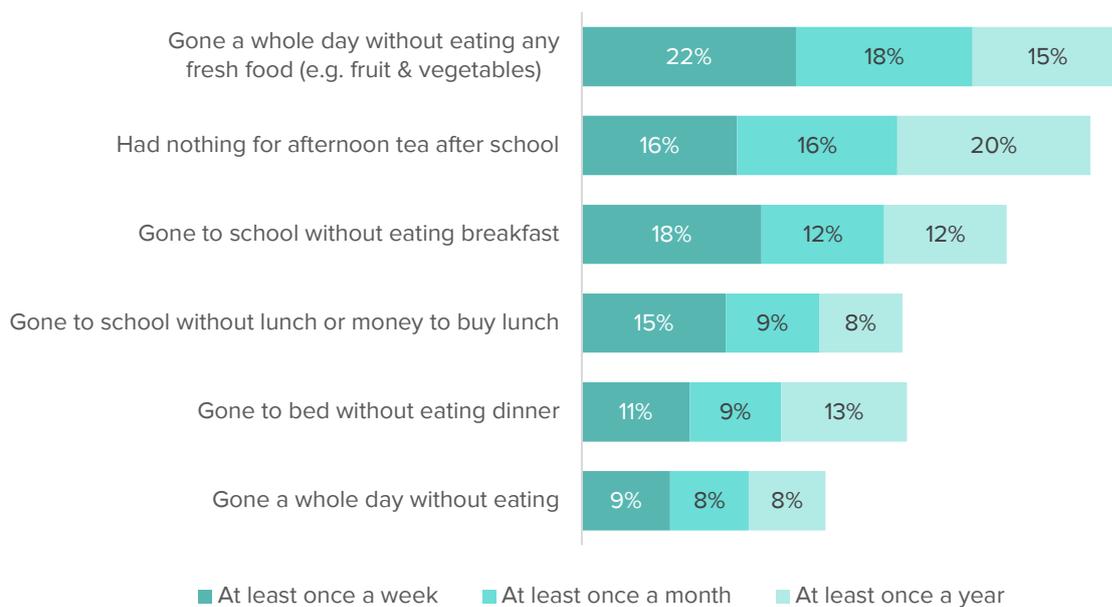
Children under the age of 15 who live in food insecure households often go without fresh food and may even go without some meals completely.

One in five parents living in food insecure households (22%) say their children go a whole day without eating any fresh food at least once a week. A similar proportion say their children

go to school without eating breakfast at least once a week (18%) and one in six say their children go to school without lunch or money to buy lunch just as frequently (15%).

Almost one in ten parents (9%) say their children go a whole day without eating at least once a week.

Q. How often has your child or children experienced the following in the last 12 months? (n = 602)



The remaining respondents for this question selected 'never'.

## The impact on a child’s wellbeing

Eating enough food is important for a child’s healthy growth and development. Parents notice a number of changes in their children’s wellbeing if they do not have enough food. More than half of parents (54%) report changes in their child’s emotions, such as more outbursts or tantrums (24%), or a decline in their child’s happiness (24%).

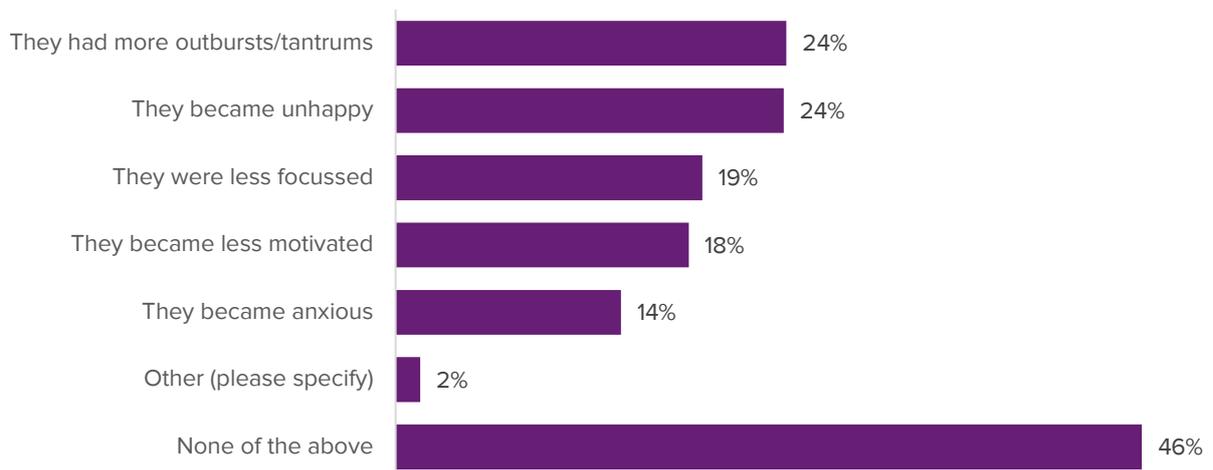
When it comes to physical changes, one in five parents (22%) indicate their children become agitated and irritable if they do not have enough to eat. Lack of food can also impact a child’s sleeping patterns (17%) and they may become more tired and lethargic (16%).

Going without food can influence a child’s behaviour both at home and at school. One in six parents (17%) notice their children acting up at school or at home as a result of not having enough food.

Food insecurity can also affect a child’s ability to thrive at school. Parents suggest their children have less energy for after school activities such as after-school sports (17%), struggle to concentrate at school (16%), and might be embarrassed to invite friends over when there is no food in the house (13%).

Q. Which of these emotional changes, if any, has your child or children experienced as a result of not having enough food? (n=602)

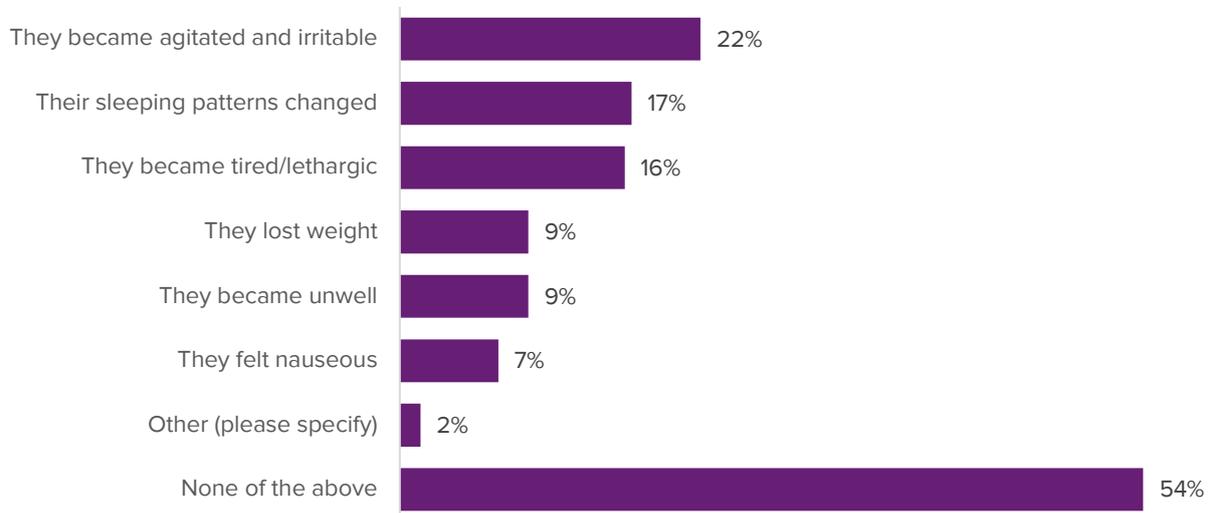
*Please select all that apply.*



Q. Which of these physical changes, if any, has your child or children experienced as a result of not having enough food?

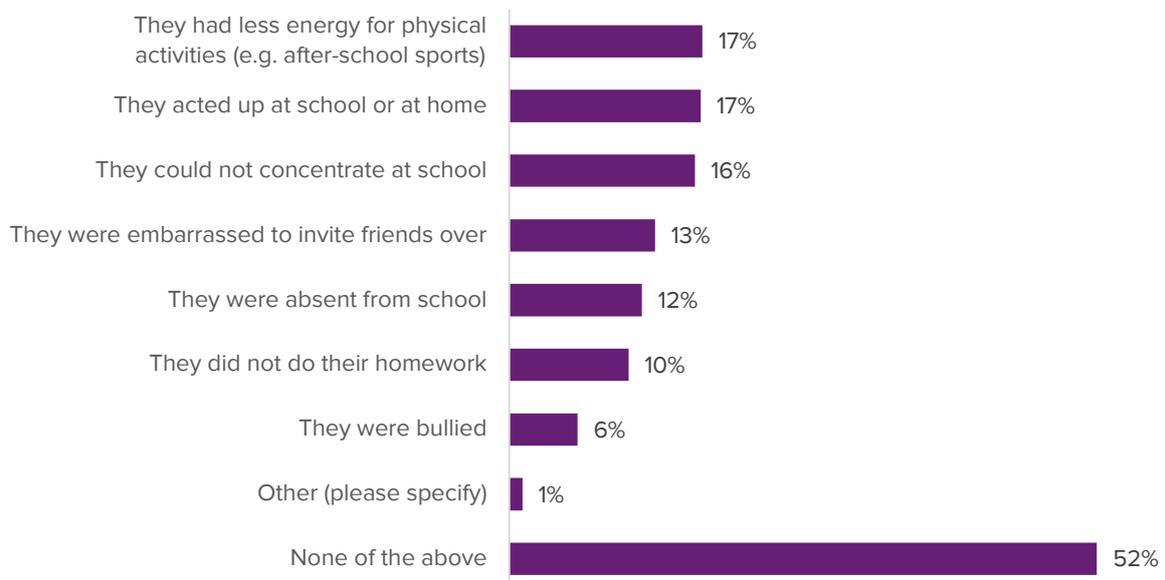
(n=602)

Please select all that apply.



Q. Which of the following have happened as a result of your child or children not having enough food? (n=602)

Please select all that apply.



## Parents skip meals so their children can eat

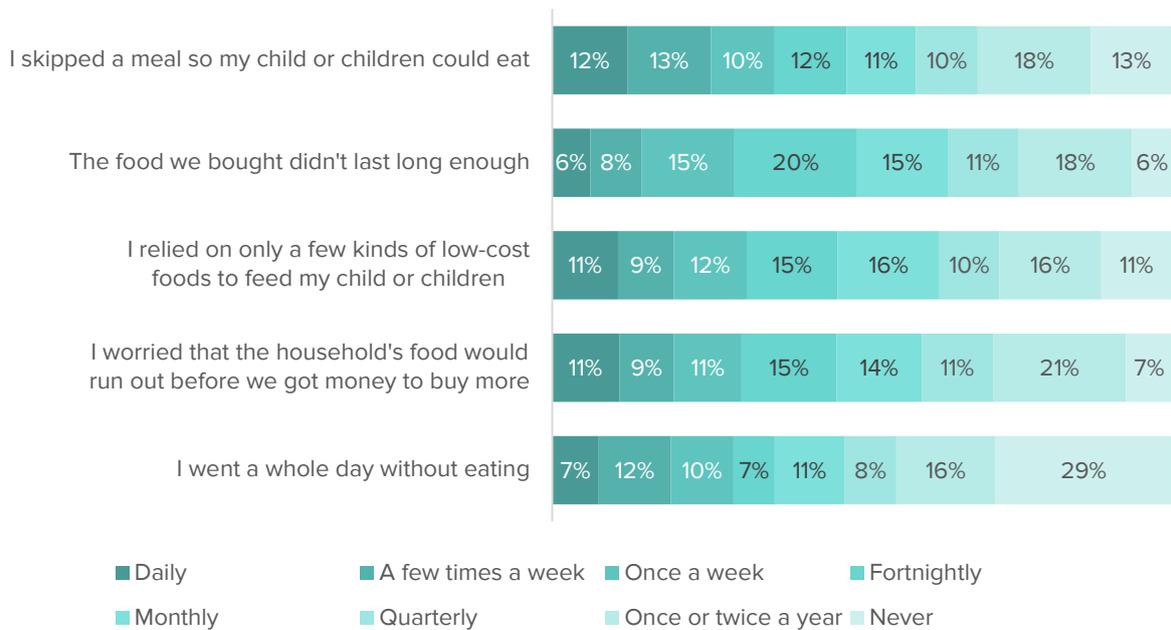
As a parent, raising children in an environment where there is no guarantee of regular access to food can be stressful. Parents often sacrifice their own needs to ensure their children can eat and, even then, may need to rely on low cost foods to feed their family.

One in ten parents living in food insecure households (11%) worry daily that the household's food will run out before they have

the money to purchase more. This concern is not unfounded, with three in ten parents (29%) suggesting the family's food runs short at least once a week.

Almost nine out of ten parents (87%) have skipped a meal so their children can eat and for 36%, this is a weekly occurrence. At least once a week, three in ten parents (29%) go a whole day without eating.

Q. How often has your household experienced the following in the last 12 months? (n = 602)



## Parents experience shame and embarrassment

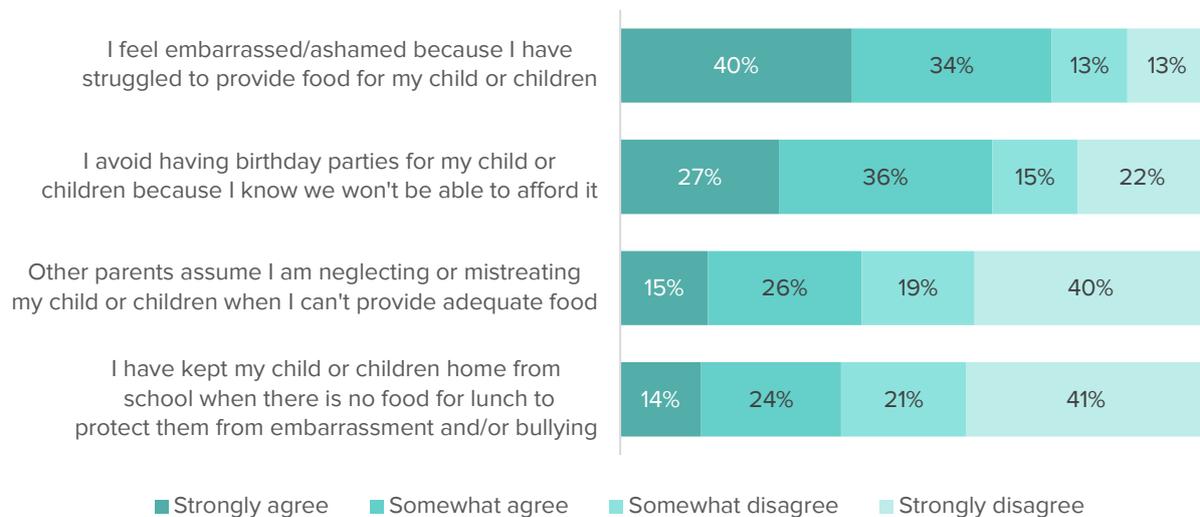
In addition to sacrificing their own physical needs, parents living in food insecure households are likely to experience feelings of shame and isolation as a result of food insecurity.

Three in four parents living in food insecure households (74%) feel embarrassed or ashamed because they have struggled to provide food for their children (somewhat/strongly agree). Many parents living in food insecure households say other parents

assume they are neglecting their children when they are unable to provide food for their family (41% somewhat/strongly agree).

These feelings of shame can also create social barriers for their children. In an attempt to protect their children from embarrassment, parents may avoid having birthday parties for their child (63%) or may keep them home from school (38%). These measures, while intended as a form of protection, may result in social isolation for their child and their family.

Q. As the carer of a child who has experienced not having enough to eat, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? (n = 602)



# Coping with food insecurity

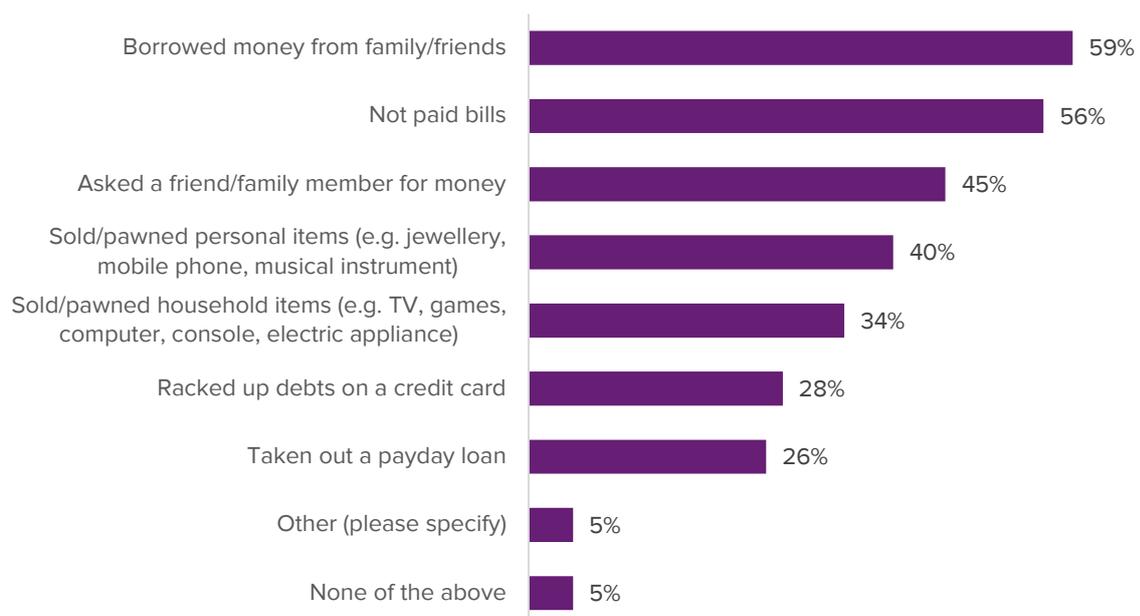
## Borrowing money from family and friends

Parents may utilise a number of approaches to have enough money to buy food for their family and ensure their children have enough to eat. When it comes to money, parents are most likely to borrow from family and friends (59%) or not pay their bills (56%).

More than two in five (45%) have asked their friends or family for money. Respondents who selected 'other' have used overdrafts, gone without any personal luxuries (e.g. haircuts) or approached charities in order to have enough money to buy food.

Q. Which of the following actions have you done in order to have enough money to buy food for your family? (n=602)

*Please select all that apply.*



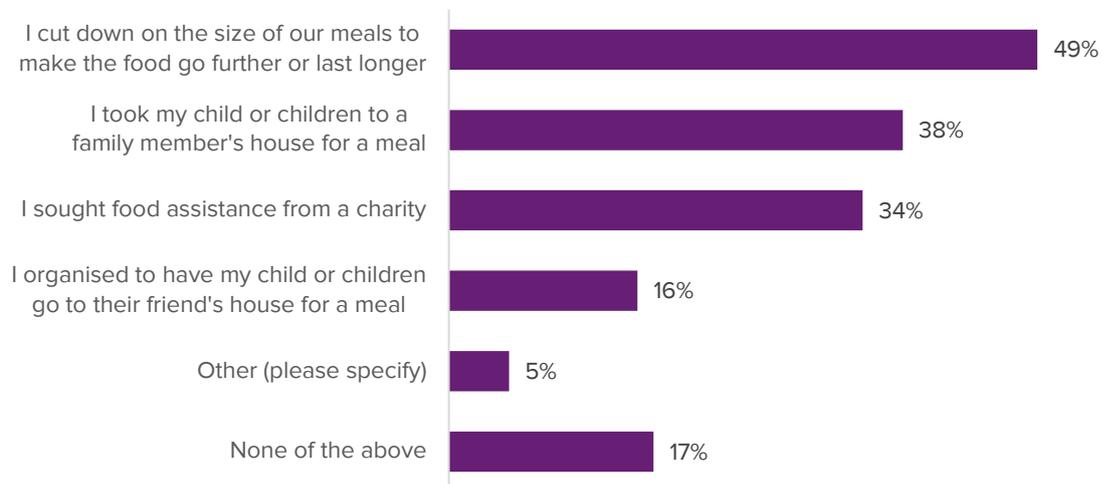
## Ensuring children have access to food

Apart from seeking money to support their family, parents may also protect their children from food insecurity by finding other ways to ensure their children have access to food. Almost half of parents (49%) have cut down on the size of the family's meals to make the food

last longer. Additionally, parents may take their children to a family member's house for a meal (38%), seek food assistance from a charity (34%) or have their children go to a friend's house for a meal (16%).

### Q. Which of the following actions have you done in order to have enough money to buy food for your family? (n=602)

*Please select all that apply.*

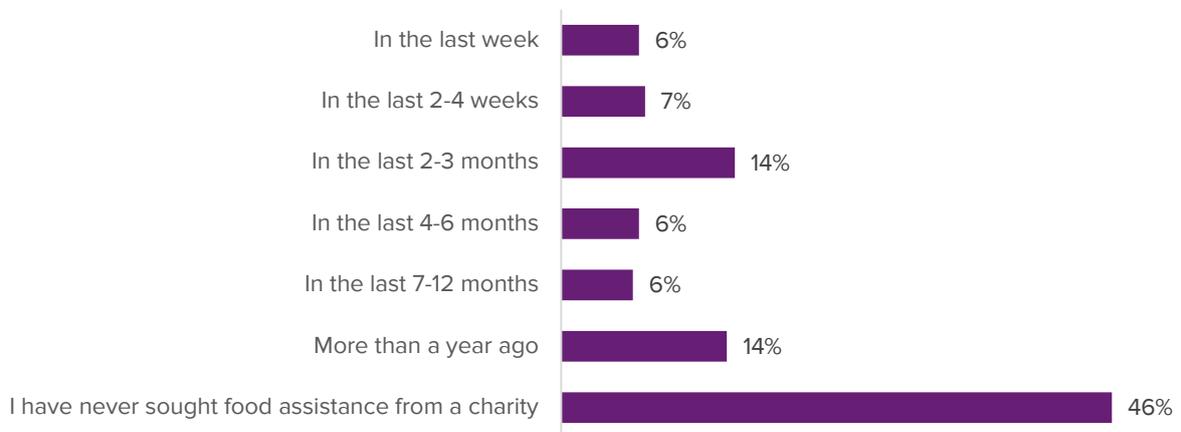


## Seeking food assistance

Just over half of parents experiencing food insecurity (54%) have sought food assistance from a charity, with two in five (40%) seeking food assistance in the last 12 months. The most common types of food assistance received are food parcels (54%) and food vouchers (50%).

With 46% of parents never having accessed food assistance, there is scope for many more food insecure households to receive help from charities to ensure children in Australia are receiving adequate and healthy food.

Q. When did you last seek food assistance from a charity such as Anglicare, The Salvation Army, your local church or a similar organisation? (n=602)



Q. When you have accessed food assistance from a charity, what kinds of services have you used? (n=326)

*Please select all that apply.*



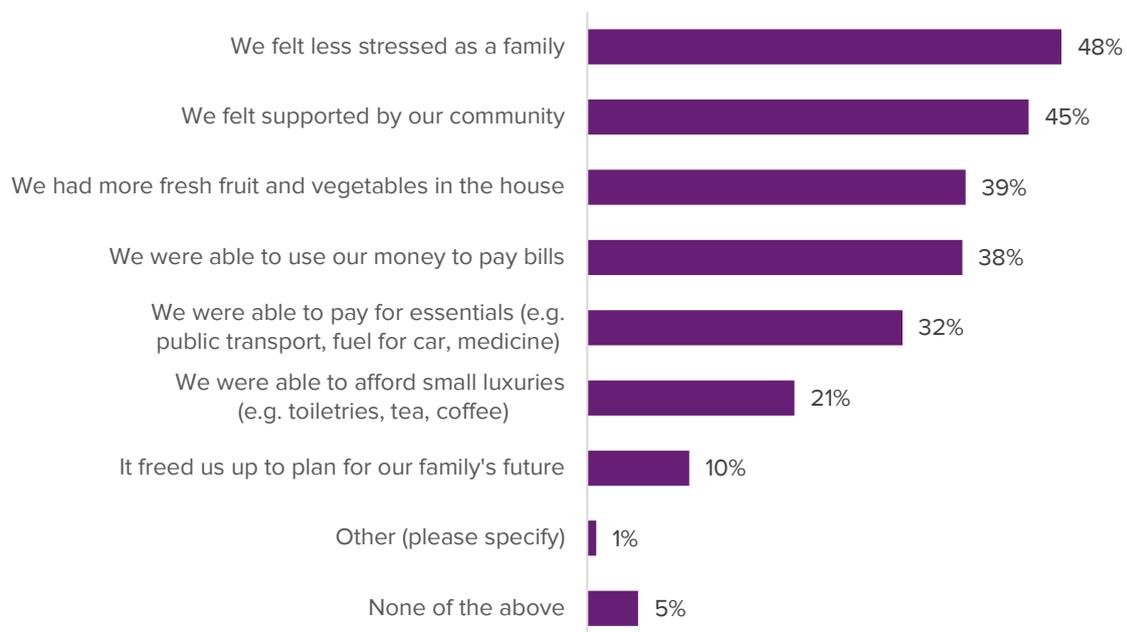
## The benefits of food assistance for families

Parents who have received food assistance report a number of benefits for their household as a result. Having access to food can reduce household stress for almost half of these parents (48%). It can also create positive social relationships, with more than two in five households (45%) feeling supported by their community.

More practically, food assistance allows families to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables (39%) and to pay for bills (38%) and essentials such as public transport, medicine and petrol for their car (32%).

### Q. Which of these benefits did your family experience as a result of receiving food assistance? (n=326)

*Please select all that apply.*



## The benefits of food assistance for children

Three quarters of parents who have received food assistance (76%) notice improvements in their children’s wellbeing as a result.

The most commonly noticed benefits of food assistance for children is that they feel less hungry (34%) and they are happier (33%). One in five parents (20%) also suggest their children

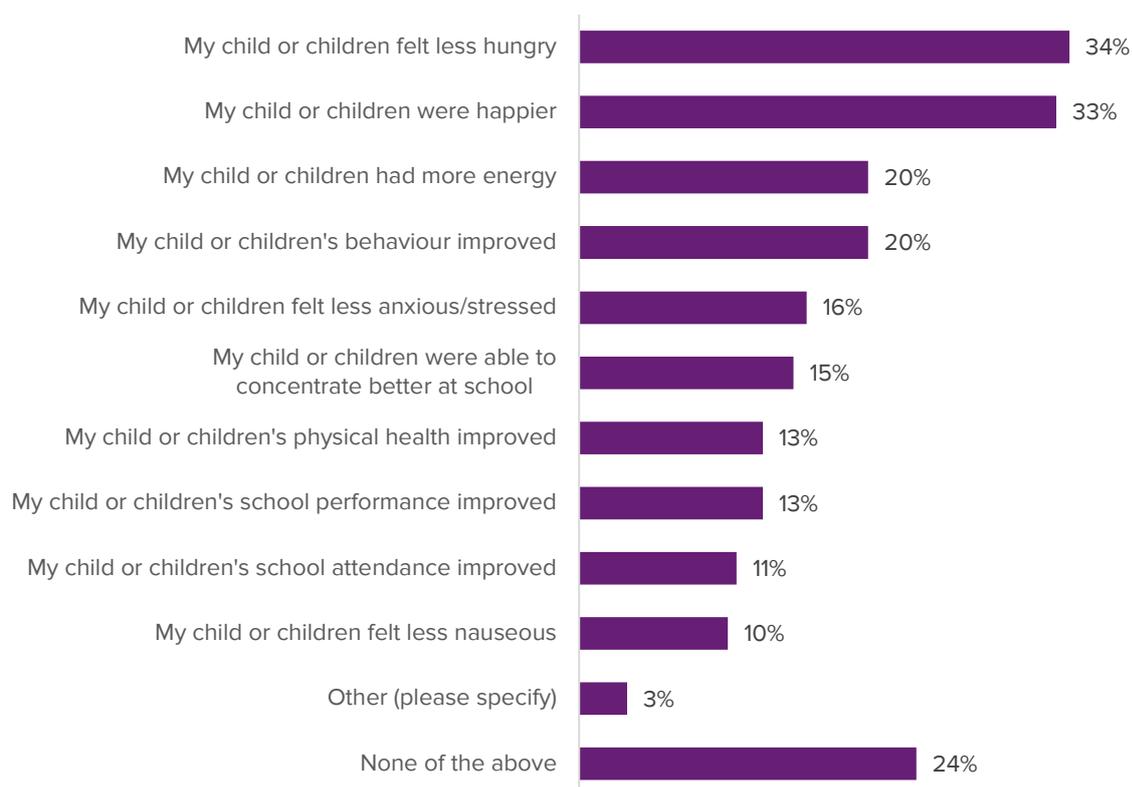
have more energy and their behaviour improves.

Food assistance, therefore, provides significant benefits for families and for children experiencing food insecurity. As a result of receiving adequate, healthy and fresh food children may improve physically, emotionally and behaviourally.

### Q. Which of these benefits did your child or children experience as a result of receiving food assistance?

(n=326)

*Please select all that apply.*



# Methodology

The Foodbank *Rumbling Tummies: Child Hunger in Australia* report is the collation of data collected via an online survey of parents in Australia in early 2018. The survey was designed by McCrindle and explored the experiences of children living in food insecure households, from the perspective of their parents.

The survey was conducted in two stages:

**Stage 1:** A panel of 1,002 Australian parents with children under the age of 15 were asked whether they had experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. Data from this question was used to inform statistics about the prevalence of child food insecurity in Australia.

To determine if respondents had experienced food insecurity, they were asked to answer yes or no to the following question: “In the last 12 months, was there any time when you or anyone in your household ran out of food and did not have enough money to purchase more?”

215 parents with children under the age of 15, were found to be living in food insecure households in stage 1.

**Stage 2:** Following stage 1, the survey was re-launched to gather a larger sample of parents living in food insecure households. A total of 602 parents living in food insecure households (including the 215 from stage 1), were then asked about the experience of food insecurity for their household, specifically for their child or children.

## Time in field

Inclusive of the two stages, the survey was in field between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2018.

## Assumptions

Children under the age of 15 are assumed to be dependent (as classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Dependent children living in a household which has experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months are assumed to have experienced food insecurity themselves in the same period.

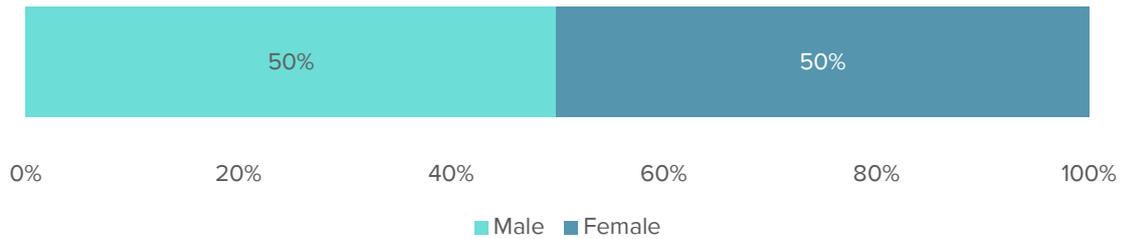
## Terminology

The term ‘children’ is used throughout this report to refer to children under the age of 15. The term ‘parents’ is used throughout this report to refer to parents of children under the age of 15 living in food insecure households.

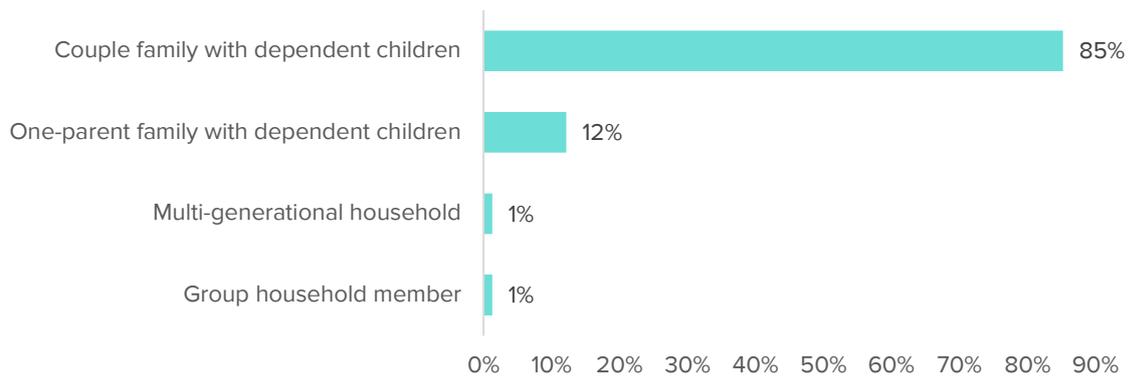
# Respondent characteristics

## Nationally representative sample (stage 1)

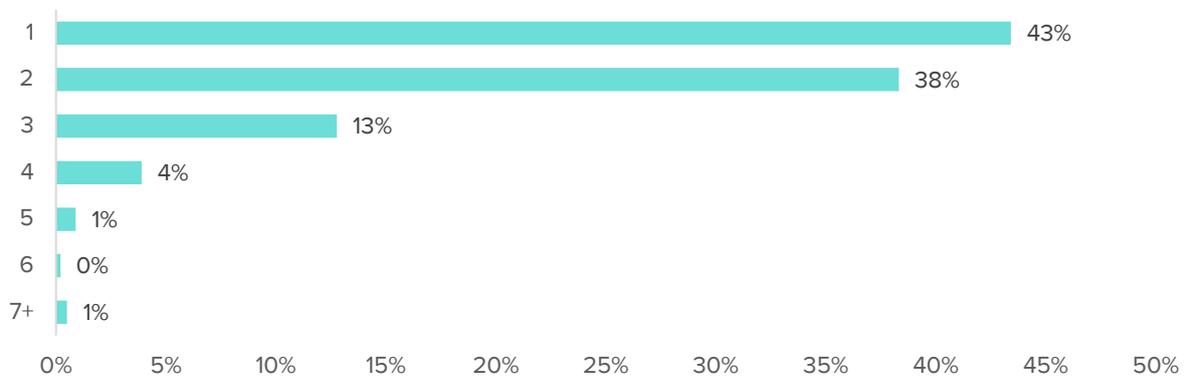
Q. Are you male or female? (n=1,002)



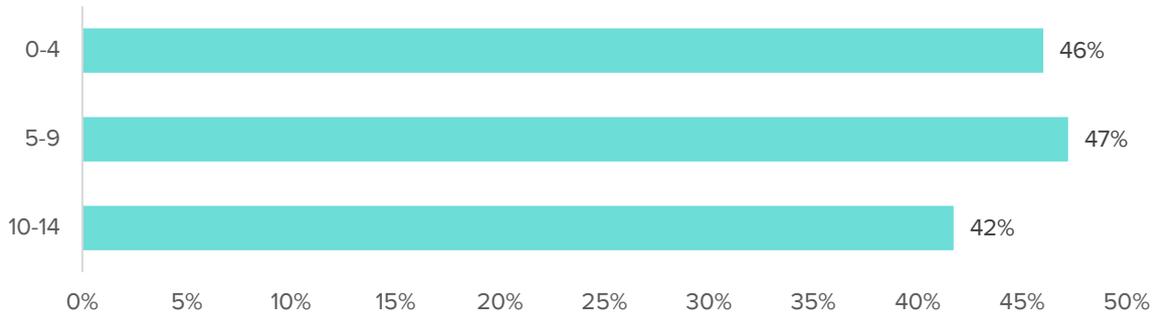
Q. What type of household do you currently live in? (n=1,002)



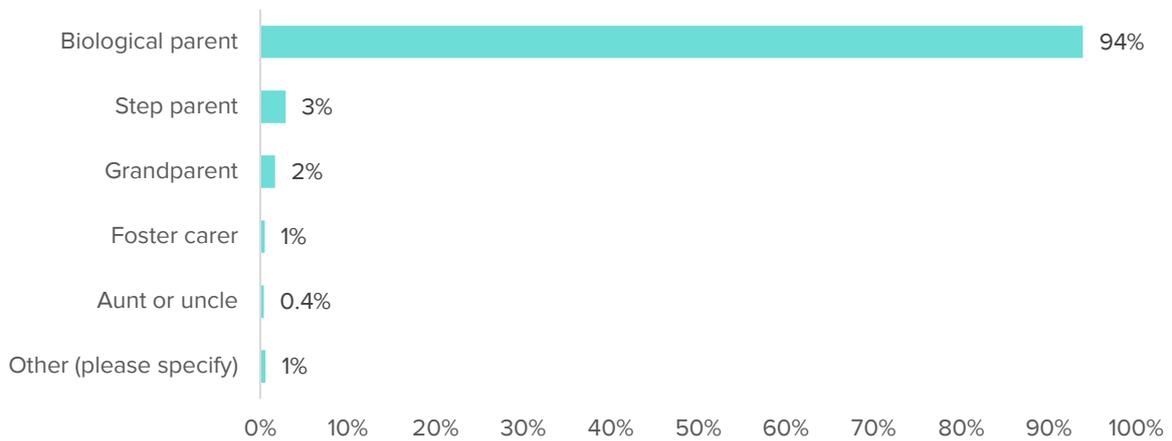
Q. How many children do you care for under the age of 15? (n=1,002)



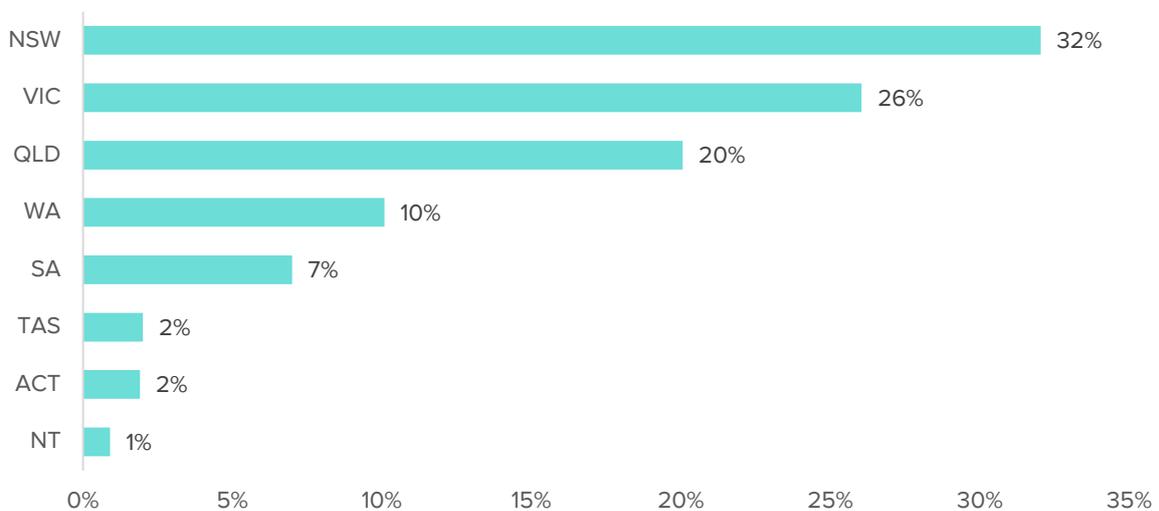
Q. What is the age of the child or children that you care for? (n=1,002)  
Please select all that apply.



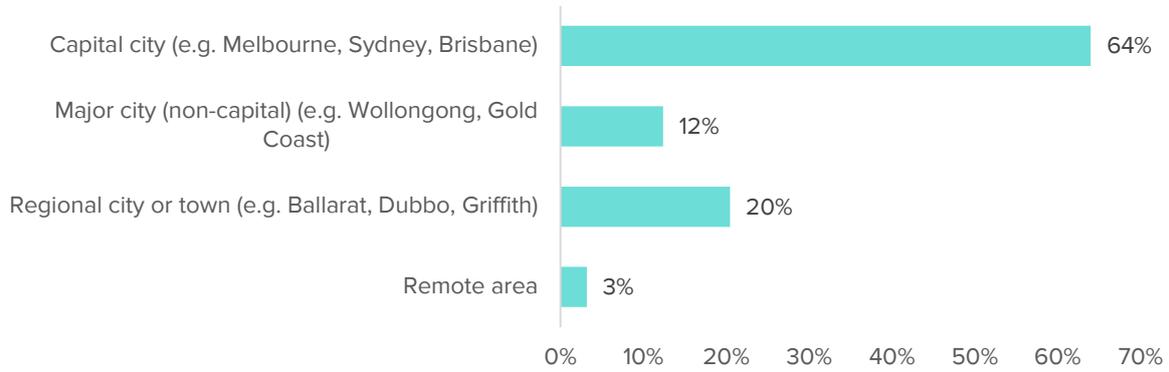
Q. Which of the following best describes your relationship to the child or children that you care for? (n=1,002)



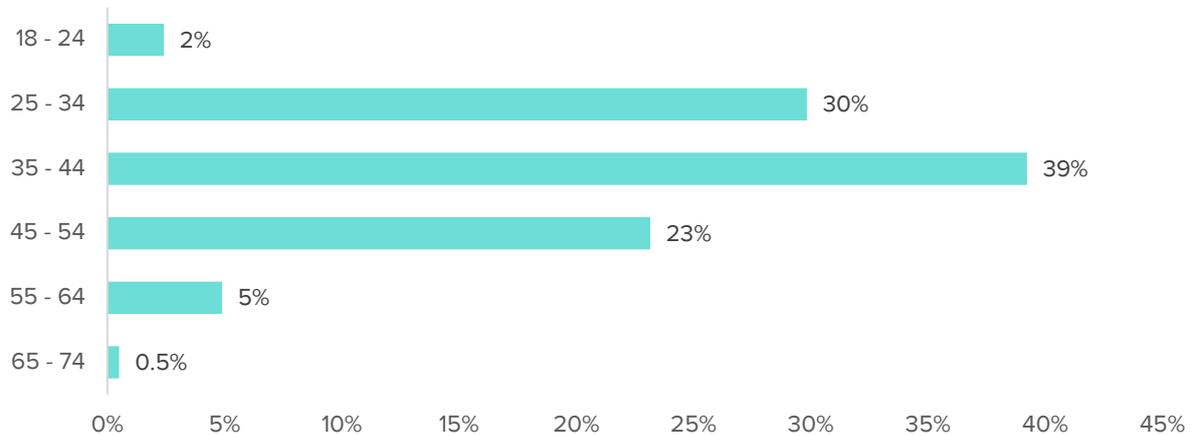
Q. Where do you usually live? (n=1,002)



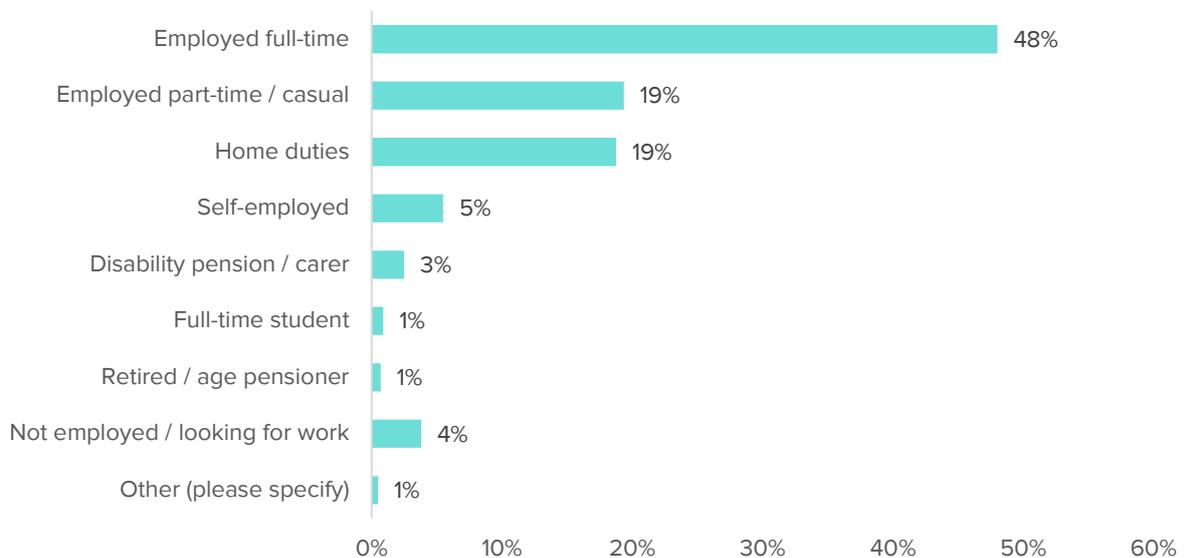
Q. Which of the following best describes where you live?  
(n=1,002)



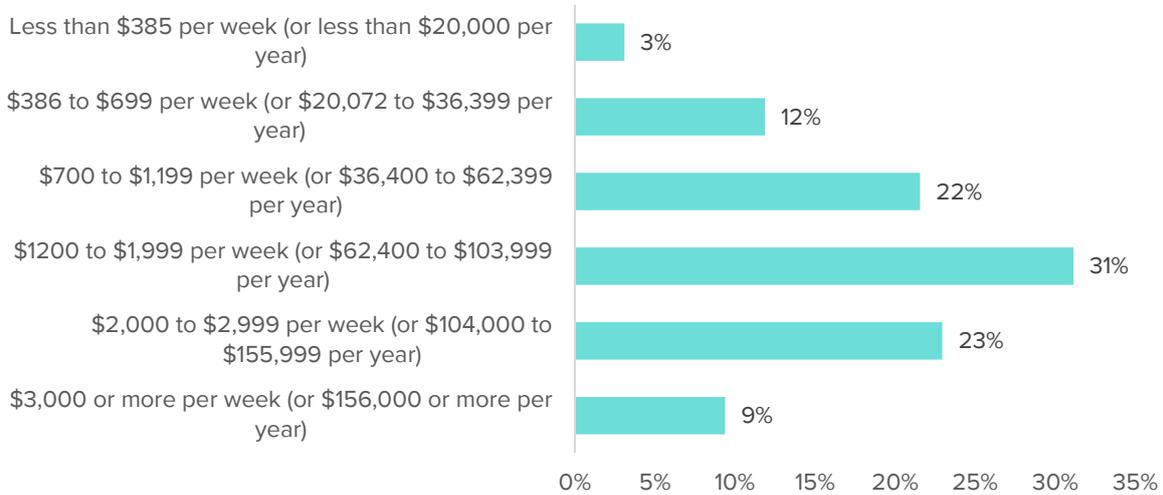
Q. What age will you be in 2018? (n=1,002)



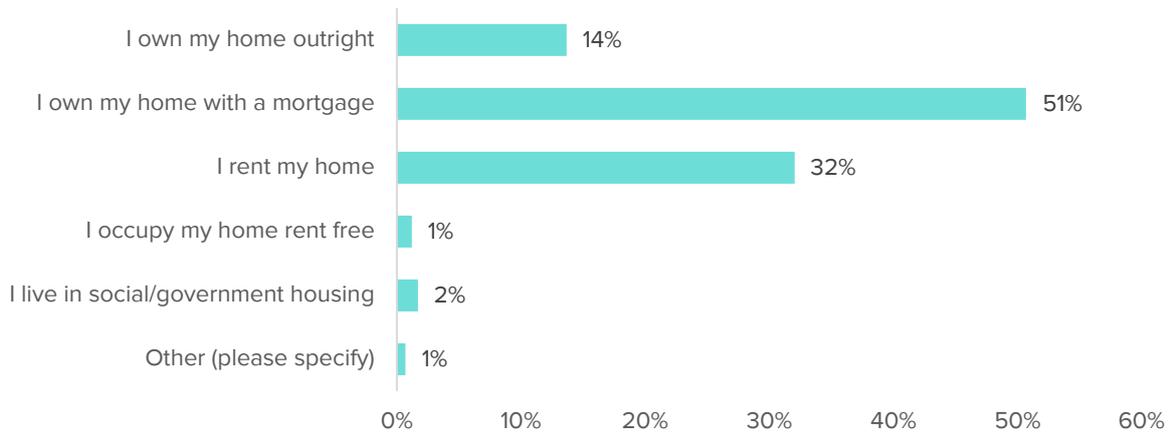
Q. Which of the following best describes your employment status? (n=1,002)



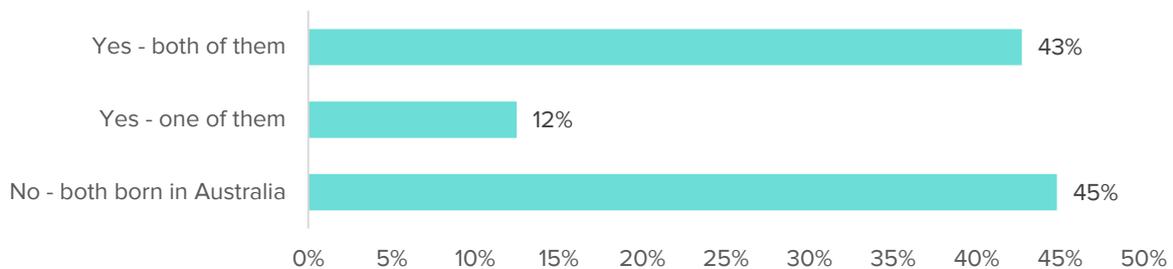
Q. Which of the following best represents your household's combined gross annual income? (i.e. before taxes) (n=1,002)



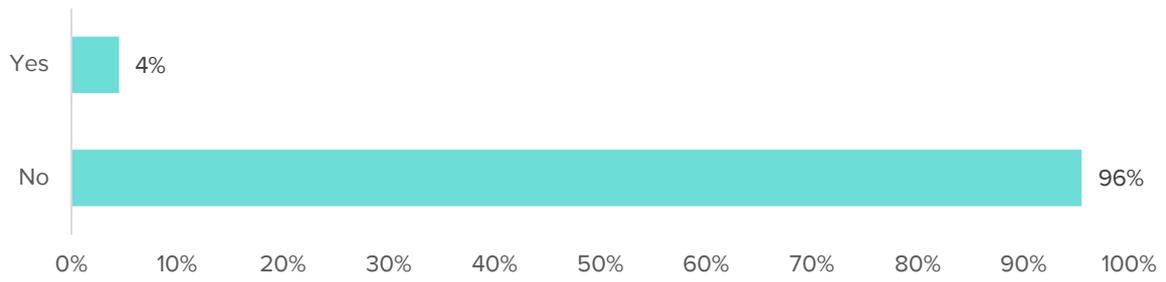
Q. What is your housing status? (n=1,002)



Q. Were either of your parents born outside Australia? (n=1,002)

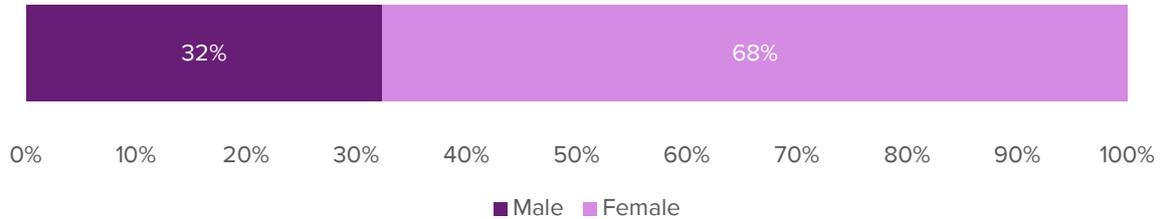


Q. Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent? (n=1,002)

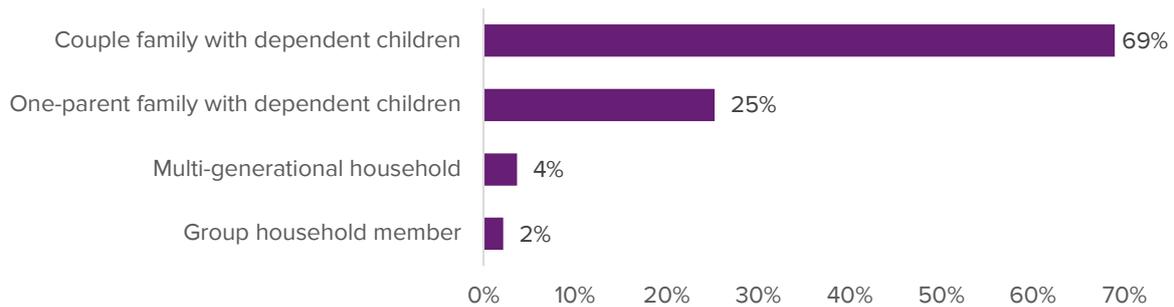


## Food insecure households (stage 2)

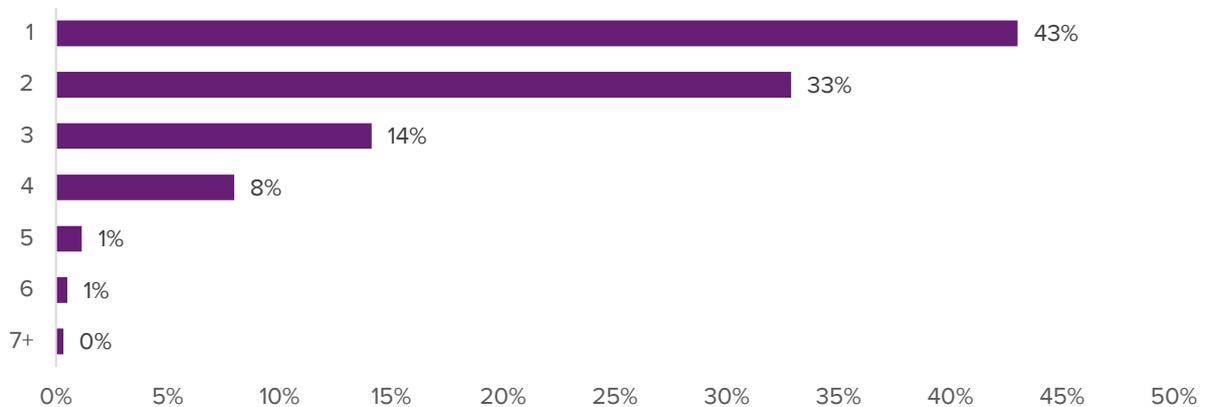
Q. Are you male or female? (n=602)



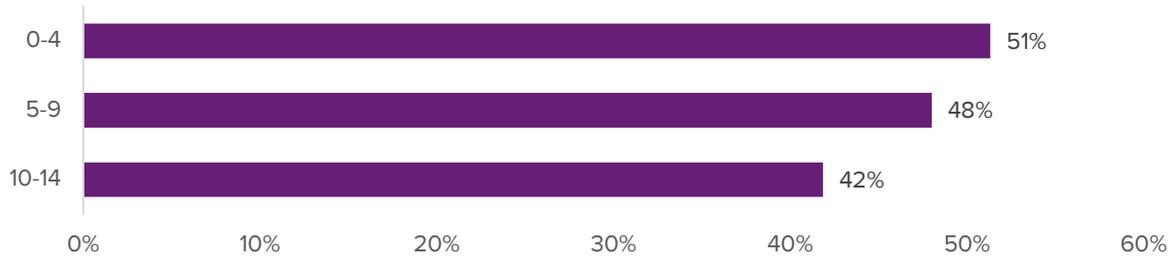
Q. What type of household do you currently live in? (n=602)



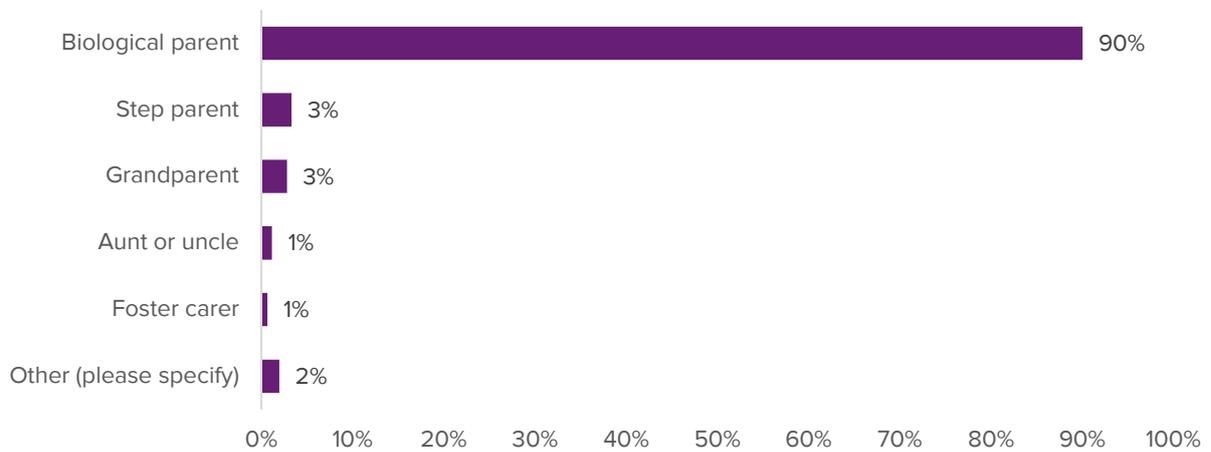
Q. How many children do you care for under the age of 15? (n=602)



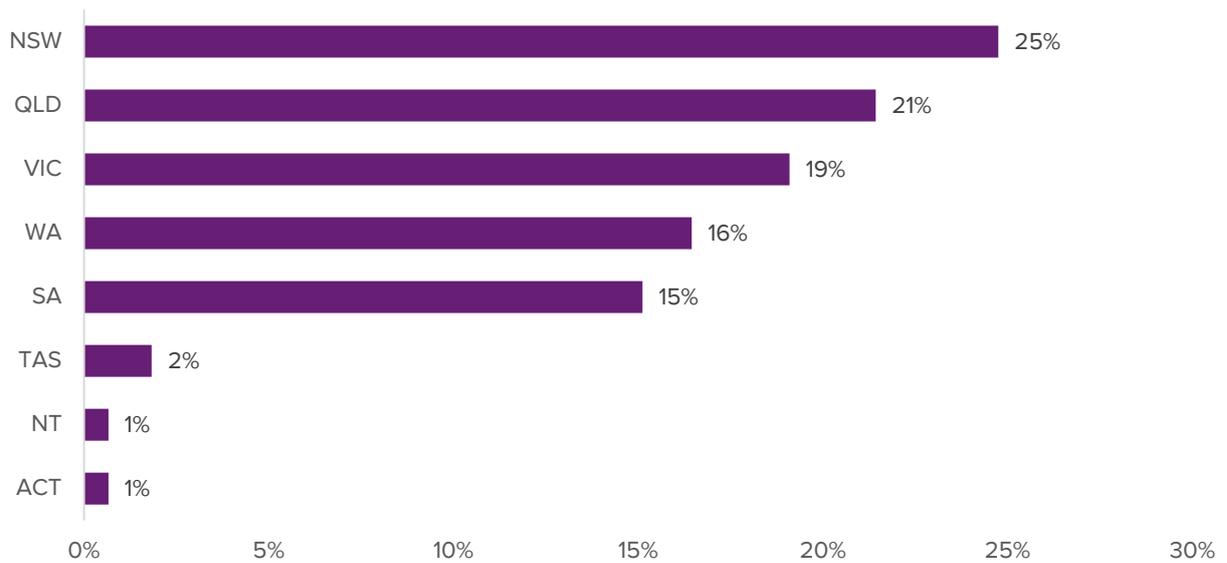
Q. What is the age of the child or children that you care for? (n=602)  
Please select all that apply.



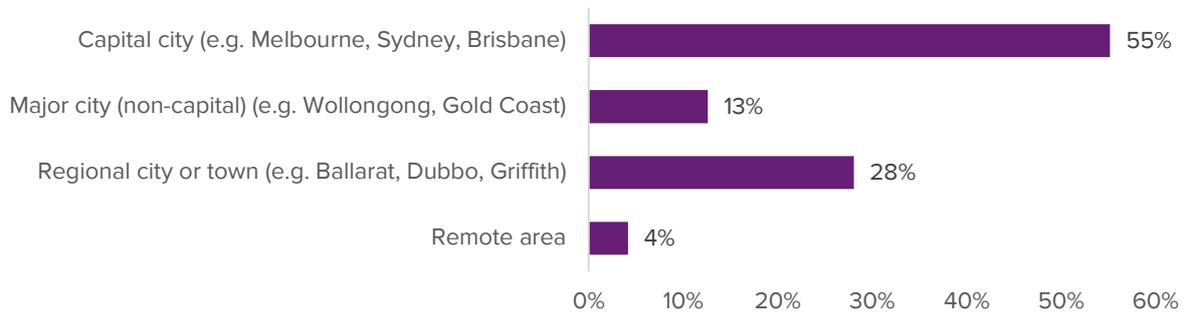
Q. Which of the following best describes your relationship to the child or children that you care for? (n=602)



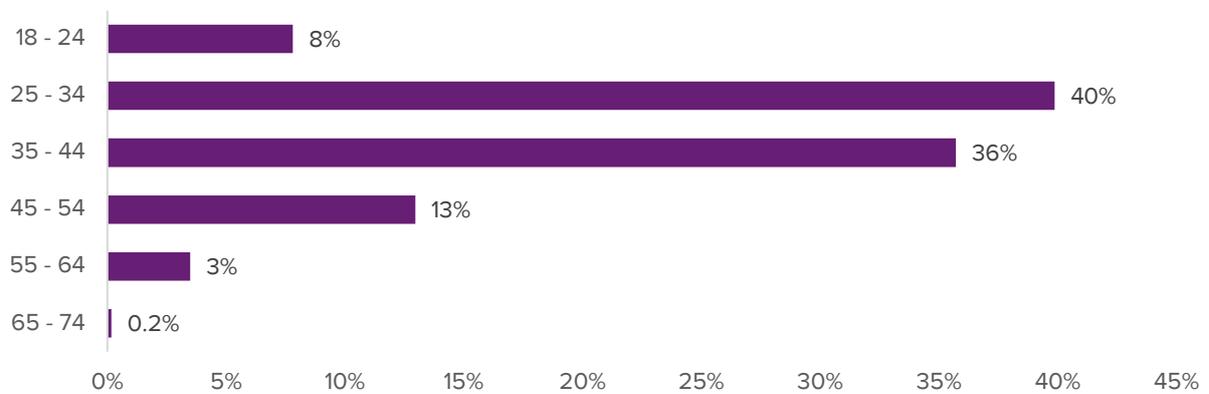
Q. Where do you usually live? (n=602)



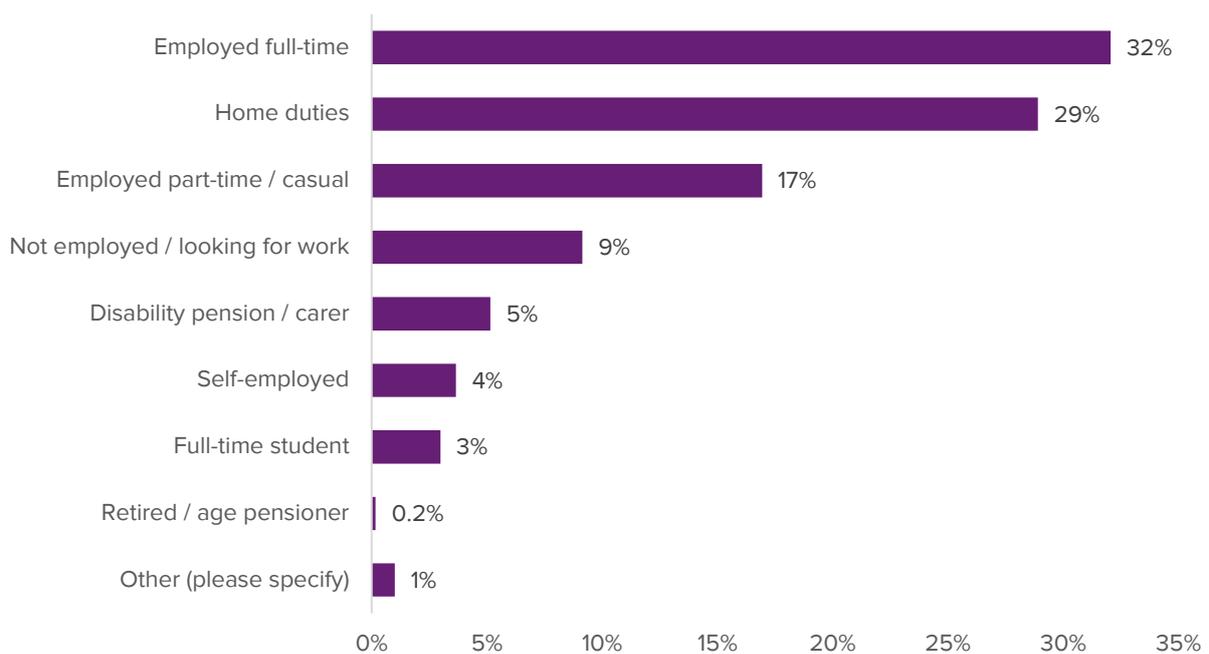
Q. Which of the following best describes where you live?  
(n=602)



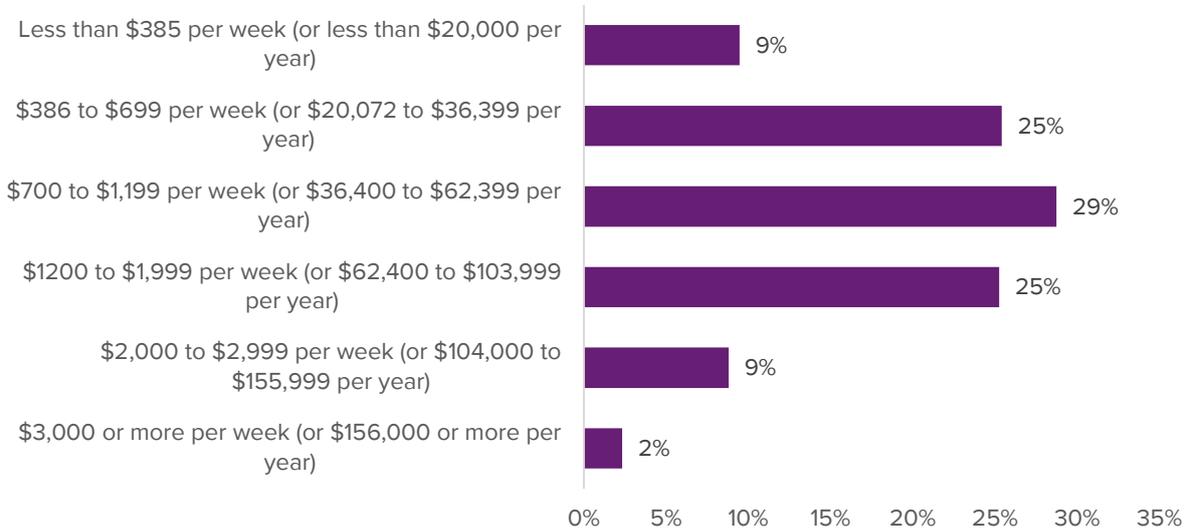
Q. What age will you be in 2018? (n=602)



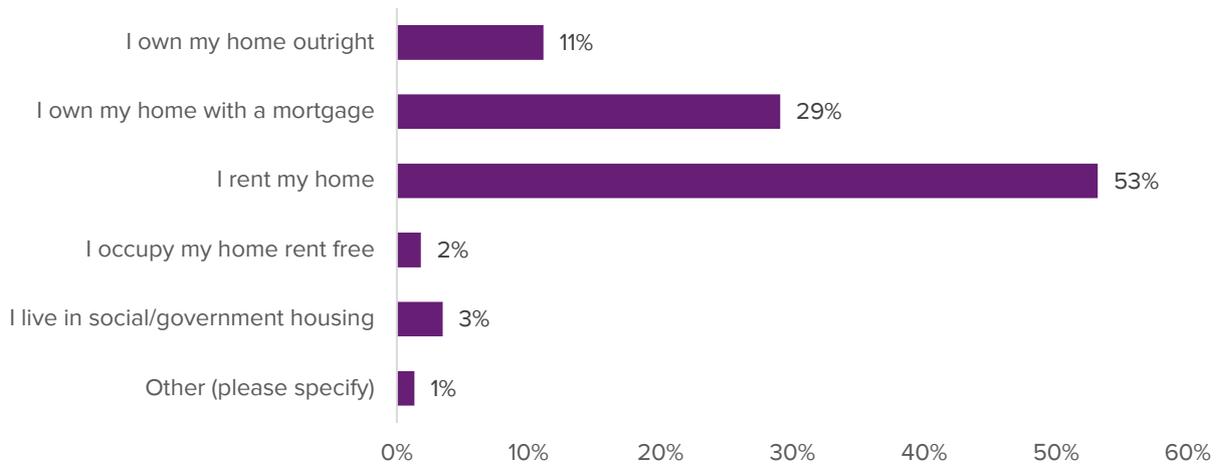
Q. Which of the following best describes your employment status? (n=602)



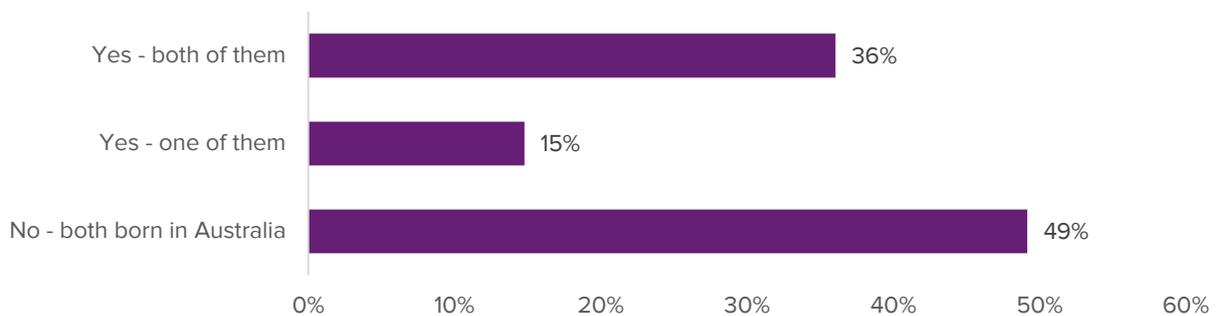
Q. Which of the following best represents your household's combined gross annual income? (i.e. before taxes) (n=602)



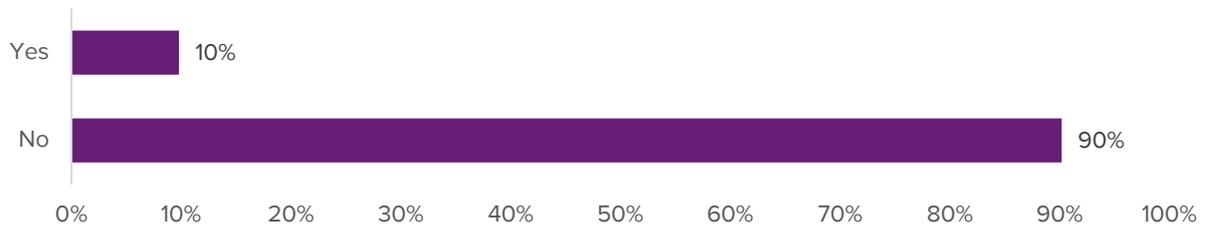
Q. What is your housing status? (n=602)



Q. Were either of your parents born outside Australia? (n=602)



Q. Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent? (n=602)



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## For further information

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