

Building the local picture

Establish an evidence base

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.

Each local government area will have its own story regarding food security. An invaluable resource can be produced by summarising key food security issues and local evidence into one document. This can be used as a tool for education, community engagement, advocacy, planning and policy development.

A good foundation in local evidence identifies where Council can have the most impact, what partnerships need to be developed, and what expertise and strategies are needed.

How can local government implement this recommendation?

Developing a local evidence base can be done by Council alone or in partnership with community agencies. The background document could include all or some of the following:

- a brief overview of the international, national and local government context of food security
- a resident survey that assesses the extent of food insecurity in the area, what it looks like, who experiences it, and what barriers they face

- mapping data on transport routes, fresh and fast food outlets, local food prices, socio-demographic and car ownership data, location of community gardens, liquor and gambling establishments
- an audit of council-owned land for potential use for food security purposes such as food growing
- statistics on emergency food relief demand
- local government data from the Victorian Government such as population surveys, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics for example, Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)
- identification of food security strategies already in place in the local area: for example, initiatives run by Council and the community such as Meals on Wheels, community gardens, food relief services, mobile fruit and vegetable vans, food delivery or food sharing programs and community cafes
- mapping of potential stakeholders both inside and outside of Council to identify who could do what in relation to food security.

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

This mapping can identify ways in which council units can be engaged in food security related responses; for example, in environmental sustainability, business development, community services and early childhood or leisure services.

You can also consider the following:

- The development of your local evidence document can be overseen by the health or social planner as part of broader work which assesses the health and wellbeing of residents, usually in preparation for a review of the Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP), the council plan or similar. The Environments for Health framework* can be a useful tool for use in the development of Municipal Public Health Plans.
- Nursing, community development, health promotion or dietetics students can be engaged to help carry out some of the data collection, report writing and survey design.
- Council units can be drawn into the process: the business planning units can help with the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps, the Environmental Health Unit has details of the location of food outlets, the Community Participation Section can undertake resident surveys and consultations, and the sustainability or community and leisure teams can contribute garden and gardening data.
- Outside experts can be contracted to produce the document, often as part of the Council Plan or MPHP development process.
- The local community health centre can be contracted or supported to do the work; a partnership between Council and community health can work well.

Food for All program examples

In the **City of Maribyrnong**, the Western Region Community Health Centre initiated a mapping process in 2006, using students

to survey food outlets. With the help of **Maribyrnong City Council's** Geographic Information System (GIS), specialist maps were produced that identified three large food deserts (areas where fresh and affordable food is not readily available) in Braybrook, Maidstone and West Footscray/Kingsville.

These maps included the presence of fruit and vegetable shops, comparative costs across the municipality, ratio of fruit and vegetable shops to takeaway stores, public transport and toilet access.

This was followed by a survey of people living in the food deserts. The survey showed that 25% of them found it difficult to shop for fruit and vegetables, mainly because of physical disabilities or an inability to carry heavy shopping.

This mapping project has been used as an education and advocacy tool both within Council and the community. The mapping was replicated in 2009 and provides a graphic depiction of food security issues and a strong basis for policy and strategy planning.

Maribyrnong City Council and City of Brimbank have inserted a food security question into the annual community satisfaction survey. Maribyrnong has additional questions around food security to provide a more detailed understanding of the causal factors influencing communities. This has been particularly helpful as it allows for analysis against housing type, family structure and gambling, for example.

* Victorian Department of Health's *Environments for Health: Municipal Public Health Planning Framework*.

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

Further reading

Burns, C 2004. *A review of the literature describing the link between poverty, food insecurity and obesity with specific reference to Australia*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

Victorian Department of Health 2001. *Environments for Health: Municipal Public Health Planning Framework*. Visit www.health.vic.gov.au

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2008. *Food for All How local government is improving access to nutritious food*. [See pages 12–13 on the development Maribyrnong mapping project; 14–15 on research in Melton.]

Wyndham City Council, Social Planning Unit 2009. *Food security project: Local Government and neighbourhood renewal*. DHS and VLGA.

See also:

Darebin City Council has a good example of the development of a background paper that covers the international, national, local food security scene, food outlet mapping, etc. Visit www.darebin.vic.gov.au

Hobsons Bay City Council also developed a background paper in 2008/9 as a prelude to the development of a food access and security policy statement. Visit www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au

Penrith City Council has developed a fact sheet about food security in the municipality. Visit www.penrithcity.nsw.gov.au

The City of Port Philip has been working on food security for some time. Visit www.portphillip.vic.gov.au

The *Mapping Maribyrnong 2009* report can be found at www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au

Victorian Local Governance Association has been working in food security for some time and has developed a Rapid Assessment Procedure to assist local government to utilise the *Environments for Health Municipal Public Health Planning Framework* (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2001) to assess food security issues in their local area. Visit www.vlga.org.au