

Allocate responsibility

Identify who carries the food security agenda

Information Sheet Series: Ten ways local government can act on food security



What is Food for All?

VicHealth's *Food for All* program funded Victorian local governments to take a lead in addressing the problem of food insecurity by improving access to healthy food. Councils developed practical and long-lasting strategies to tackle food insecurity, particularly within disadvantaged communities.

This information sheet is one in a series of ten, designed to assist local government in advancing a food security agenda.

To have food security accepted as a legitimate area for local action and policy, it's important to assign the role of driving the food security agenda within Council and the community to a specific staff member.

The *Food for All* program identified 'allocating responsibility' as crucial in raising awareness of local food security issues, getting the issues understood, initiating local strategies and policies, and building the essential relationships within Council and with local businesses and community agencies.

The role of carrying the food security agenda works best when it is:

- placed within the social or health planning section of Council
- integrated into an existing role rather than a separate project.

The person in this role needs to:

- be at a sufficiently senior level and have research analysis and strategic thinking skills
- have community development and/or health promotion experience
- be familiar with the processes of local government and can confidently develop and foster relationships within Council and in the broader community.

How can local government implement this recommendation?

Advancing a food security agenda is an enormous task which requires cooperation across many Council departments and portfolios. Actions and strategies can include the following:

- Allocate resources to support the development and implementation of new food security actions and initiatives. If the food security role is added to the portfolio of an existing staff member, Council will need to address the question of capacity. You may need an external consultant to run part of the program; for example, to facilitate a forum or write a report.
- Ensure the role is well supported by management especially in the early stages when introducing food security as an issue across Council. Without senior level support, doors do not open, other priorities will dominate and the person with allocated responsibility may find the challenges too great.

For more information about VicHealth's work on food security go to www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/foodforall

- Include the person responsible for food security in council communications and meetings to enable the development of informal and formal information-sharing and relationships across work units.
- Build partnerships across sectors and across council departments, because the food security focus needs to be broad and encompass human services, infrastructure planning, urban development, food supply, business development and sustainability.
- Look for potential synergies in council and community projects. For example, strategies addressing social disadvantage or community transport could provide valuable opportunities for complementary food security initiatives.

Food for All program examples

The *Food for All* program showed that it worked well giving someone specific responsibility to advance food security within Council. The following examples demonstrate that the role was especially successful when the project officer was placed within the right team.

The **Maribyrnong City Council** *Fruit and Veg for All* Project Coordinator was placed in the Safer Communities and Health Promotion team within the Community Planning and Advocacy Branch. This area also included Environmental Health, which allowed for valuable interaction with staff from several portfolios and projects.

The **Swan Hill Rural Shire Council** *Food for All* Project Officer was initially employed within the Community Facilitation branch. This area was responsible for managing funded projects. Four years later, the position was moved into the Environmental Health department. This move was very beneficial to the program because it provided greater opportunities for the integration of food security across Council. It conveyed the message that food security is 'core business' and enabled the officer to work alongside mainstream staff, allowing for greater interaction and knowledge sharing on a daily basis.

The **Brimbank City Council** *Food for All* Project Officer was initially in the Community Wellbeing Department, and then moved into the Social and Health Policy Unit within the Community Planning and Development Department. This placed the project closer to staff in social and health planning roles, with the project officer more able to influence policy, planning and strategic development.

At first, the **Shire of Melton** placed the *Food for All* project in the Aged and Disability Services Branch because the project initially focused on developing a mobile food van service. This led to a discreet service delivery perspective rather than a cross-council social planning perspective.

The project was then moved to the Social Development Team within the Community Support and Development Branch. This placed the project officer closer to staff developing the Public Health Plan and offered many more opportunities for influencing cross-council planning.

View the *Food for All* micro-movies at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/foodforall

Further reading

Centre for Public Health Nutrition. 2002. *Food Security Options Paper: A planning framework and menu of options for policy and practice interventions*. Sydney: University of New South Wales.

Montague M. 2009. *Food Access and Security Policy development in Local government: An evaluation of projects in the Cities of Darebin, Banyule and Hobson's Bay*. For the North West Metropolitan Department of Health in Melbourne.

Montague M. *Learnings from the evaluation of the Food For All Program*. (Paper given at the VicHealth Food Forum August 2008.) Visit the 'Food for All' section of the VicHealth website: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

Slade C. 2009. *The Role of Local Government in Food Security: A Literature Review*. The City of Banyule and the City of Darebin. La Trobe University, Community Planning and Development Program.

VLGA Food Security Network. Visit the 'climate change' section of 'projects & campaigns': www.vlga.org.au