

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Access to adequate and nutritious food in Hobsons Bay

Our health is determined by much more than genes and lifestyle decisions. It is determined by the circumstances in which we are born, grow, live, work and age. How well we eat is a fundamental contributor to our health and wellbeing and is influenced by our income, understanding of healthy eating and access to fresh, appropriate food.

Through its various functions, local government plays a major role in protecting, improving and promoting the health of its residents. As the closest level to the community, councils work to understand the populations they serve and ensure all residents are provided with an environment which allows everyone to equally achieve the best personal health and wellbeing possible.

This research summary is aimed at providing information about the social and environmental conditions that affect the health and wellbeing of Hobsons Bay residents.

Why Does Access to Nutritious Food Impact Health and Wellbeing?

Food security is defined as regular access to safe, nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable food from non-emergency sources (VicHealth, 2010).

People who are not able to access nutritious food on a regular basis are said to be experiencing 'food insecurity'. Food insecurity can lead people to become more vulnerable to illness and impact on physical, mental and social wellbeing.

A Foodbank 2018 survey indicated that in 'the last 12 months, more than four million Australians (18 per cent of the population) have been in a situation where they have run out of food and have been unable to buy more'. The

report also indicated that charities are reporting that the number of people seeking food relief continues to increase (Foodbank, 2018).

A person's social and economic circumstances can affect their health throughout their life. This is because as a person earns more money, their opportunities to access better health care, education, nutritious food and secure adequate housing improve (World Health Organisation, 2003).

Some population groups are more vulnerable to food insecurity and this includes those of a low socioeconomic status, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, newly arrived and refugee communities, individuals with chronic illness or a disability, older people, young people and

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people experiencing (or at risk of experiencing) homelessness.

It is not only income which dictates the food we eat. Proximity to shops that sell healthy food, how easily we can get to these shops, our level of understanding of what a healthy diet should contain and our knowledge of how to prepare healthy food and adequate storage of food, all influence our ability to eat nutritious food.

Foodbank Hunger Report 2018 indicates 'that food insecurity has a significant impact on quality of life with half of those experiencing it feeling tired or lethargic (52 per cent) when they do not have enough to eat. Lack of food can also result in a decline in mental health (44 per cent) and a reduced ability to concentrate (38 per cent) (Foodbank, 2018).

Australians struggling with food insecurity say they feel stressed (57 per cent), depressed (52 per cent) and sad (47 per cent) during times when they are unable to buy enough food (Foodbank, 2018).

Food security can also be the over consumption of inadequate food. People can make unhealthy food choices, despite their ability to access and financially purchase nutritional food. Over consumption can lead to health impacts such as obesity and risk factors for heart disease and diabetes.

Australians spend 42 cents in every food dollar eating out which can result in larger portion sizes, increased saturated fat and salt and increase energy consumption (Heart Foundation, 2018).

What do we know about food security in Hobsons Bay?

Consumption patterns

Good eating habits are often formed within the family. Similar to Victoria, 66 per cent of Hobsons Bay residents surveyed indicated they share a meal with their family on five or more days per week (VicHealth, 2012).

Hobsons Bay residents consume an average of 2.3 serves of vegetables and 1.6 serves of fruit each day. Although similar to the Victorian average, it is below recommended dietary requirements of six serves of vegetables for men (5 for women) and two serves of fruit for men and women (VicHealth, 2015).

In Hobsons Bay, only 8.2 per cent of the population consume five or more serves of vegetables per day and 53.6 per cent consume 2 or more serves of fruit per day (DHHS, 2014).

Hobsons Bay residents drink an average of five glasses of water per day which is below the Victorian average of 5.4 glasses (VicHealth, 2015). Although lower than Victoria (11.2 per cent), 8.9 per cent of Hobsons Bay residents surveyed consumed sugar sweetened soft drinks daily (DHHS, 2014).

Socio-economic factors

In a recent community survey, approximately four per cent of respondents reported that within the last 12 months, they could not afford to buy more food when they ran out. This figure is consistent with the previous year (Hobsons Bay City Council, 2018). It is also similar to the state average of 4.6 per cent (DHHS, 2014).

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The main reason why people go without healthy food is due to a lack of money, made worse by rising costs including housing and utilities costs (e.g. gas, electricity, water). Meeting these expenses can leave people without enough money to purchase food.

A longitudinal survey of Australian households, the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) survey, found that those in housing stress are more likely to be unable pay for food and utilities, and of seek assistance from family, friends and community organisations (Rowley and Ong, 2012).

In Hobsons Bay, housing costs, both rents and median house and unit prices, have increased significantly over the past decade. In 2016, 9.4 per cent of low income households were in housing stress (meaning they are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on meeting housing costs). This figure increases to 23.9 per cent for households that are renting¹.

Families receiving Centrelink payments spend 31 per cent of their weekly income on purchasing nutritious food (Palermo et al, 2016). In Hobsons Bay, approximately 17 per cent of residents receive sole parent, disability, Newstart and/or aged payments (Centrelink, 2017).

Data from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing shows that households in the lowest income quartile make up 23 per cent of the Hobsons Bay population (earning less than \$740 per week).

Within Hobsons Bay 27,093 residents (30.4 per cent) were born overseas and 19.5 per cent of this group arrived between 2011 and 2016.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) are produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The disadvantage index is based on factors such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations.

In 2016, the SEIFA Index for Hobsons Bay was 1015. This indicates Hobsons Bay is more advantaged on average than the Western Region (SEIFA 989). Within the municipality, however, SEIFA ranges from 908.2 in Laverton, 946.3 in Altona North and 980.1 in Altona Meadows, to a high of 1096.3 in Newport East.

What Government Policies Relate to Access to Nutritious Food?

Recently, international attention has been given impacts of climate change of food production, the rising cost for acquiring and producing food and its implications for the consumer. This has led to increased recognition that in developed countries like Australia, there are sections of the population that experience hunger and/or have an inadequate diet due to poor food options. In addition, rising utility costs are further impacting the household budget, influencing food purchasing and nutritional outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged populations.

¹ Rental stress data is derived from 2016 Census of Population and Housing, compiled and presented in atlas.id <https://atlas.id.com.au/hobsons-bay>

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Commonwealth

Strategy for Australia's Aid Investments in Agriculture, Fisheries and Water 2015 is the Federal Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's, guide for investment in agriculture and food security. This is implemented through a mix of global, regional and bilateral initiatives with three priority areas: strengthening markets; innovating for productivity and sustainable resource use; and promoting effective policy, governance and reform (Australian Government, 2018)

State

The aim of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015 – 2019 is to improve the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. This is the second state level health and wellbeing plan and it seeks improvements in issues such as food safety and healthy eating (as supported by Priority 1: Healthier eating and active living). It also highlights that food security in the future is likely to deteriorate for some people, and these are likely to be people who are already vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity.

The Victorian *Food Act 1984* provides the legal framework for the sale of safe food in Victoria. It requires that any food donated by food businesses is safe, including for emergency relief purposes.

Regional

In their report *Healthy Foods for Healthy Communities*, HealthWest highlighted a number of issues affecting food security in the west. These included high cost of healthy food, low income, lack of public or private transport,

fruit and vegetable deserts, a higher number of take away outlets in comparison to fresh food outlets and a lack of culturally appropriate food. Among the recommendations for improving food security, initiatives such as food swaps, urban food production, establishing partnerships, policy integration and advocacy were highlighted as potential opportunities for local government (HealthWest, 2010).

Local

The role of local government is to provide services and infrastructure for the local community and plan for future needs.

According to VicHealth (2010), local government is ideally placed to develop locally relevant, integrated and long lasting strategies to address the barriers people face when trying to access nutritious food.

As such Council's role includes:

- being well informed on the issues and needs affecting its residents and to advocate on their behalf
- acknowledging the issues that contribute to improving access to nutritious food in Council's strategic policies including Council Plan, the Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Municipal Strategic Statement
- playing a leadership role in supporting healthy eating choices in Council run activities and through its land use planning mechanisms

Consultation to develop Council's Climate Change Adaptation Plan identified food security as an issue to be addressed. The community said that Council should:

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- assist the community to become resilient to climate change and peak oil food security issues by assisting the community to develop their knowledge of how to grow food locally
- encourage the supply of locally grown produce within the municipality
- continue Council's My Smart Garden program, as it is an important program to help address food security

Council's work in food security is supported via the Improving Access to Nutritious Food (Food Security) Policy Statement 2009 which seeks to improve access to safe and nutritious food for vulnerable groups in Hobsons Bay.

Council undertakes a range of food security actions including providing funding for community organisations to assist residents experiencing issues with gaining food including through emergency sources, advocacy on behalf of vulnerable local residents and the community organisations assisting them, the delivery of nutritious and culturally appropriate meals to Home and Community Care (HACC) eligible residents, education programs which provide knowledge about growing your own food and home composting, and supporting emergency food relief.

Council will continue to monitor food security and the actions in which Council undertakes.

Updated 2018

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