



**Hobsons Bay**  
CITY COUNCIL

**Hobsons Bay City Council**  
Food Security – Discussion Paper

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# Executive Summary

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The purpose of this discussion paper is to provide a brief review of food security approaches and policy so as to provide the context and background information to support the development of the Hobsons Bay City Council's food security policy statement.

## **What is Food Security and who is affected by a lack of food security?**

Food security is the practice of ensuring constant access to safe and nutritious food for a given population. Food security is determined by the food supply in a community and whether people have adequate resources and skills to acquire and use that food (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

According to 2006 Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) data, 7.7% of the adult population living in Hobsons Bay had experienced food insecurity, compared to 6.3% in the Northern & Western Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 6.0%. Food insecurity in this instance was defined as running out of food at some point and not being able to afford to buy more, within the last 12 months

There are a number of groups at greater risk of being food insecure. Some of the most vulnerable groups are low or fixed income earners as well as newly arrived migrants.

## **Why do people experience a lack of food security?**

People experience a lack of food security when the food supply and/or access to food is inadequate. Populations experience a lack of food security for a variety of reasons some of which are listed below:

- Inadequate location and/or low availability of food outlets
- High food prices
- Lack of a variety of food
- Promotion of unhealthy foods leads to bad consumer choices
- Difficulties in storing food
- Diminished capacity to make healthy food choices
- Lack of knowledge about preparing nutritious food
- Lack of time for preparing and shopping for quality food
- Lack of social supports or extended family

## **What is being done to improve food security internationally?**

Internationally, there are two main divisions of the United Nations (UN) which play a role in food security. These are the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization. In 1996, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN convened the World Food Summit to encourage all sectors of civil society to join forces to ensure food security for the world's people. The participants of this summit developed the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

## **What is being done to improve food security nationally?**

In 1992, the Federal Government through the then Department of Health, Housing and Community Services released a Food and Nutrition Policy with the aim of increasing the availability of nutritious foods for economically disadvantaged people and to increase understanding of good nutrition.

In 2001, the Eat Well Australia: the National Public Health Nutrition Strategy was endorsed to assure food security and emphasise the need to address the food supply as well as individual's capacity to acquire food (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

The Australian Red Cross, while mostly known for its disaster relief efforts, also has a nationwide school meal program for students who might otherwise skip a meal during the day.

## **What is being done to improve food security in Victoria?**

There are several pilot projects currently underway in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The most notable of these being funded by VicHealth, called the Food For All program. This program has awarded funding to local and rural Councils to study food security and healthy eating. The Food For All program helped to identify groups at risk of experiencing a lack of food security, and to identify potential solutions to alleviating food security issues. Other organisations undertaking work to promote food security in Victoria include Ceres and Fare Share (formally One Umbrella).

Most recently, the Department of Human Services provided funding to three local Councils (Banyule, Darebin, and Hobsons Bay) to gauge how food security and access can be improved through policy. The goal of this project is to produce policy based measures which will assist local Councils in providing better service to those parts of their communities who would normally be at a disadvantage caused by a lack food security.

## **What is being done to improve food security in and around Hobsons Bay?**

There are a number of initiatives currently being undertaken regionally and within the municipality which are proving effective in addressing food security issues.

The City of Maribyrnong has been addressing food security for many years and in 2002 adopted a Food Security policy. Some work has also been conducted in and around Hobsons Bay in relation to community gardens with gardens developed in the Laverton area and within the Floyd Lodge high rise, located in Williamstown.

Two primary schools in Hobsons Bay, Altona Meadows and Altona Green Primary Schools, have also established gardens with funding from the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation. ISIS Primary Care is currently running community kitchens at the Laverton Community Center and to teach residents how to prepare healthy food.

## **What is Hobsons Bay City Council doing to improve food security within the municipality?**

A number of initiatives are currently being undertaken by Hobsons Bay City Council to address food security issues, in particular through the Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Food security has been identified by the Council as a priority issue for Laverton's Community Renewal Project. In relation to children, the Council has been receiving funding to run the Kids 'Go for your life' (KGFYL) program since September 2006. In 2005, the Council's Public Health department initiated the Healthy Choices for Children Awards.

Regarding vulnerable communities, the Council is working in close partnership with other key stakeholders to support residents of the Half Moon Caravan Park in Brooklyn. In relation to older people, people with disabilities and their carers, who have been assessed as nutritionally at risk and are unable to prepare regular meals, the Council also provides the café and meals on wheels programs.

Most recently, the Hobsons Bay City Council has been funded by the Department of Human Services to develop a Food security policy statement. This policy will assist the Council to identify food security priorities, underpin any future work the Council undertakes in relation to food security and identify the Council's role in addressing food security issues within the municipality.

### **Where do we go from here?**

The Council will undertake a community consultation exercise, the results of which will be used to tailor and inform the food security policy statement and the priorities for future work in the area.

# Background

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It can be said that Australia is a food secure nation. However, within Australia, as is the case in other developed countries, there are sections of the population that experience hunger and/or have an inadequate diet due to poor food options (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

As such the term food security can be defined as 'the state in which all persons obtain nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable, safe foods regularly through non emergency sources' (VicHealth, 2005).

According to the 2006 Census data, Hobsons Bay is ranked 9th most disadvantaged local government area in the Socio-Economic Indices for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage. In relation to neighbourhood areas within the municipality, Laverton is the most disadvantaged followed by Brooklyn and Altona North. Their SEIFA index of disadvantage indicates that these areas are more disadvantaged than Hobsons Bay as a whole (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

SEIFA indices are based on factors such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in relatively unskilled occupations and such variables that reflect disadvantage. The Australian average is set at a figure of 1,000. Low scores on the Index occur when an area has many low income families and people with little training and in unskilled occupations. High scores occur when an area has few families on low incomes and few people with limited training and in unskilled occupations.

In light of this, over the last few years ISIS Primary Care has highlighted food security as an important issue. Work has been undertaken by ISIS to map indicators of food supply and access to food in disadvantaged areas as compared to more affluent pockets of Hobsons Bay. This confirmed that there are certain communities within Hobsons Bay who are at risk of experiencing a lack of food security, not only for economic reasons, but also due to poor access to food due to the physical location and spatial access of food outlets.

Hobsons Bay City Council has also identified food and nutrition as an important issue within the current Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Municipal Early Years Plan. In particular, the Health and Wellbeing Plan identifies 'safe and nutritious food' as one of the six priorities areas of focus over the next 4 years. In order to progress this work, in the first half of 2008, a series of forums were held which aimed to develop a common understanding and language within the Council about food security issues, as well as to identify current work being undertaken and possible future directions.

The forums identified the Council objectives in influencing and addressing food security issues across the municipality which included:

- **Improving Governance and Leadership** by creating value adding work through community consultation to examine how food security issues can be included within new Council policies.
- **Building Capacity Within Council** by encouraging discussion around food security as well as information sharing to increase awareness and understanding of food related issues
- **Conducting Research and Community Profiling** to gauge what policies currently govern food security and to map out what current service/assets are available to local residents

- **Identifying Services and Infrastructure Available within the Community** to fill the gaps in the current service provision. This might take the form of facilitating access to resources and creating community groups such as cooking groups which would give the community additional assets for addressing food insecurity
- **Ethically Framed Advocacy** by creating a set of benchmarks for food security research to measure the level of success of community programs. Additionally working within the community and the Council to ensure that food security is given voice in discussions
- **Facilitation and Influence** through community assets to support food security initiatives such as community kitchens and gardens. Establishing connections with local industry to provide improved fresh food access when resources are stretched thin.

The need for the Council to develop a Hobsons Bay Food Security Policy within a Human Rights framework to inform future food security actions was also identified through the forums

In light of the above, this discussion paper provides a brief review of food security approaches and policy so as to provide the context and background information to support the development of the Hobsons Bay City Council's food security policy statement.

# What Is Food Security?

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## What does Food Security mean?

Food security is defined by VicHealth as ‘the state in which all persons obtain nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable, safe foods regularly through non emergency sources’. Food security refers to the ability of individuals, households and communities to acquire appropriate and nutritious food on a regular and reliable basis, and using socially acceptable means. Food security is determined by the food supply in a community and whether people have adequate resources and skills to acquire and use that food (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

In article 25 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights there exists a right to food, ‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food...’ To this end people should have access to food since it is their right.

However, the types of food one might have access to are not necessarily the ones that will help a person to live a healthy productive life. According to Gerrad et al (2004) poor nutrition accounts for up to 10 percent of the total burden of disease in Australia due to obesity, inadequate consumption of fruits and vegetables and high blood cholesterol. For example, an individual may not live close enough to a fresh food outlet so as to make it feasible to shop there. Instead, there may be a high number of fast food and take-away establishments. Under this circumstance, it is easier to eat at a fast food establishment.

Consequently, this comes with a high personal and social cost over time in relation to public health. According to Rychetnik, et al, 2002, poor nutrition due to insufficient, low quality or unreliable food intake leads to ill health. Rychetnik, also states that poor nutrition contributes to inequalities in health because inadequate or poor quality food intake is commonly experienced by people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and those living in other forms of individual or environmental disadvantage.

## Who is affected by a lack of Food Security?

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports in 2002, almost 60,000 low income Australian families had gone without meals in the previous 12 months. The most recent National Nutrition Survey (1995) revealed that 5% of Victorian respondents have run out of food and had no money to buy more at some time in the previous 12 months.

Food security was also measured in the 2006 Community Indicators Victoria Survey where results indicated that a quarter of a million adults in Victoria had experienced food insecurity (Brown, 2007).

According to 2006 Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) data, 7.7% of the adult population living in Hobsons Bay had experienced food insecurity, compared to 6.3% in the Northern & Western Metro Region and the Victorian State average of 6.0%. Food insecurity in this instance was defined as running out of food at some point and not being able to afford to buy more, within the last 12 months

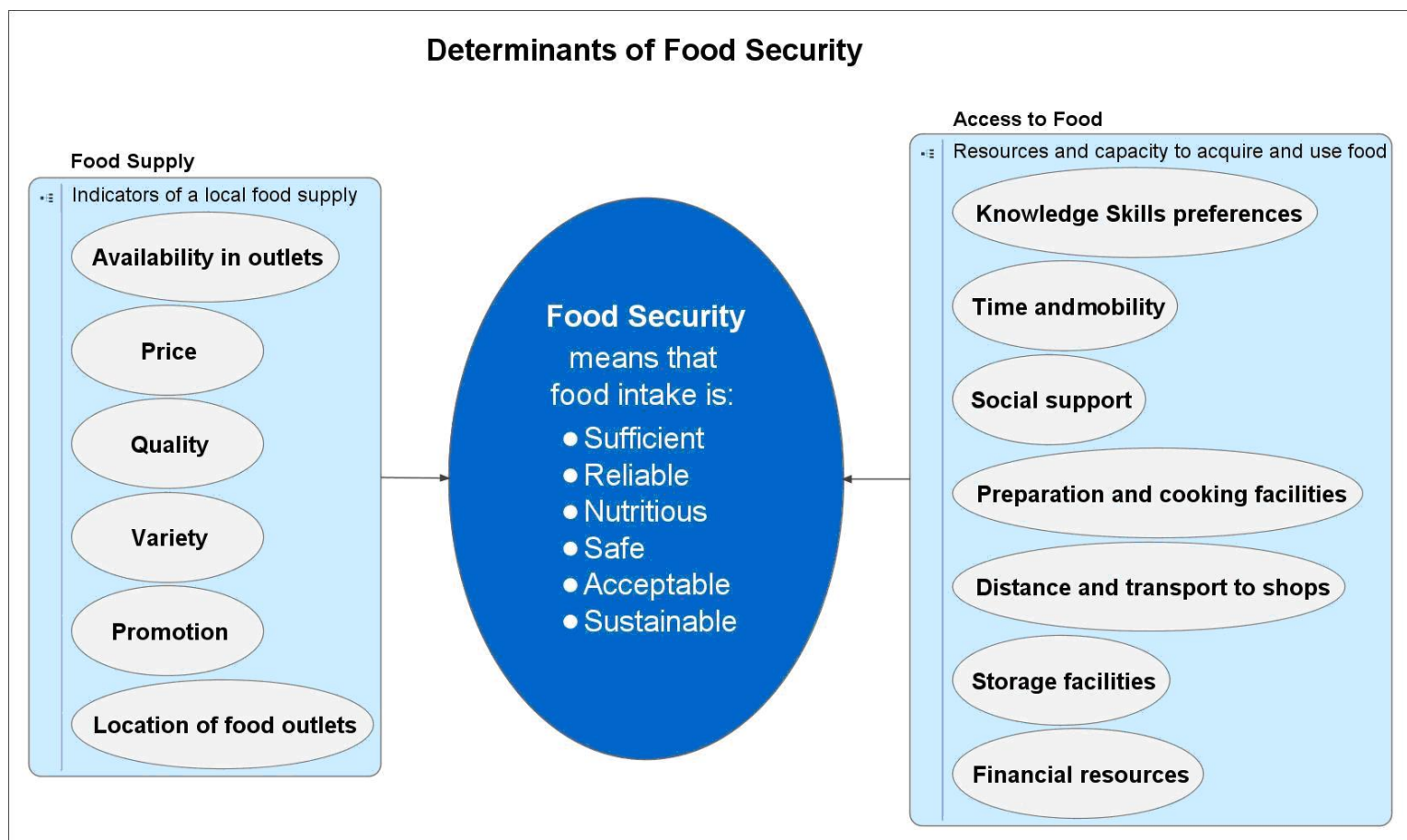


In line with the report produced by ISIS Primary Care entitled: First Steps to improving Food Security in Hobsons Bay, groups in Australia that are particularly likely to be food insecure include:

- low income families
- the unemployed
- people with a disability
- people from CALD and Indigenous backgrounds
- elderly people
- people affected by substance/alcohol abuse
- people with chronic health conditions
- homeless people.

### Why do people experience a lack of Food Security?

Food Security has many determinants as shown by the illustration below:



Rychetnik, Webb, Story & Katz (2002) *Food Security Options Paper*, NSW Centre for Public Health Nutrition. (Adapted from a model by McComb, Webb & Marks, 2000)

People experience a lack of food security when the food supply and / or access to food is inadequate. Populations experience a lack of food security due to:

- **Inadequate location and/or low availability of food outlets** – Physical barriers such as people with limited mobility of limited choices food outlets located nearby that have a limited stock of fresh food items

- **High food prices** – With the current economic situation many people that are on low or moderate incomes are spending a larger proportion of their pay check on food. Individuals reliant upon government benefits have fixed incomes and are especially vulnerable
- **Lack of a variety of food** – Some food stores lack in the diversity in the items available due to either demand being low or the cost to transport some items being prohibitive
- **Promotion of unhealthy foods leads to bad consumer choices** – Advertising is a multi-million dollar industry much of which is spent selling unhealthy (and cheap to produce) foods to children. Some successful companies are recognisable by their logo alone prompting people to buy their product regardless of the nutritional content
- **Difficulties in storing food** – While food may be accessible, some households may have limited ability to store more than a few days worth of food, which requires making frequent trips to obtain food
- **Diminished capacity to make healthy food choices** – Some people require social support to make healthy choices about food which may not be available
- **Lack of knowledge about preparing nutritious food** – Some people know how to cook. However, many don't know or have lost that knowledge. This is partially caused by a separation from food in a sense that most food we now eat does not come from field to plate but instead passes through a warren of delivery systems until it reaches store shelves
- **Lack of time for preparing and shopping for quality food** – Some people are too busy in their schedule to consume healthy food and are unable or unwilling to sacrifice time committed on other activities to prepare something more nutritious. Lack of exposure to alternative food choices may in turn cause poor food choices because of time constraints or other commitments.
- **Lack of social supports or extended family** – There are many single people who are new to the area or who live alone, which may preclude them from engaging in an average level of social contact.

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# What Is Being Done Internationally?

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Many of the images that come to mind when we hear the term food security are of developing countries which are far removed from where we live. While food security is a major problem in these countries we would be naïve to assume that any developed country is immune to similar situations. This is why in recent years more attention has been given to the rising costs of food worldwide.

In almost every country in the world, households are spending a larger portion of their income on food when compared to several years ago, creating an emerging problem which has potential for far reaching impacts.

Internationally, there are two main divisions of the UN which play a role in food security. These are the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

In 1996, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN convened the World Food Summit to encourage all sectors of civil society to join forces to ensure food security for the world's people. The participants of this summit developed the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

A lack of food security among disadvantaged and low income groups has been empirically demonstrated in many developed countries. Studies in Canada and the US indicated that single parent households were more likely to experience a lack of food security. A lack of food security was identified from respondents acknowledging they did not have enough money to buy food, acknowledgment that they were not eating the quality or variety of food desired or they simply did not have enough to eat (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

A recent example from the private sector where food security has been promoted is by the large British grocery chain Tesco and its recent venture in the United States market with a small format grocery store. Unlike most US retailers, some of Tesco's Fresh and Easy stores have been placed in underserved communities, where retailers have traditionally avoided. Over the long term this will help improve the health of the local population; however, the impact will be limited if market forces continue to drive the location of additional stores. This raises the question of public-private partnerships in tackling food security.

# What Is Being Done In Australia?

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## **Federal Government and Nationwide**

In 1992 the Federal Government through, what was then Department of Health, Housing and Community Services released a Food and Nutrition Policy with the aim of increasing the availability of nutritious foods for economically disadvantaged people and to increase understanding of good nutrition. In 2001, the Eat Well Australia: The National Public Health Nutrition Strategy was endorsed to assure food security and emphasise the need to address the food supply as well as individual's capacity to acquire food (Rychetnik, et al, 2002).

In both South Australia and Queensland, healthy food basket surveys have been conducted to understand the food supply at a state and local level in greater detail. It should be noted that those in major metropolitan areas fared far better in both the amount of food available as well as the variety. In areas such as Southwest Queensland, staple items were in short supply and most of what was available on a regular basis consisted of dry packaged goods which were of poor nutritional value.

Additionally, studies conducted in New South Wales (Food Security Options Paper: NSW Health 2003) and Victoria (Sustainable and Secure Food Systems for Victoria: Victorian Eco Innovation Lab 2008) have also contributed to the discussion in developing regional food security approaches.

The Australian Red Cross, while mostly known for its disaster relief efforts, also runs a nationwide school meal program for those students who might otherwise skip a meal during the day. Due to the stigma often associated with hunger amongst younger people, the program feeds everyone who participates regardless of their socio-economic status.

Examples of implemented food security policies here and in Canada have provided valuable insight into the scope of what can/can not be achieved through policy development.

## **State Government and within Victoria**

The Sustainable and Secure Food Systems for Victoria paper describes that there are significant and urgent challenges to the security and sustainability of the food system. It also identifies that the food system faces several challenges in becoming more sustainable in the future. The primary challenge being the need to reduce energy consumption while maintaining an increasing food supply as the population grows. This is a difficult task in light of climate change and increasing scarcity of inputs required for the production of food (particularly water).

There are several food security related pilot projects currently underway in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The most notable of which is being funded by VicHealth, called the Food For All program. This program has awarded funding to local and rural Councils to study food security and healthy eating. The Food For All program helped to identify groups at risk of experiencing a lack of food security, and to identify potential solutions to alleviating food security issues.

Other organisations undertaking work to promote Food Security in Victoria include CERES and Fare Share (formerly One Umbrella).

One Umbrella takes what would otherwise be considered surplus food such as that left over from large social functions and makes new meals which are then given out to those in need. One Umbrella is especially notable due to it being the sole food 'rescue' organisation in Melbourne, which operates on a large scale. They work closely with local food banks and continue to provide an ever increasing number of meals to those in need within the region.

CERES is a Brunswick based not-for-profit organisation that works with local communities on a variety of projects which promote sustainability and community self-reliance. These projects include methods for households and individuals to reduce food miles (the total distance which food travels between where it is grown and where it is consumed) and ways to cut back on energy consumption. They also educate communities on how to grow and maintain urban crops and are partnered with many state/local agencies to take advantage of a large body of knowledge in this particular field. Reducing food miles decreases energy consumption which over the long term helps the region to become more sustainable. Another advantage of reducing food miles is the freshness of food, as a result of the shortened time required to go from paddock to plate.

The Victorian Government has produced several resources for promoting healthy eating and planning for healthier communities including the Go for Your Life campaign which seeks to promote healthy eating and increased physical activity amongst all sections of Victoria's population. One aspect of this program called 'Kids – Go for Your Life' is focussed on children and healthy eating.

The Victorian Government has taken an on the ground approach to promoting a healthy environment through education, with the aim of making a positive impact on the choices individuals make in their daily lives. While it is still too early to measure how effective this campaign has been, it serves as an encouraging example of what can be tried to encourage healthy eating.

Most recently, the Department of Human Services has provided funding to three local Councils (Banyule, Darebin, and Hobsons Bay) to gauge how food security and access can be improved through policy. The goal of the project is to produce policy based measures which will assist local Councils in providing better services to parts of their communities who would normally be at a disadvantage due to a lack of food security.

# What Is Being Done Locally?

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## **What Are Local Organisations Doing?**

There are a number of initiatives currently being undertaken regionally and within the municipality which are proving effective in addressing food security issues.

The City of Maribyrnong has been addressing food security for many years and in 2002 adopted a Food Security policy. As a product of working with VicHealth and Deakin University, Maribyrnong City Council created a food desert mapping project in order to spatially identify where access to food was poor. The food desert map is an invaluable tool as it helps planners and community organisations see where they can improve their services. This mapping exercise also demonstrates the use of spatial data as a means of conveying the scale of a problem, which may otherwise be deemed unimportant or negligible.

Some work has been conducted in the area around community gardens. Community gardens serve as a good method of getting a large portion of the local population involved with food including providing access to fresh produce. In 2006 a community garden was established in the Laverton area. The garden is quite active and is operated by the local community. Additionally ISIS Primary Care has been working with Floyd Lodge high rise, in Williamstown to develop a community garden for its residents (Brown, 2007).

Two primary schools in Hobsons Bay, Altona Meadows and Altona Green Primary Schools have also established gardens with funding provided by the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation. The foundation seeks to promote healthy food through the participation of school aged children in the growing, preparation and consumption of food. This gives the participants a greater appreciation for where food comes from and what it takes to prepare it.

Another local project which focuses on the preparation of food are cooking classes held in community kitchens in Laverton Community Center. It is offered to local residents to teach them how to prepare healthy food. This skills training gives them the ability to improve their own quality of life.

The regional food kitchen is being built in Williamstown which will prepare meals for aged and low income individuals in fourteen municipalities across the North and West of the metropolitan region.

## **What is Hobsons Bay City Council Doing?**

A number of initiatives are currently being undertaken by the Hobsons Bay City Council to address food security issues, in particular through the Health and Wellbeing Plan.

The Council has identified food security as a priority issue for Laverton's Community Renewal Project. Laverton Community Renewal has been active in improving food security outcomes by working with local initiatives to provide healthier food options. As a result of funding from Vic Health, DHS – Northwest Region and support from local business a community garden was started which has been operating steadily for several years. In addition, a proposal is currently being submitted by the Laverton Community Renewal

team for the funding of a position which will liaise with the traders and the community to improve healthier food access.

In 2005 the Council's Public Health department initiated the Healthy Choices for Children Awards. These were initiated to promote healthier menu options in local cafes and restaurants. The program has achieved some success, however uptake has been slow, possibly due to perceived difficulties in the business community about providing healthy food on their menus (ie financial viability). The Public Health Department continues to review and improve the program.

In relation to children, the Council has been receiving funding to run the Kids 'Go for your life' (KGFYL) program since September 2006. KGFYL aims to establish healthy habits at an early age so the principles of good health are taken through childhood, and into adulthood. One of the key objectives of KGFYL is to influence local policy and to create community environments that are supportive of healthy eating and physical activity for children and their families. In research undertaken as part of the KGFYL Program, food security emerged as an important issue.

Regarding vulnerable communities, the Council is working in close partnership with other key stakeholders to support residents of the Half Moon Caravan Park in Brooklyn. This Council and community initiative aims to provide services in the form of educational programs to improve community solidarity around issues by which they are affected such as food security and health awareness. A weekly soup kitchen is offered to residents as well as access to the café meals program funded through DHS.

In relation to older people, people with disabilities and their carers, who have been assessed as nutritionally at risk and are unable to prepare regular meals, the Council provides the café and meals on wheels programs.

The café meals program is in place to ensure eligible people have access to affordable meals within a social setting. There are a number of cafes where persons who are frail aged or have a disability can go for a meal. The Meals on Wheels program facilitates access to healthy food options for those who would otherwise have difficulty in getting healthy meals due to their limited mobility. Individuals can choose a three course meal from the menu and the meals are delivered daily by a volunteer.

Most recently, the Hobsons Bay City Council has been funded by the Department of Human Services to develop a food security policy statement. This policy will:

- Assist the Council in identifying its food security priorities
- Underpin any future work the Council undertakes in relation to food security
- Identify the Council's role and responsibilities in addressing food security issues within the municipality.

### **Where do we go from here?**

In order to develop this food security policy statement the Council will undertake a community consultation exercise, the results of which will be used to tailor and inform the food security policy statement and the priorities for future work in the area.

Undertaking a community consultation will also assist the Council to put a human face on the food security issue. Consultation will include both survey and focus group exercises, open to a variety of stakeholders, including residents, service providers and Council staff.

Following the development of the food security policy statement, recommendations will be developed in relation to the types of actions required to ensure a continued commitment to improving food access as well as improving the health of the community.



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