



# Food Insecurity in Warrnambool 2022

South West  
Healthcare  
Regional Health Promotion

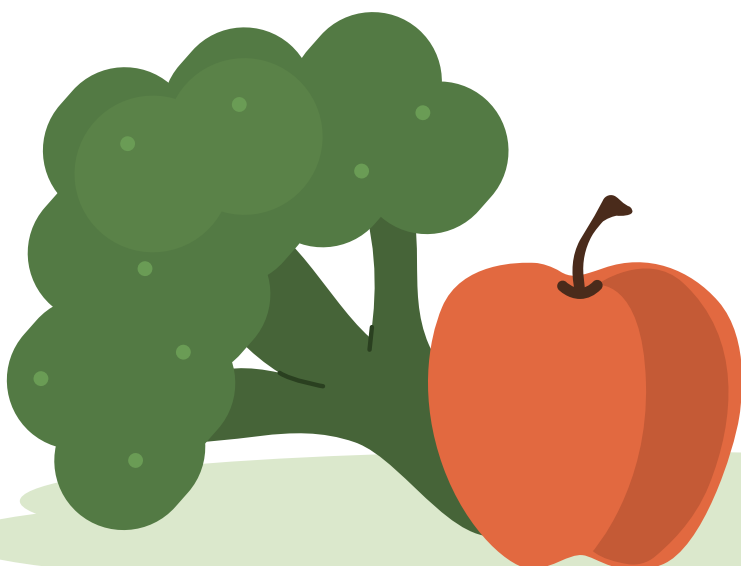
## Food Insecurity Investigation Snapshot

**Being food secure means having enough food to meet your individual energy needs, is nutritious, culturally appropriate and is obtained in socially-accepted ways. Food insecurity exists when availability of food or a person's ability to acquire this food is limited or uncertain (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2012).**

The South West Healthcare Health promotion team investigated the experience of food insecurity in Warrnambool in 2022 due to the following data indicating food insecurity was a growing concern locally.

- Warrnambool residents are not eating enough fruit and vegetables. In 2017, the Victorian Population Health Survey found that only 4% of adults in Warrnambool were meeting the vegetable consumption guidelines and 40% were meeting the fruit consumption guidelines.
- In 2020, 6.6% of people in Warrnambool reported that they ran out of money to buy food in the last 12 months.
- COVID-19, disruptions to food supplies and the rising cost of living has dramatically impacted people's financial situation and their ability to access and purchase food, resulting in an increase in the number of people reporting food insecurity.

## What we did?

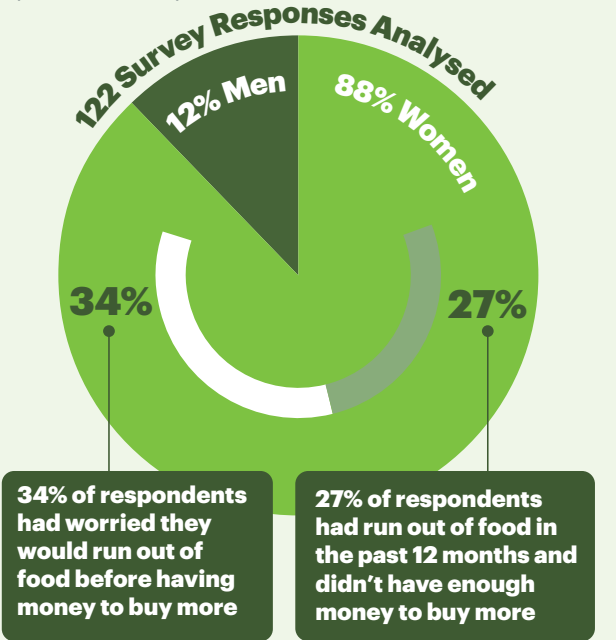


- ✓ **Developed 1 Literature review**
- ✓ **Developed 1 environmental scan**
- ✓ **Completed the Victorian Healthy Food Basket Survey in Warrnambool**
- ✓ **Completed interviews with 12 service providers (17 professionals in total)**
- ✓ **Distributed a community food survey, with 122 responses analysed**
- ✓ **Completed interviews with 15 community members**
- ✓ **Completed mapping of food outlets in Warrnambool City Council**

# What we found out

## Having access to affordable healthy food should be a right, not a privilege

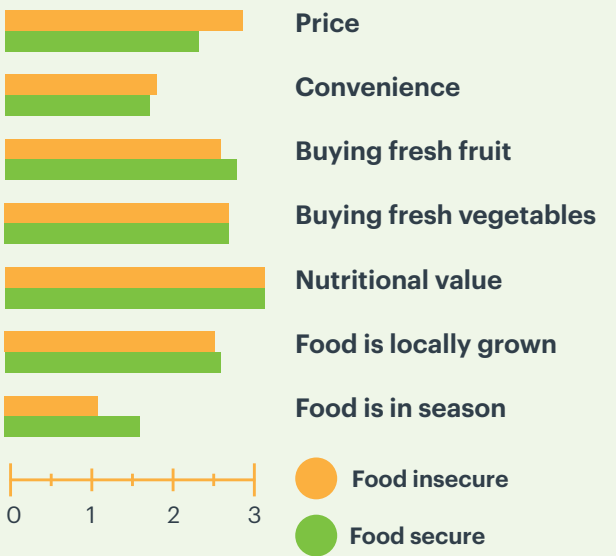
Our results demonstrated the right to food is not upheld for everyone.



We found that the majority of people want to eat healthy food. When asked about their priorities when it comes to purchasing and consuming food,

- Both those who had experienced food insecurity and those who were food secure placed an equally high value on buying fresh fruit and vegetables, and the nutritional value of food.
- However respondents who experienced food insecurity were more likely to place higher importance on the price of food, and whether meals could stretch to feed their family.

## Priorities when shopping for food



## The cost of living and low incomes are making it hard for many people to eat delicious healthy food

Our findings suggest that income and the rising cost of living are the main drivers of food insecurity and this supports the literature.

Of the 61 respondents in the food survey that indicated they had experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months,

- 77% answered that “not enough money” was a factor and
- 52% answered that “food costs too much at the local shops”

However, it also became evident that food insecurity is a complex, socially determined issue that is a symptom of larger issues of inequity, marginalisation and poverty.

- Key themes that emerged from the interviews;
- Financial stress caused by low income, unemployment and the rising costs of living has a huge impact on the amount and variety of foods that households have access to.

**“The pension isn’t enough. Rental costs are going up \$50-60 a week. More than half your pension goes on rent...you have insurances, you have phone, you have internet, you have all those things and sometimes just really struggle”**

- Housing instability and transient housing limits the ability to prioritise food, and restricts access to storage and cooking equipment
- Mental health, trauma and stress impacts a person’s ability to prioritise food, and engage in health promoting behaviours.

Food stress occurs when a healthy diet costs more than 25% of a person’s weekly income.

- The Victorian Healthy Food Basket showed that a baseline healthy diet in Warrnambool can cost anywhere from 6% to 37% of a household’s weekly income, based on median income and different forms of Centrelink assistance.

	Family of 4 - dual income (household)	Single mum, 2 kids	Elderly woman	Single man
Median income	13% to 20%	15% to 25%	6% to 9%	8% to 12%
Centrelink payment	25% to 37%	24% to 37%	9% to 14%	19% to 29%

Families, particularly single parent households and those who rely on income support, are at high risk of experiencing food stress as a healthy diet can cost more than 25% of their weekly income.

## Having access to affordable healthy food within walking distance or an easy commute can support our communities to enjoy nutritious foods

A food desert is an area that has limited access to affordable and nutritious food within a convenient travelling distance of 1km. Healthy food outlets include anywhere that sell a significant quantity of fresh produce, including supermarkets, fruit and vegetable shops, farmers markets, butchers and fresh seafood shops.

The area of West Warrnambool has been identified as a food desert. As demonstrated in the image below, the white dots highlight the food outlets in Warrnambool, and the dark orange circle shows the lack of food outlets located in the West Warrnambool area.

- West Warrnambool is also one of the most disadvantaged areas in Warrnambool City Council, according to the SEIFA Index of Socio-economic Disadvantage.
- Research reveals that more advantaged areas in communities have closer access to healthy food outlets, and conversely areas of lower socioeconomic status had closer access to fast food outlets (Vic Health, 2016).

Challenges with transport, such as not having a car or accessible public transport makes it difficult to purchase healthy food, especially when people are far from food outlets

*"there's so many conveniently located fish and chip shops. There may not be a shopping centre close by, but there's always a fish and chip shop. \$5, you feed a family".*

## Involving children in meal preparation and decision making can build lifelong skills and love of healthy foods

**Skills and knowledge** are important enablers to healthy eating and interviews with community members suggested that these skills are often learnt in childhood.

*"I really do think it begins in childhood. It should not be assumed that every child would learn to cook at home, not every child has a grandmother or grandfather to teach them how to cook or a mother or father who can cook ..."*

**Food preference and behaviours** are not only influenced by taste but also the impacts of early life.

*"I don't believe I had that healthy eating when I was brought up, so my kids think I'm really fussy ... when I was younger we did a lot of travelling and we just went through the drive through wherever we went and I'm so the opposite with my kids"*

**Time and convenience** are also important considerations, particularly for people with young children.

*"It's so much easier when you know what you're having each night ... it just makes it a bit more organised and takes the stress away from just something as simple as a meal".*



## When we work together, we can make it easier and more affordable for our community to enjoy delicious healthy food

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Based upon our findings from the community investigation, the below three actions are most important to address food insecurity;

### Make affordable healthy food more available

- Cost, quality and variety has been recognised throughout the survey and our interviews as a key barrier to eating nutritious food and having enough food.
- *"A cheap fruit and vegetable market in my area"* was selected by 66% of respondents in the survey as something that would make it easier for them to eat nutritious food.

### Remove barriers to accessing healthy food

- Improving emergency food relief and the increased promotion and connection to affordable options is important to ensure adequate access to food.
- Further explore the challenges experienced utilising public transport and identify opportunities to enhance convenience and access. Public transport that meets the community's needs may enhance access to healthy food, particularly for those located in food deserts.
- *"A guide to shops selling cheap food in Warrnambool"* was chosen by 31% of respondents in the survey as something that would make it easier for them to eat nutritious food.

### Provide opportunities for people to learn about food

- Knowledge and skills to cook and grow your own food were both raised as areas of interest for further support by respondents, and are often the focus of food initiatives.
- *"Recipes for easy and cheap meals"* was chosen by 31% of all respondents in the survey as something that would make it easier for them to eat nutritious food.
- *"Knowing how to grow my own fruit and vegetables"* was chosen by 31% of people who had experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months, as something that would make it easier for them to eat nutritious food.

## Summary

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**In summary, food insecurity is a growing concern locally with many residents feeling the impacts of the rising cost of living, low incomes and housing insecurity. Affording a healthy diet is out of reach for many people and this is made more challenging in areas that have limited access to healthy food, such as West Warrnambool.**

Further investment and support for local initiatives that reduce barriers to food, increase household and community resilience and improve affordability of food are vital for mitigating the impacts of food insecurity. The Warrnambool community has solid foundations to build on and many opportunities for local organisations to work together to support our communities to create more equitable, affordable and resilient food systems.

