



**FIGHTING HUNGER  
IN AUSTRALIA**

# **FOODBANK HUNGER REPORT 2017**

## WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?



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>



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



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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

## THE FOODBANK HUNGER REPORT IS AN ANNUAL SNAPSHOT OF THE HIDDEN PROBLEM OF FOOD INSECURITY IN AUSTRALIA

This year's report combines insights from charities and community groups across Australia providing food relief as well as individual Australians who experience food insecurity. Two surveys were used to collect these insights. The first was the Foodbank Welfare Agency Survey which explored the charities and community groups that provide front-line food relief, their food provision activities and the beneficiaries of their services. In its fifth year, this survey captured responses from 1,123 agencies between December 2016 and July 2017.

The second survey was aimed at understanding the Australians who have experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. This is the second time Foodbank has conducted research amongst those directly affected by the issue of food insecurity. The aim of the survey was to understand the characteristics of these individuals, as well as the key drivers and resulting impacts of food insecurity in their lives. The survey identified 511 people who had experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. The survey was in field from 31 July to 7 August.

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Agency survey data collected by Foodbank.

Survey of Australians experiencing food insecurity written and hosted by McCrindle.

Data collation, storytelling, and visualisation by McCrindle.



# ABOUT FOODBANK

## FOODBANK IS AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST HUNGER RELIEF ORGANISATION, PROVIDING FOOD FOR 172,000 MEALS A DAY TO OVER 2,600 CHARITIES NATIONALLY

Foodbank is a not-for-profit organisation that works with the entire Australian food and grocery industry including farmers, wholesalers, manufacturers and retailers to source fresh and manufactured foods as well as bathroom, kitchen and laundry supplies. Donations include stock that doesn't meet specification, is close to expiry or excess to requirements. Companies also make donations as part of their corporate social responsibility commitments and cause-related marketing campaigns.

In addition, Foodbank collaborates with producers, manufacturers, suppliers and transporters in programs

to source key staple foods that don't come in sufficient quantities via rescue channels to meet the needs of charities.

In addition to providing food to charities, Foodbank also provides regular breakfasts to over 100,000 students in 1,750 schools around the country.

As a not-for-profit, Foodbank relies on governments, individuals, organisations, community groups and thousands of volunteers to fight hunger.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Foodbank's activities in Australia play a key role in delivering on five of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals which are aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all. Foodbank's operations are strongly aligned to the following five of the 17 goals:



### ZERO HUNGER

Everyone in Australia should have enough safe and nutritious food to thrive. A country with zero hunger can positively impact our economy, health, education, equality and social development. Achieving zero hunger is fundamental to building a better future for everyone.

### NO POVERTY & REDUCED INEQUALITIES

By providing essential food relief, Foodbank assists front-line charities to build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations. Overcoming inequality will help drive economic growth and is critical to achieving social cohesion, and decreasing political and social tensions.

### RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION & PRODUCTION

Sustainable consumption and production is key to reducing future economic, environmental and social costs and strengthening economic competitiveness. Foodbank plays a critically important role in assisting the Australian Government to achieve this goal through its food rescue activities and partnering with stakeholders along the supply chain to reduce food waste and food loss.

### PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

The Foodbank model engenders multi-stakeholder partnerships throughout the entire food and grocery supply chain. These partnerships mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources to deliver outcomes.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## DESPITE OUR REPUTATION AS THE “LUCKY COUNTRY” THE ISSUE OF HUNGER EXISTS IN AUSTRALIA BUT IS LARGELY GOING UNNOTICED

The reality is that 3.6 million Australians (15%) have experienced food insecurity at least once in the last 12 months, with three in five of these individuals experiencing food insecurity at least once a month.

Food insecurity impacts a wide range of groups in the community, and is not restricted to the unemployed or homeless. In fact, almost half of food insecure Australians (48%) are employed in some way, whether full-time, part-time or casually.

Our youngest members of the community are also impacted, as dependent children live in 40% of food insecure households. Nine out of 10 children (89%) in these circumstances are under the age of 12. When it comes to accessing food assistance, more than a quarter of recipients (27%) are children.

**THE REPORT SHOWS HOW EASY IT IS FOR SOMEONE TO FALL INTO FOOD INSECURITY, GIVEN THE RISING COST OF LIVING. FINANCIAL DEMANDS, INCLUDING BILLS, RENT AND MORTGAGE REPAYMENTS CAUSE STRESS FOR MANY AUSTRALIANS.**

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Financial pressures create difficult choices, such as choosing between heating and eating. Two in five food insecure Australians (41%) have not paid bills in order to have enough money to buy food.

The experience of food insecurity is incredibly challenging and can cause a significant decline in quality of life for individuals and families. Skipping meals in these instances is quite common, and 28% of food insecure Australians report going for an entire day without eating in times where they have run out of food. This lack of food has several impacts, including

lethargy (42%), declining mental health (38%) and loss of confidence (35%). More than half of food insecure Australians feel depressed (53%) and stressed (52%) in circumstances where they cannot afford to buy food.

In times of food scarcity, Australians are most likely to turn to friends or family rather than seek assistance from a charity or community group. The 46% who have sought assistance from a charity in the last 12 months, however, report many benefits including being better able to concentrate (36%) and improved physical health (33%).

Significantly, more than four out of five recipients of food relief (83%) say the benefits of receiving food assistance made a difference in their life for a week or more, and 8% stated it made a long-term, lasting improvement to their life.

# FOOD INSECURITY IN AUSTRALIA

## HOW COMMON IS FOOD INSECURITY IN AUSTRALIA?



Australians (15%) have experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months.



Of these, 3 in 5 experience food insecurity at least once a month.

## How often do Australians experience food insecurity?



● Daily - it is a constant problem that I face ● A few times a week ● Once a week ● Fortnightly ● Monthly ● Quarterly ● Once or twice a year

## HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE?

Foodbank provides food assistance to over...

652,000

Australians every month.



27%

are children.



## Proportion of individuals assisted in each age group:



● 0-5 ● 6-17 ● 18-25 ● 26-64 ● 65+

## CHARITIES ARE STRUGGLING TO MEET THE RISING NEED FOR FOOD RELIEF

10%

The increase in the number of individuals seeking food relief from charities in the last 12 months.

65,000

The number of people seeking food relief each month who are unable to be assisted by charities.

37%

The percentage of charities meeting the full needs of the people they assist.

# WHO EXPERIENCES FOOD INSECURITY IN AUSTRALIA?

**IT'S NOT ALWAYS THOSE ONE MIGHT EXPECT. THE FACE OF FOOD INSECURITY IS DIVERSE IN AUSTRALIA, RANGING FROM YOUNG TO OLD, FROM EMPLOYED TO UNEMPLOYED, AND FROM CITY TO COUNTRY**

## WORKING AUSTRALIANS ARE NOT IMMUNE

Being employed does not guarantee that a person will not experience food insecurity. Almost half of those experiencing food insecurity (48%) are employed in some way (either full-time, part-time, casually or self-employed). Despite being employed, however, these individuals and families still find it difficult to make ends meet.

The largest numbers of people seeking food assistance are doing so because they are struggling to afford daily necessities on a small income. While Foodbank agencies provide food assistance to a diverse range of groups, including those struggling with unemployment (64%), homelessness (39%) and substance abuse (19%), the most common group that they assist are individuals and families living on a low income (81%).

**ALMOST HALF OF FOOD INSECURE AUSTRALIANS (48%) ARE EMPLOYED.**



**THE MOST COMMON GROUP THAT FOODBANK'S AGENCIES ASSIST ARE LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES (81%).**



## AUSTRALIA'S YOUNG PEOPLE OFTEN GO HUNGRY

Young Australians, including children, are more likely to experience food insecurity than the general population.

When it comes to food insecurity the youngest members of our society are not exempt. Two in five (40%) households experiencing food insecurity are families with dependent children and most (89%) of these children are very young (0-12 years old). Children represent more than a quarter (27%) of those receiving food relief from Foodbank's agencies. In addition to this, Foodbank also provide regular school breakfasts to over 100,000 students around Australia.

Australia's young adults are also at risk of food insecurity. While Generation Y and Generation Z (18-37 year olds) make up 28% of Australia's population

overall<sup>2</sup>, they represent a much greater proportion of those experiencing food insecurity (38%). Young people also tend to experience food insecurity more frequently than older generations. Over a third of food insecure Generation Ys and Generation Zs (34%) go hungry at least once a week, compared to 24% of Gen Xs and 21% of Baby Boomers.



**TWO IN FIVE HOUSEHOLDS (40%) EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY ARE FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN. MOST OF THESE CHILDREN (89%) ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 12.**

# FOOD INSECURITY IN REGIONAL & REMOTE AUSTRALIA

Almost a third of Australians (29%) experiencing food insecurity live in regional and remote areas. There are several unique challenges that come with living outside major cities including:



## SOCIAL PRESSURE

Australians living in regional and remote areas are more likely to feel inadequate (44%) and isolated (38%) as a result of food insecurity, compared to those in major cities (29%, 25% respectively). They are also more likely to report that they were unable to invite friends over because they ran out of food (32% compared to 26% of major city dwellers).



## LESS MONEY IN THE FIRST PLACE

Those living outside major cities are more likely to say there is just not enough money in the first place when asked why they are unable to buy enough food (55% compared to 45% of those living in major cities).

# WHICH AUSTRALIANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE FOOD INSECURITY?

When it comes to food insecurity, those affected come from all age groups, backgrounds and circumstances. However, some groups are consistently overrepresented.

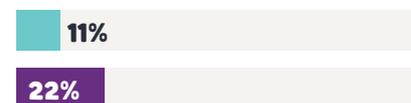
### RENTERS<sup>3</sup>



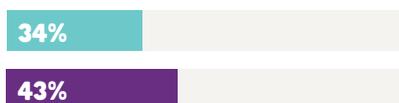
### YOUNG PEOPLE GEN Z & GEN Y



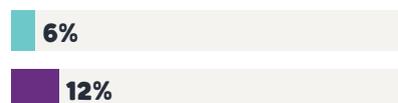
### LONE PERSON HOUSEHOLDS



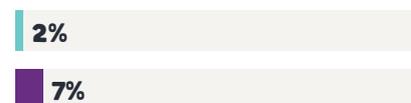
### FIRST & SECOND GENERATION AUSTRALIANS PARENTS BORN OVERSEAS



### UNEMPLOYED<sup>4</sup>



### ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS



● % of the Australian population    ● % of those experiencing food insecurity

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census of Population and Housing

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census of Population and Housing (same for all except unemployed)

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, July 2017

# REAL STORIES



## PAULA SOUTH WEST SYDNEY

"Two years ago, I left a 20-year marriage that may have seemed perfect on the outside but there was a lot of domestic violence that I told no one about. Every part of my life was impacted. There was intimidation, psychological abuse and even physical violence – at times I feared for my life. The thought of not being able to support my three children made it almost impossible for me to leave but I found the courage and since then all I care about is making sure my daughters Mia, Zoe and Eva have a normal life like other children; free from violence and poverty.

I'm happy to be free now, but life is still very tough. Initially we didn't even have cutlery and plates and I slept for months on a mat on the floor because I couldn't afford a bed. Just when I began to doubt my ability to rebuild my life, I received a gift that changed everything. It was a box of fruit, vegetables and groceries from a food pantry in my area. It meant I could provide something for my youngest daughter and her friends for her birthday. I put it in the boot and sat in my car and sobbed with relief.

I'm so grateful for the help I received that now I'm helping others by establishing my own community food pantry. I want to give people the feeling of choice and dignity and the ability to start rebuilding their lives."



## STEVE MELBOURNE

"Mum's on a pension and I haven't worked for probably three years now because of my depression and anxiety. I used to do concreting and forklift driving but I got to a stage where, because of the medication I'm taking, it played with my motion and because it's such a dangerous job your vision has to be perfect.

I lost my father to suicide when I was 14. The whole family has dealt with that in different ways. Moving back with mum has been just an amazing thing for me.

Anything we can do to ease the financial burden... it's the electricity, it's the rent, it's all the amenities and just the day-to-day living that makes it really, really hard.

### **AND IF YOU'RE MALNOURISHED YOU CANNOT DO ANYTHING. FOOD'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.**

I've worked voluntarily for the Uniting Church and The Salvos so I've got a lot of food parcels from them and obviously I want to put back in as well.

There's more on our news about Donald Trump and what he's doing in America than there is about hungry people in Australia. How is that even in the hemisphere of right? That just doesn't make sense."



## LINDA PERTH

"Ten years ago, life changed dramatically for us. My husband, Neil, and I were both working full time, taking long holidays and really enjoying life. Then the unexpected happened – we became the legal guardians of our two year old grandson Blair. When we first took custody of him we still had money coming in so we were doing alright financially. I kept working for a while, however I found it increasingly difficult. When he first arrived I would drop him off at daycare at 6.30 in the morning, catch the bus to work in the city and back again, to pick him up by 4pm. I did this for a while, but it just got too much in the end. I had to pack it in.

Neil retired soon after, aged 70, and then things got very tough for us and I knew I'd have no choice but to reach out for help. It was one of the hardest decisions as we've never needed charity before. At the time I felt like I was the only one going through it. We have since met many others out there that are in the same boat as us and they have a lot more children than we do. Talking to others helped a lot."

The food and other things, like tissues, washing up detergent and toiletries, have been a huge help, because in the weeks when you haven't got that extra bit of money, you know you can still get enough food to get you by until the next fortnight."

## MOST COMMON GROUPS ASSISTED BY FOODBANK CHARITIES\*

Low income families/individuals

81%

Unemployed

64%

Single parent families

60%

Homeless / special accommodation

39%

People with a mental illness

29%

Indigenous

26%

Aged

24%

People with a disability

23%

Women

21%

Substance abuse / dependence

19%

Children & Youth

18%

Ethnic / cultural groups

15%

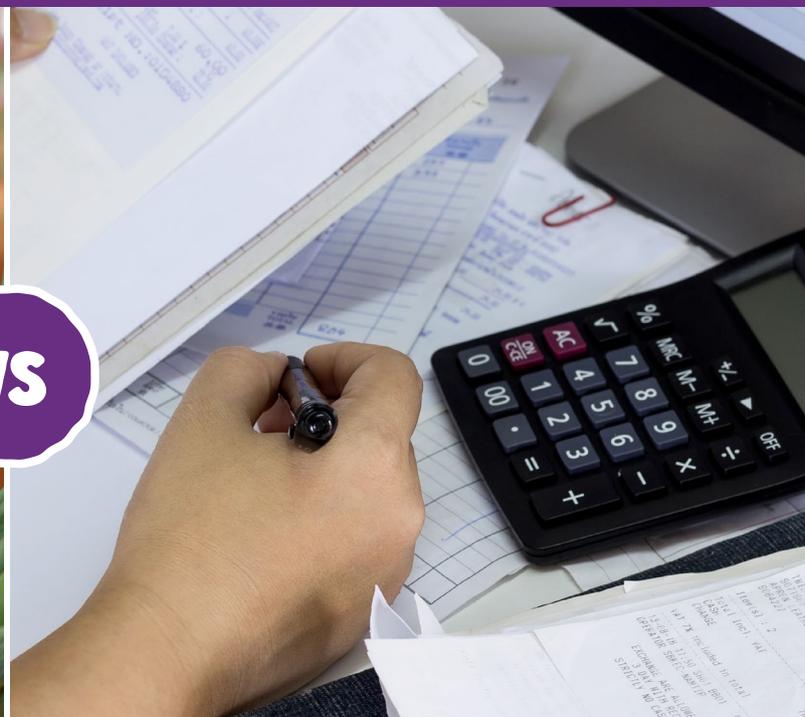
Asylum seekers / refugees

12%

\* Figures represent percentage of charities assisting each group



VS



# WHAT CAUSES FOOD INSECURITY?

## THE HIGH COST OF LIVING IS THE MAIN CAUSE OF FOOD INSECURITY FOR AUSTRALIANS

Many of us face the daily pressures of rising amenity costs, including rent, mortgage repayments and power bills. For some people, this pressure can result in tough choices such as, 'Do I pay that bill or buy food?'

Energy prices have increased significantly in recent years<sup>5</sup> and are expected to continue growing in the future<sup>6</sup>. Unexpected expenses or large bills are the main cause of food insecurity for Australians, with 56% citing this as a reason they are unable to purchase more food when they run out. In these situations, people are forced to choose between food and other everyday necessities.

Housing affordability is another area that causes financial stress for many Australians. Over the past five years, earnings have not kept pace with growth in rental prices. The proportion of households that pay 30% or more of their income in rent has grown from 10.4% to 11.5%<sup>7</sup> over this period. Almost two in five (38%) of those who have experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months have been unable to buy food because of their rent or mortgage payments.

Food itself can also be expensive. More than a third (35%) of food insecure Australians say they are unable to buy food because it is too expensive.



**TWO IN FIVE (41%) FOOD INSECURE AUSTRALIANS HAVE NOT PAID BILLS IN ORDER TO HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY FOOD.**

<sup>5</sup> Parliament of Australia, Energy prices – the story behind rising costs, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Energy Market Commission, 2016 Residential Electricity Price Trends

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census of Population and Housing

## TOP 4 REASONS FOR NOT HAVING ENOUGH FOOD



**56%**

Unexpected expense or large bill



**48%**

Just not enough money in the first place



**38%**

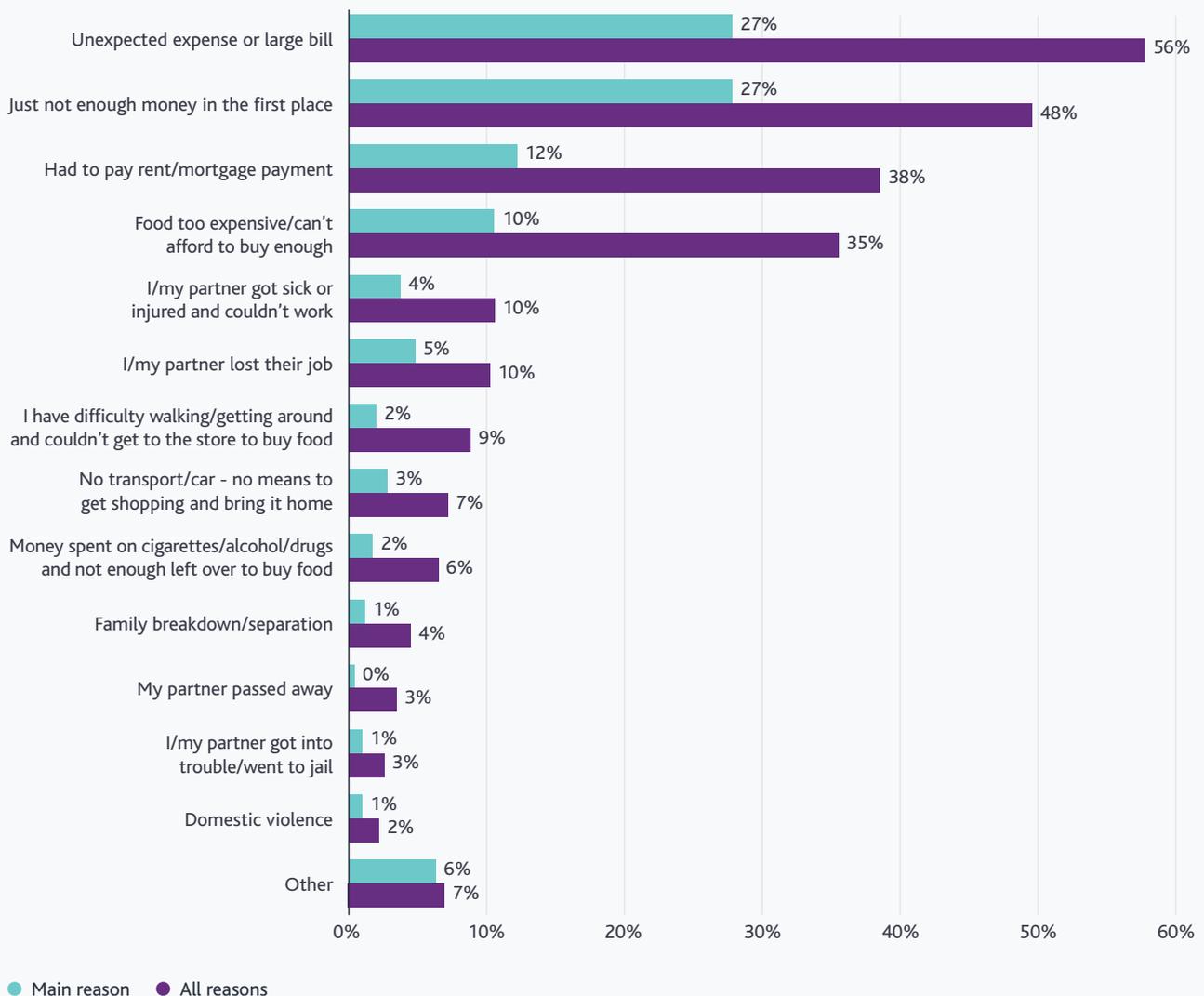
Had to pay rent/mortgage repayment



**35%**

Food too expensive/can't afford to buy enough

## REASONS FOR NOT HAVING ENOUGH FOOD



# LIVING WITH FOOD INSECURITY

## TO GET THROUGH TIMES OF FOOD INSECURITY, PEOPLE OFTEN GO WITHOUT

When individuals are faced with food insecurity, meal-skipping is commonplace. Many Australians (45%) experiencing food insecurity have skipped a meal, and 28% have gone for an entire day without eating.

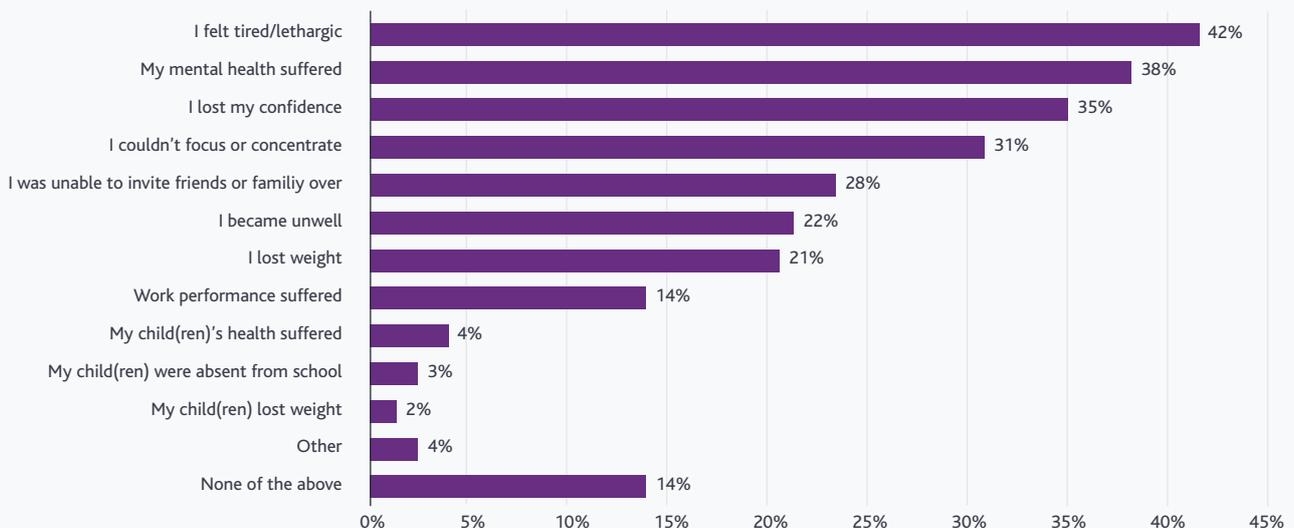
For parents, meal-skipping can mean the difference between their children having something to eat or going hungry. Almost half (46%) of parents have skipped a meal so that their children can eat in instances where they have been unable to afford food. Children can also miss out on vital nutrition and 17% of parents report their children go without fresh fruit or vegetables in times of food insecurity.

## LACK OF FOOD CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT QUALITY OF LIFE

Not having enough to eat can severely impact everyday functioning and wellbeing. Food insecure Australians most commonly report lethargy or tiredness (42%), a decline in mental health (38%) and a loss of confidence (35%) because of a lack of food.

Not having enough food can also influence a person's ability to create and maintain social connections. More than a quarter (28%) of Australians report that in times where they have run out of food and are not able to afford more, they have been unable to invite friends or family over.

### THE RESULTS OF NOT HAVING ENOUGH FOOD



## STRESS AND DEPRESSION ARE COMMON EMOTIONS FOR THOSE WITHOUT ADEQUATE FOOD.

Those who have experienced food insecurity report feeling the following emotions when they are unable to buy enough food.



**53%**  
Depressed



**52%**  
Stressed



**44%**  
Embarrassed



**44%**  
Sad



**39%**  
Hopeless



**38%**  
Ashamed

# THE BENEFITS OF FOOD RELIEF

## LESS THAN HALF OF THOSE EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY SEEK FOOD RELIEF

When individuals are faced with food insecurity, seeking food relief from a charity is not the most common first point of call. In fact, less than half of food insecure Australians (46%) have sought assistance from a charity.

This is because people feel as though others need help more than they do (42%) or because they feel embarrassed (36%) or ashamed (33%).

Generation Y and Z are less likely than older age groups to seek assistance from a charity when they are faced with food insecurity (18% compared to 28% of Generation X and 30% of Baby Boomers).

## THE BENEFITS OF FOOD RELIEF ARE TANGIBLE AND ONGOING

Those who do access food relief see a number of benefits in their lives as a result of receiving assistance. Recipients of food relief (n = 174) suggest they feel less hungry (43%) and are better able to concentrate (36%) as a result of receiving assistance.

## THE TOP 5 BENEFITS OF RECEIVING FOOD RELIEF

**43%**

Felt less hungry

**36%**

Able to better focus/concentrate

**33%**

Physical health improved

**30%**

Felt less nauseous

**28%**

Able to better plan for the future

There are also emotional benefits for those who receive food relief, the most common of which is feeling relieved (48%). Receiving food assistance also helps individuals feel calmer and less stressed (42%).

More than four out of five recipients of food relief (83%) say the benefits of receiving food assistance lasted or made a difference in their life for a week or more. One in twelve (8%) suggested it made a long-term, lasting improvement to their life.



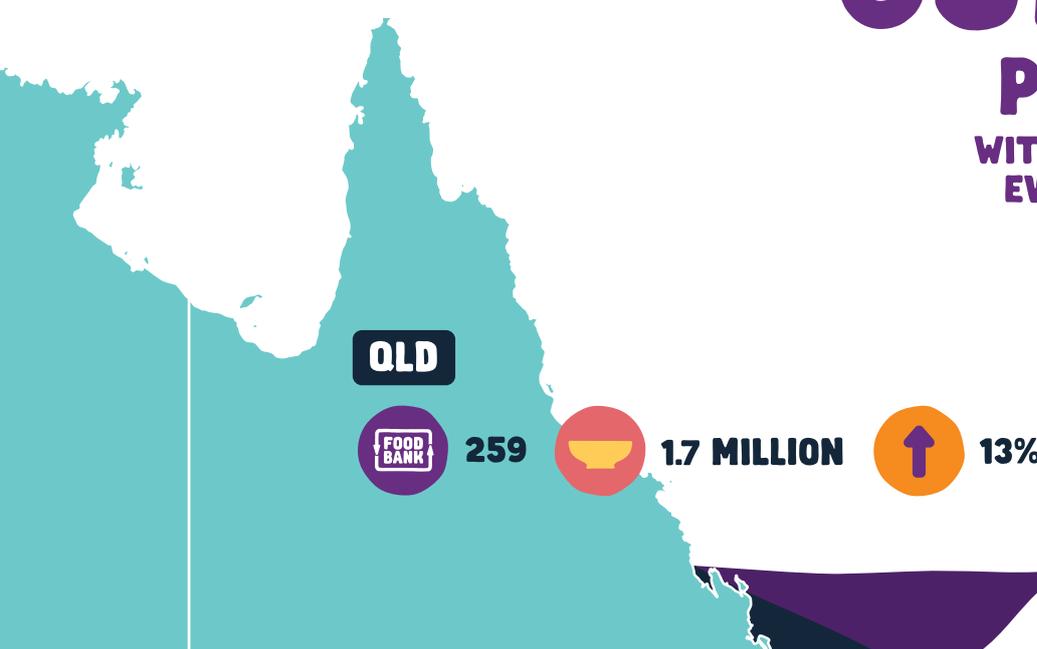
**MORE THAN FOUR OUT OF FIVE RECIPIENTS OF FOOD RELIEF (83%) SAY THE BENEFITS OF RECEIVING FOOD ASSISTANCE MADE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR LIFE FOR A WEEK OR MORE.**

FOODBANK WORKS WITH OVER  
**2600**  
CHARITIES  
ACROSS AUSTRALIA...



-  Number of Foodbank agencies
-  Meals per month
-  Increase in the proportion of people seeking food relief since 2016
-  Additional food that would be required to meet total demand

AND PROVIDES MORE THAN  
**652,000**  
**PEOPLE**  
WITH FOOD RELIEF  
EVERY MONTH.



**QLD**



259



1.7 MILLION

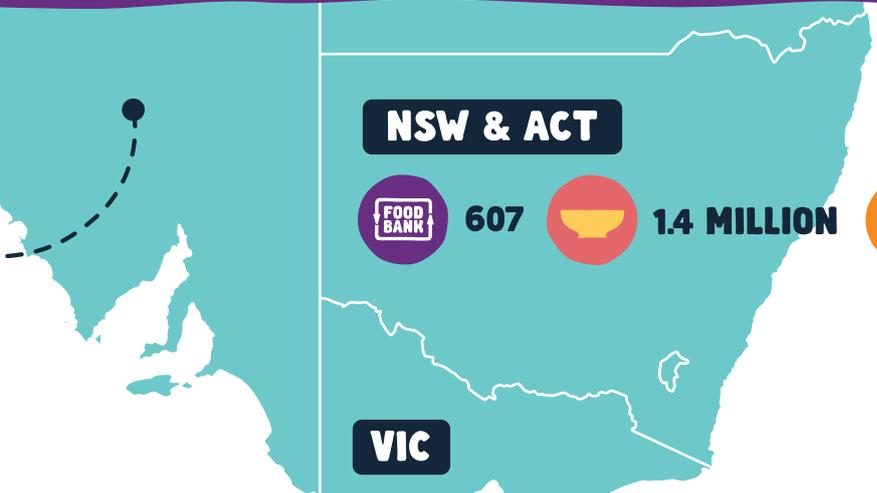


13%



35%

**ACROSS AUSTRALIA**



**NSW & ACT**



607



1.4 MILLION



10%



41%

**VIC**



472



1.1 MILLION



9%



31%

**TAS**



227



183,000



8%



45%

# METHODOLOGY

## WELFARE AGENCY SURVEY

Foodbank Australia conducted the Welfare Agency Survey from December 2016 to July 2017 with agencies registered with all state and territory Foodbanks to receive food and groceries. Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their current operating performance, clientele and needs. The survey received 1,123 responses which represented 46% of all registered agencies across Australia that had received food from Foodbank in the last 12 months. The response rate varied from between 28% to 74% in different states and territories.

Data collated in the survey was cleaned to ensure a robust analysis including filtering of results to only include organisations that provided food relief and verifying any outliers to ensure these responses did not inappropriately alter the overall results. There will inevitably be some degree of error in any survey as a result of sampling and non-sampling errors that could impact on the estimate of aggregate demand and which need to be taken into account when interpreting these figures.

The total number of people receiving food assistance from Foodbank's agencies was calculated by finding the average number of people assisted by agencies for each state and multiplying this by the number of agencies in each state that had received food from Foodbank in the last 12 months. This differs from the method that was used in the 2016 Hunger Report and, therefore, the numbers are not directly comparable. The same difference applies to calculations of the number of people unable to be assisted by Foodbank's agencies

The section titled 'Foodbank across Australia' reports the total number of agencies registered with Foodbank (n=2643). Calculations for the number of people assisted, however, are based on the number of agencies that have received food from Foodbank in the last 12 months (n=2434).

## SURVEY OF AUSTRALIANS EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY

The survey was conducted online among a sample of 511 Australians 18 years and older who experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months. Respondents were distributed across Australia's metropolitan and regional centres. McCrindle Research designed the questionnaire, a copy of which is available on request. Fieldwork for the online survey took place from 31 July to 7 August 2017.

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 did you or anyone in your household not have enough food and were unable to buy more?"

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## TERMINOLOGY

Reference to the generations throughout this report refer to the following age categories:

- Generation Z: 18-22 year olds (those born from 1995-1999)\*
- Generation Y: 23-37 year olds (those born from 1980-1994)
- Generation X: 38-52 year olds (those born from 1965-1979)
- Baby Boomers: 53-71 year olds (those born from 1946-1964)

\*As respondents were required to be over the age of 18, Generation Z in this report only includes respondents aged 18+. Generation Z and Y have been combined for analysis.

# FOODBANK OFFICES

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**FIGHTING HUNGER  
IN AUSTRALIA**