

## **Hobsons Bay City Council**

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### **Improving Access to Food in Hobsons Bay (Food Security) Policy Statement**

#### **Defining the Issue**

Recently, international attention has been given to the rising costs and implications for acquiring and producing food. 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.

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

Populations experiencing a lack of food security are focused on meeting their basic need for food and are at risk of:

- Including children who have poor development and school performance
- Feeling powerless, socially excluded and prone to depression
- A greater risk of chronic disease and poor health outcomes
- Higher incidences of unemployment and crime

A lack of food security can affect anyone, in particular during hard economic times. However, there are a number of groups at greater risk of being food insecure, including (and not limited to) low or fixed income earners, people with disabilities, homeless persons and newly arrived migrants. 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 leading 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

#### **The Municipal Setting**

In Hobsons Bay, the 2006 Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) data, revealed that 7.7% of the adult population living in the municipality had experienced a lack of food security (defined in this instance as running out of food at some point and not being able to afford to buy more, within the last 12 months). This figure is higher than the Victorian State average of 6.0%.

The Hobsons Bay municipality is diverse, and as such disadvantage varies. According to the SEIFA index of disadvantage, Laverton is the most disadvantaged neighbourhood area followed by Brooklyn and Altona North.

Work undertaken over the last few years by ISIS Primary Care has highlighted that populations living within the most disadvantaged areas of the municipality are more vulnerable to experiencing a lack of food security not only for economic reasons or personal circumstances, but also because of causal factors, including the physical location and spatial access of food outlets. The

HealthWest Primary Care Partnership and work undertaken through the Council's Kids – 'Go For Your Life' also highlight food security as an issue within Hobsons Bay.

## **Context for the Hobsons Bay City Council's Work on the Issue**

The Hobsons Bay City Council has recognised access to 'safe and nutritious food' as a priority area of focus for its work within the municipality's Health and Wellbeing Plan 2007 - 2011.

In 2008, the Council undertook work to establish a common understanding of the food security issue. This work also served to highlight the areas in which the Council was currently undertaking work to address food insecurity.

A community consultation in early 2009 identified the factors that the community deemed important when accessing food as well as their views on what is needed within the municipality in order to improve access to food. The community consultation also assisted to identify areas where the Council might have a role to play in influencing and addressing food security issues into the future.

This work is described in more detail within the Food Security Discussion Paper and the Community Consultation Report which accompany this policy statement.

## **The Purpose and Intention of this Policy**

The Hobsons Bay City Council recognises that the factors affecting populations vulnerable to food security are complex and require a variety of responses from a range of stakeholders.

In the absence of any Federal or State policies, local government is limited in its capacity to address all the determinants surrounding the food security issue.

However, given that food security has been confirmed as an issue for sections of the population living within Hobsons Bay, the Council recognises that a local response to the issue is required in order to promote initiatives and solutions at the local level.

**The purpose of this policy statement is to inform and guide future work relating to improving access to food for vulnerable populations in Hobsons Bay, within a Human Rights based framework.**

## Vision for Improving Access to Food in Hobsons Bay

Key stakeholders working together to develop an active coordinated effort which endeavours to ensure all residents living in Hobsons Bay are able to access safe and nutritious food, at all times, without having to resort to emergency resources.

### Guiding Principles

The following fundamental principles will guide the Hobsons Bay City Council's strategic directions for improving access to food in Hobsons Bay.

1. Access to safe and nutritious food is a basic human right to which all residents of Hobsons Bay are entitled.
2. Populations who have adequate access to food experience better health and wellbeing outcomes and are at less risk of chronic diseases.
3. The Hobsons Bay City Council recognises that the factors affecting food security are complex and include environmental, economic and social factors that relate to the acquisition and production of food.
4. The local, national and global effects of climate change will have an impact on the availability, choice and price of food.
5. All levels of Government have a role to play in addressing the factors underpinning the food security. Local government is currently limited in its capacity to address all the determinants surrounding the food security issue.
6. The Hobsons Bay City Council is committed to ensuring a cooperative effort by the community and all levels of Government to ensure improvements in food access at the local level occur.
7. Local Government is well placed to provide leadership to mitigate the impacts of a lack of food security in its community, through cross departmental solutions to local needs, now and into the future.
8. The Hobsons Bay City Council recognises that it is important that the needs of those in the community vulnerable to experiencing a lack of food security are heard. The Hobsons Bay City Council can advocate on behalf of vulnerable populations as well as the services supporting them to assist in addressing inequalities.

### Strategic Directions

The strategic directions outlined in this policy will guide the Hobsons Bay City Council's current and future work towards addressing the various determinants of food security.

#### Strategy 1 - Advocating for Food Security

**The Council will work in partnership with key stakeholders in the region to advocate for resources to address food security issues.**

The Hobsons Bay City Council recognises that the factors affecting populations vulnerable to food security are complex and require a variety of responses from a range of stakeholders. It is recognised that within Hobsons Bay the number of organisations providing welfare services is limited. Therefore, it is important that the needs of those in the community vulnerable to experiencing a lack of food security are heard. The Council is well placed to build partnerships and undertake the

research and advocacy required to attract resources and promote initiatives and solutions at the local level.

## **Strategy 2 - The Urban Environment**

**Through its land use, town planning, economic development and infrastructure responsibilities, the Council will aim to ensure residents have access to affordable, safe and nutritious food within walking distance or by easily accessible transport.**

Populations vulnerable to a lack of food security experience a range of barriers which may be either linked to their own limited mobility, their capacity to afford and/or their ability to access food due to the urban landscape in which they live. Some areas of Hobsons Bay have limited choice of food outlets and limited public transportation for residents. This exacerbates food security issues for those most vulnerable.

## **Strategy 3 - Education for Healthy and Sustainable Eating**

**The Council will help promote community initiatives that increase knowledge of food preparation, nutritional education and the production of environmentally sustainable food.**

In order for populations to be food secure not only do they need to have access to the right foods at affordable prices, but they also need to be able to obtain relevant information to make the right nutritional choices and be able to prepare the foods that will lead to a balanced diet. It is also important for populations to be aware of the implications that production, manufacture, transport and packaging of food have on the natural environment and be able to more readily access food that is locally grown.

## **Strategy 4 - The Council's Food Services**

**The Council's food services will provide meals that cater for the nutritional and cultural needs of residents vulnerable to a lack of food security.**

Through the delivered meals service and Café Meals program, the Council works with the community to provide meals to vulnerable residents in our community who due to age, disability or frail health, are unable to prepare or access food. It is important to ensure that the food provided through the Council's food services reflects the needs of the community, both from a nutritional and cultural perspective.

## **Strategy 5 - Support in Emergency Situations**

**The Council will facilitate and support the work of community based organisations to ensure that residents vulnerable to a lack of food security are assisted in times of need.**

Populations that are on fixed or low incomes, who are homeless or have drug, alcohol, mental health problems or have a disability, are vulnerable to finding themselves in situations where they run out of food and don't have the necessary money to buy what is required to feed themselves or their families adequately. Such vulnerable populations turn to the support offered by emergency relief providers and other community based organisations. It is critical for the Council to support the valuable work that these organisations and their volunteers undertake with limited resources, to ensure residents get the assistance they need in times of crisis.

## **Strategy 6 - Encouraging Healthy Eating Practices**

**The Council will lead by example and encourage healthy eating practices across the municipality and within the Council's own programs and activities, in particular within services which cater for children.**

It is recognised that populations that experience poor nutrition are at risk of chronic disease. Although it is important to ensure populations are food secure throughout the lifespan, it is also important to form good habits early, and as such the Council recognises the importance of ensuring services such as long day childcare provide nutritional foods that aid a balanced diet for children in Hobsons Bay. The Council is well placed to encourage healthy eating practices not only within its own services and programs, but also in schools, services and across the community.