

FOOD SECURITY IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE



Food security exists when everyone has the physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active, healthy lifestyle at all times.

Food insecurity occurs when a person cannot access food due to financial and environmental barriers. Apart from poorer general health, food insecurity is linked to an increased risk of anaemia, malnutrition, diabetes, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Some groups of people are at particular risk of food insecurity including asylum seekers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, unemployed people and those with little to no income.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for food relief from charities has already doubled as many people are out of work, getting less work or are waiting for financial assistance from the government.

The food relief system has been challenged by social distancing restrictions and a lack of volunteers, which forced some community groups providing food relief to close their doors. Donations of food from the major supermarkets also fell due to rising consumer demand. The pandemic has also exposed the vulnerability of supply chains, as demonstrated by widespread emptying of supermarket shelves and subsequent panic buying across Australia. When financial supports such as JobSeeker and JobKeeper are wound back, it is anticipated that rates of food insecurity in the city of Melbourne will surge further with those already vulnerable the hardest hit.

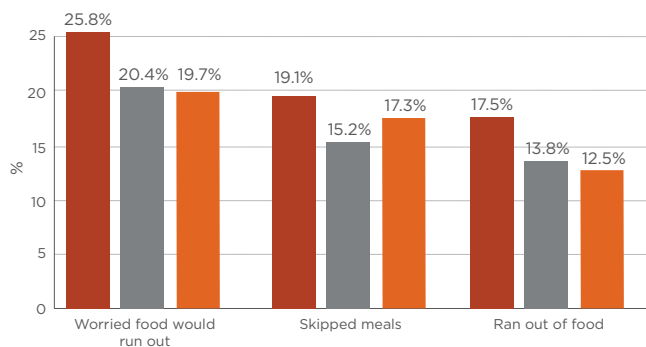
How are we tracking?



Food security

Alarming, the proportion of residents who reported experiencing food insecurity has increased from 25.8 per cent in 2019 to 32.9 per cent in 2020. From 2019 to 2020 the proportion of residents who :

- are worried food would run out rose by 5.4 per cent / increased from 20.4 to 25.8 per cent
- skipped meals increased from 15.2 to 19.1 per cent
- ran out of food increased from 13.8 to 17.5 per cent.



Key

2020 2019 2018

Figure 1. Proportion of city of Melbourne residents experiencing a food security issue 2018 and 2019

Source: City of Melbourne Community Indicators Survey

Certain groups in the community are at greater risk of experiencing food insecurity compared to the general population. These groups included:

- Younger adults aged 18–24 years (51.8 per cent increasing from 32.9 per cent in 2019)
- Young people who live alone (43.6 per cent)
- Students (43.5 per cent), carers (44.4 per cent) and pensioners (33.3 per cent)
- People who were unemployed (41.8 per cent) or employed on a part-time or casual basis (44.3 per cent)
- Less economically advantaged groups such as low-income households (less than \$33,799)
- People living in public housing (48.4 per cent) and renters (39.4 per cent)

Residents who spoke a language other than English were also more likely to be food insecure compared to residents who spoke only English (41.8 per cent compared with 22.3 per cent). The most food insecure suburbs are Carlton (42.7 per cent) and Melbourne (38.8 per cent).



Fruit and vegetable consumption

In 2020, only seven per cent of adults in the City of Melbourne consumed the recommended two serves of fruit and three serves of vegetables each day. While this is an improvement on 4 per cent in 2019, healthy eating could be further promoted within the municipality given 93 per cent of residents are still not meeting the recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables. Food deserts – areas where there is limited access to healthy food premises such as supermarkets – can make it difficult for some people in the community to access healthy, fresh produce and drive them to cheaper and unhealthier takeaway options. There is still a need to grow awareness and understanding of the importance of healthy eating within the community.



Production and consumption of own food

The proportion of residents who produce or preserve and consume their own food is rising in the City of Melbourne, with an increase from 58.9 per cent in 2020 to 61.4 per cent in 2019. Reduced dependence on external sources of food can help support food security within the community. Increased backyard vegetable gardens and home-cooking present opportunities for more fresh, nutritious food intake in the home.

Reports of a spike in demand for vegetable seeds and seedling suggests growing interest in backyard vegetable production during the COVID-19 pandemic.



How is the City of Melbourne responding?

- ▶ The **City of Melbourne Food Policy** recognises the impact of food on physical and mental health. It provides a guiding vision and framework to ensure sufficient and sustainable access to good food for all.
- ▶ The City of Melbourne's **Community Food Guide** is a resource for community agencies or anyone who needs information about how to access affordable, fresh and healthy food within the municipality of Melbourne. The guide includes information on food banks, parcels and vouchers; community meals, including free and cheap meals; food education, including classes and community kitchens; community gardens; fresh food and groceries and food rescue. A COVID-19 version is available to show which services remained open in some capacity.
- ▶ The City of Melbourne supports **Communal Gardening** groups like Kensington Stockyard Food Garden, which harvested 206 kg of produce and recorded 906 volunteer hours in a single year. The city's newest communal garden is the Drill Hall Community Garden on Therry Street. Communal gardens are an important way for people to access fresh produce, boost their wellbeing and build community connections as Melbourne's population grows. Growing sustainable, local produce and composting organic waste is also a great way to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and take action on climate change. Other communal gardens can be found at Stevenson Lane, Boyd Community Hub in Southbank, East Melbourne Library, Geographe Street in Docklands, and Courtney Street in North Melbourne.
- ▶ **Healthy Choices at the City of Melbourne** is dedicated to ensuring people always have access to healthy food and have the knowledge and capability to make the healthiest choice. The program helps food providers to improve their menus, offer more healthy options and enable consumers to make better food choices. Healthy Choices is based on the state government's Healthy choices: food and drink classification guide, which assesses a food's ingredients list to determine its overall nutritional value.