

Public Hearing: Senate Select Committee on Cost of Living

Wednesday 1st February 2023

Foodbank Australia Opening Statement

Brianna Casey, Chief Executive Officer

~ CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY ~

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence at today's hearing. I wish to start by acknowledging the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to Elders past and present, and I extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present today.

As Senators may already be aware, Foodbank has a federated structure, and I am here in my capacity as CEO of Foodbank Australia, alongside our General Manager, Business, Sarah Pennell. Our members include Foodbanks in every state and territory and we currently exist in a perfect storm of a cost of living crisis, an income crisis and natural disasters of growing frequency and intensity.

All of this is impacting not only demand for food relief, but also our supply. Just as it is costing consumers more to buy food and groceries, turn on the lights, fuel their vehicle and keep a roof over their heads, it is also costing Foodbank a lot more to source, store and transport essential food relief, at a time when demand for food relief has never been higher.

You're going to hear a lot of numbers throughout this inquiry. This isn't a debate about numbers. It's a debate about people and a growing number of people are struggling to put food on the table – in fact, more than at the height of the pandemic.

The numbers I want to share with you aren't the ones that appear in the monthly ABS updates or portfolio budget statements. Apologies to the economists in the room, but they're far more important than that. They're numbers that keep me up at night and they matter.

- » **1.3 million:** that's the number of children living in severely food insecure households – compromising on their nutrition, skipping meals or even going all day without eating

- » **64:** that's the percentage of households citing increased or high cost of living as a reason why they couldn't meet their household food needs, with increased food and grocery costs, increased energy costs, increased housing costs and unexpected large expenses as the major contributors to their struggles
- » **54:** that's the percentage of food insecure households in Australia with someone in paid work. A job – or even multiple jobs – is not a shield against the cost of living crisis.
- » **500,000:** that's the number of households who will struggle to put a meal on the table tonight. These are households in my community. In your community. In a growing number of communities.

Why? Put simply, because people's income isn't keeping up with their expenses. It is crucial that this inquiry consider both sides of the ledger. We need solutions that are enduring – like a permanent increase to income support payments in the next Budget. We need solutions that are going to deal with the immediate crisis, like ensuring food relief is available to those struggling to put a meal on the table today. We need clever policy solutions that will deliver increased food and stimulate regional economies, like a national food donation tax incentive.

We need to do better by those in our community who are hurting.

We commend the committee for its consideration of this important issue and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.