

Advocacy

Get your voice heard: advocate on food security

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.

The *Food for All* program identified that many barriers to food security stem from systems that local government cannot directly alter.

Many of the challenges that people have accessing fresh foods are economic in nature. People living on low incomes derived from government pensions or low wages, struggle to cover expenses associated with housing, transport, education, healthcare and resettlement. There is often very little money left over for food.

Local government is not responsible for the cost and availability of public transport, housing, food, petrol, education, healthcare and the size of government pensions and benefits, but it can be a strong voice to those that are: the state and federal governments.

Local government can advocate for change to improve food security at the local level.

How can local government implement this recommendation?

There are a number of areas where local government can advocate on behalf of its residents and influence factors around food insecurity that are normally outside its capacity. Local government can:

- advocate for the provision and costs of public transport, particularly in low socio-economic areas and areas with low car ownership rates
- advocate for the availability of affordable housing, and for the location of public housing to be close to shops and transport.
- promote health factors as important considerations when planning for urban land use and infrastructure, and promote the importance of state government leadership in ensuring this occurs routinely in relation to food access issues
- advocate to state and federal governments and generate public awareness and media around issues of food pricing, the advertising of unhealthy and healthy food products and food labelling

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

- lobby the state government to increase local government's powers to influence the business mix at the local level in the interests of public health
- make a request to the local water corporation for a reduction of watering restrictions for local work-based, community or home fruit and vegetable growing initiatives
- work with other councils to challenge state and federal government water management policy to ensure adequate stocks of water are available for the key food growing areas in regional Victoria
- advocate to the federal government to include education and support around buying, cooking and eating healthy local foods in settlement services for newly arrived communities.
- making a submission to the *Review of the 1984 Victorian Planning and Environment Act* (Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development) advocating for the inclusion of health effects in general – recommending that planning schemes be aligned with Municipal Public Health Plans to integrate health and planning objectives.

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) is one organisation through which local government can advocate around food security issues with broader audiences. VicHealth funded VLGA to look at ways of increasing the understanding among local government planners of the links between food security and land use planning. The manager of Statutory Planning from **Brimbank City Council** was a key stakeholder on this project's steering committee. The resulting report suggests ways forward and enhances understanding of the issues.

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

Further reading

Kettings C, Sinclair AJ, & Voevodin M. 2009. 'A healthy diet consistent with Australian health recommendations is too expensive for welfare-dependent families'. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 33(6):566-572.

King T, Kavanagh AM, Jolley D, Turrell G, & Crawford D. 2005. 'Weight and place: a multilevel cross-sectional survey of area-level social disadvantage and overweight/obesity in Australia'. *International Journal of Obesity* 1-7.

Public Health Association of Australia. 2009. *A future for food: Addressing public health, sustainability and equity from paddock to plate. A call to Action.*

Victorian Local Governance Association. 2009: *Integrating Land Use Planning and Community Food Security: A new agenda for Government to deliver on sustainability, economic growth and social justice.* Prepared for the VLGA by the Community Planning and Development Program, LaTrobe University, Bendigo Campus.

Victorian Local Governance Association. 2008: *Land Use Planning and Community Food Security Project: A literature review.* Prepared for the VLGA by the Community Planning and Development Program, LaTrobe University, Bendigo Campus .

Food for All program examples

Food for All councils advocated in a number of ways to help address specific food security barriers.

The **City of Greater Dandenong** alerted the Public Transport Commission to the impact of the removal of a bus stop from outside a caravan park where high numbers of significantly disadvantaged people lived. The removal of the bus stop was causing considerable hardship for the residents; for many, the bus was the only form of transport available to get to the closest shops. The Council's efforts resulted in the bus stop being reinstated.

Maribyrnong City Council undertook several strategies including:

- lobbying a commercial bus company to alter the bus timetable to make it easier for residents who live in an area of low car ownership, to get to the Footscray Market
- advocating strongly on the links between gambling, poverty and food insecurity, with a view to influencing the placement of gaming venues in the area