

# Food for All

How local government is improving access to nutritious food









# Foreword

Australia is seen as the land of plenty but large numbers of Australians don't have regular access to affordable nutritious foods.

Try buying healthy fresh food if you don't have an adequate income, or affordable outlets you can reach, or somewhere to store and cook the food.

'Food insecurity' is much more common than we think or would like and it has much broader consequences than just diet – it impacts on people's physical, mental and social wellbeing, and their ability to work.

In Australia, food security\* problems are invisible to most people. Resources to address food security issues are limited; and a lack of awareness and understanding of food security means there are few frameworks or models to address the problem.

Those most at risk of food insecurity include people with low or no income, and those who live in poor quality or insecure housing. Often the groups who are most affected are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, refugees, single parents, people with chronic illnesses or disabilities, people living in remote or isolated areas and young unemployed people.

Most strategies to improve access to nutritious food for these vulnerable groups have focused on short-term emergency food relief or individual counselling and health education.

As far back as 1995, the ABS *National Nutrition Survey* found that food insecurity was experienced by 5% of people aged 16 years and over. More recently, 53 of Victoria's 79 local government areas have reported that one in 20 of their residents ran out of food in the last 12 months and could not afford to buy more.

Based on these figures, several hundred thousand Victorians are at risk of food insecurity.

At VicHealth we have long recognised that having adequate and nutritious food is the basis of good health. We know that the greatest population health gains can be achieved by ensuring a coordinated government approach

to food policies and that strategies support food security for everyone, with a specific focus on people living in the most disadvantaged areas.

With this in mind, we partnered with the Department of Human Services to fund two food security demonstration projects in 2001. These projects (one in the City of Maribyrnong and the other in the City of Yarra, under the auspices of North Yarra Community Health Services) showed that local sustainable action is needed to reduce the barriers that make it difficult for people to have access to food for healthy eating.

To have an impact, food insecurity solutions need to be linked to other community and government activities, such as housing strategies, community and urban planning, neighbourhood renewal, shopping strip revitalisation and tourism. Also food security must be built into policy frameworks, such as local government Municipal Public Health Plans and Municipal Strategic Statements, in order to provide focus and leadership and ensure there is action at the local level.

The demonstration projects helped to build experience and knowledge to develop potential frameworks and models. In particular, they informed the development of our long-term program, Food for All. We work with local governments in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage to improve integrated planning to access nutritious food, and develop sustainable programs that make it easier for people to source, store and cook healthy foods.

We used existing SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas) data to reach out to the most disadvantaged groups: Only local government areas with more than 20% of their population living in areas with low SEIFA scores were eligible to apply.

We also made food *access* the key focus.

Our primary partners are local councils because we believe they are best placed to develop relevant, integrated and long-lasting strategies to tackle this problem.

The eight councils (covering nine municipalities), funded for three years through Food for All, are offering practical and sustainable ways to help residents living in disadvantaged areas regularly access a variety of nutritious foods. These practical activities, together with a greater focus on connecting this issue *within* councils, have shown progress in several areas. Many initiatives are showcased in this publication. The stories demonstrate each council's leadership and success at working together within council and in pulling together a diverse range of organisations and people to contribute their skills, ideas and services.

As well as providing funding for local governments, we are supporting projects to share information and experiences about ways to improve food security. These include a web-based Food Security Network hosted by the Victorian Local Governance Association; regular meetings for funded projects to exchange knowledge and expertise; external evaluation; free annual public forums, and specifically designed communications resources and strategies to raise awareness of food security in Victoria.

Drought, climate change, increasing prices of petrol and food, and housing stress have escalated issues related to not having enough food to eat, even in a country like Australia. We have a head start in trying to find strategies to improve access to nutritious foods and food security, and it's important that we share what we have learnt.

I hope you find these stories food for thought.



**Todd Harper**

Chief Executive Officer  
Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

\* Food security is the ability to consume quality, affordable, culturally appropriate nutritious food from non-emergency sources.







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## Acknowledgements

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## More Information

To find out more about why VicHealth promotes and invests in healthy eating, go to [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/healthyeating](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/healthyeating)

**Cover illustration:** *Toby Quarmby, Vishus Productions. Draws on information and concepts from the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab.*

**Left:** *At VicHealth we have long recognised that having adequate and nutritious food is the basis of good health. Photo: Mark Farrelly*





# Welcome to Brimbank

**Fact sheets on food preparation and food purchasing, and a handy map, are key features of a new 'Welcome Kit' for emerging communities.**

Many new arrivals and people from refugee backgrounds call the western suburbs of Melbourne home. In the City of Brimbank, 43% of residents were born overseas and 54% of the community speaks a language other than English.

To help residents make the transition to a new life a lot healthier and less stressful, Brimbank City Council and project partners developed an easy-to-use 'Welcome Kit'. Unique in its content and layout, it is helping people familiarise themselves with fresh fruit and vegetables as well as healthy and safe food practices.

The resource is colourful and easy to read and has high-quality photos of common fruits and vegetables and instructions on how to buy, prepare, cook and store each item.

It also contains a map highlighting fruit and vegetable outlets in the Brimbank municipality, encouraging people to shop locally.

The kit was produced as part of Brimbank City Council's Food for All program, in partnership with the Migrant Resource Centre North West Region, ISIS Primary Care and WestNet.

Developed in consultation with settlement workers and community guides (key points of contact for new arrivals) it was initially published in Arabic, Amharic, Somali and Tigrinya. It is now also available in Khmer and Dari.

Ingrid Phyland, project officer for promoting healthy eating in Brimbank, says that African new arrivals were the primary target for the information.

"It is known that many new arrivals and people from refugee backgrounds are unfamiliar with Australian produce, particularly fruit and vegetables. Many have difficulty locating familiar foods and lack an understanding of our common food preparation practices and use of cooking equipment," says Ingrid.

Cooking classes and shopping tours run by local agencies led to wide acceptance and promotion of the kit, especially among African communities.

“ They were very excited when they could identify their own street and work out where they could shop locally for fruits and vegetables. ”

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**Left:** Participants in the Sudanese Learning Program use the Welcome Kit to find fresh produce in Brimbank. Photo: Migrant Resource Centre North West Region

Council-run focus groups with Sudanese women have revealed how the kit is being used and whether it has influenced shopping habits and food preparation.

“Many women say they keep the kit in their kitchen and regularly refer to it. One woman said her son has cooking classes at school and shows her at home, from the kit, the fruit and veggies he used, so he is educating her as well. Many are from very close-knit communities and say they pass the information they have learnt on to their friends,” says Ingrid.

Claudia Garzon Ribeiro from the Migrant Resource Centre North West Region says the project has highlighted a number of cultural issues.

“New arrivals sometimes come from refugee camps where they have had no electricity or access to running water. They arrive in Australia and it’s taken for granted that they will know how to use a microwave or an oven. Many won’t drink from a tap because they are used to boiling water before they drink it. The community guides are often new arrivals themselves, and in the middle of their own settling process and learning all of this too,” says Claudia.

To reach new arrivals as early as possible, the Council collaborated with Adult Multicultural Education Services to incorporate the kit into their English-language classes.

“We wanted to catch people early in their resettlement, before they adopted some of the unhealthy eating habits common to our western lifestyle,” says Ingrid.

The kit has also been incorporated into local parenting programs. Syl Legane, who teaches English as a Second Language, used it with Sudanese mothers at Sunshine Primary School.

**Right:** The Welcome Kit assists with familiarisation of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as healthy and safe food practices.

“The women loved the photos. I will never forget the smile on their faces when they could identify some familiar foods,” says Syl. “They also loved using the map – they were very excited when they could identify their own street and work out where they could shop locally for fruits and vegetables.”

The project has also identified the need for training and support around healthy eating for workers who are in contact with newly arrived communities. They are often the main dissemination point of food and nutrition messages and sometimes misconceptions about diet and food safety are transferred.

Unique in its content and layout, the kit is a valuable health promotion tool that gives critical support to many new arrivals. But it has also been used by many other agencies in their food-related activities, and is a valuable resource that can help other groups at risk of food insecurity, including people with low literacy levels or disabilities.

And as Ingrid Phyland says, the kit has increased understanding across the council of the issues associated with food access and the barriers new arrivals face in settling into a new country. “We have new links with Asset Management who helped develop the maps, as well as with Economic Development, Communications and Environmental Health,” she says.

Welcome Kit fact sheets in multiple languages can be downloaded from the Brimbank City Council website at [www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/welcomekit](http://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/welcomekit). For further information, contact the Community Planning & Development Department on (03) 9249 4030.

## What made the difference?

- Partnerships between local government and key community, welfare and settlement agencies to develop and distribute the ‘Welcome Kit’.
- Valuable cultural expertise and linkages to the target community provided by members of the ‘Welcome Kit’ working group.
- Testing the translated material with new arrivals to check cultural nuances and comprehension.
- Sharing resources and knowledge between Brimbank City Council and other Food for All projects at the City of Greater Dandenong and Maribyrnong City Council to increase the number of translations and extend the distribution of and access to the ‘Welcome Kit’.





**Left:** To receive a CHOICE award, food outlets had to achieve standards in three key areas, including excellence in hygiene and food handling.  
Photo: Courtesy City of Casey and Cardinia Shire Council

# CHOICE: Choosing Healthier Options in Casey and Cardinia

“CHOICE attracted participants from a variety of businesses including school canteens, hotels, cafes, take-away food premises, restaurants and a bowling club.”

**Two councils create an awards scheme for local eateries, encouraging them to provide good-value nutritious meals.**

In the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire, the demographic and geographic features of these areas put residents at a high risk of food insecurity, poor food intake and diet-related diseases.

Both municipalities are characterised by rapid development and population growth, a lack of public transport and a heavy reliance on car usage for everyday travel. More people are consuming meals away from the home and there are more take-away food outlets than greengrocers and supermarkets in the area.

Mindful of these issues, the City of Casey and the Cardinia Shire Council looked at ways of increasing the access, affordability and availability of healthier foods for their residents.

To encourage local food outlets to provide good-value nutritious meals, the councils developed an award scheme – CHOICE: Choosing Healthier Options in Casey and Cardinia Eateries.

Sara McAlister, Sprouting New Ideas project officer for Cardinia Shire Council and the City of Casey, says that with the growing rates of obesity and other diet-related diseases they wanted to ensure that there was a large variety of healthy options for residents who didn't eat at home.

“We know that people are time-poor and that many families find it easier to buy take-away food than cook themselves,” says Sara.

The councils hoped the CHOICE awards would build social support by providing the outlets with the opportunity to create a health-promoting environment, and enable residents to make better food choices for their individual health needs. And that the availability of healthy food choices may also attract customers looking for healthier options – a win-win situation.

To receive a CHOICE award, food outlets were required to achieve standards in three key areas: Excellence in hygiene and food handling; and provision of nutritious affordable food options for healthy eating.

Local health practitioners ran workshops on safe food handling and how to incorporate healthier options into menus.

Once a business met the criteria, it received an award and was promoted by council in newsletters and media releases. A CHOICE sticker adorned the premises' windows.

Compliance was assessed by environmental health officers and a community dietitian.

CHOICE attracted participants from a variety of businesses including school canteens, hotels, cafes, take-away food premises, restaurants and a bowling club.

Kelly's Hotel in Cranbourne, which serves 2500 meals a week in its cafe and bistro, has been part of the awards since they





began three years ago. Chef Darren Bronsema said CHOICE offered ‘the whole package’.

“We already had quite a few nutritious choices – we catered for coeliacs, we had a lot of salads and we use cholesterol-free oils – but it was really helpful when the dietitian went through our menu and talked about how important it was for people to have choices.

“We trim 100% of our steaks now, and are selling a lot more salads. People are asking for smaller servings. We are more aware of what people want – people are thinking more about healthier eating,” says Darren.

The awards were reviewed by a working group, which decided not to continue with the current model. The group is using valuable learnings from three years of implementation to look at options for the future.

Sara McAlister explains: “We really have learnt a lot. We were focusing on the needs of the businesses when we should have also focused on the residents – raising their awareness of the choices available. We need to go a step back and do some social marketing. We need to provide more information to the community about *why* healthy eating is good and then show them the healthy options that are available locally.”

Cardinia Shire Council’s senior environmental health officer, Gareth Little-Hales, a member of the working group, agrees: “In hindsight, we may have put the cart before the horse. People who aren’t making healthy choices don’t know what to look for. We need to educate the public – if the public can’t see any benefit, then it won’t happen.”

Anthony Basford, Manager of Community Services at Cardinia Shire Council, says sustainability is the key issue: “The idea of the CHOICE awards is a really good one, but it needs to sit within a bigger picture of how local government works with business, and it needs to be sustainable within existing structures and activities.”

One option is to incorporate the CHOICE awards into the council’s business awards, which recognise the contributions of local businesses to the community.

For further information about the CHOICE awards, contact Cardinia Shire Council on 1300 787 624, [www.cardinia.vic.gov.au](http://www.cardinia.vic.gov.au) or the City of Casey, (03) 9705 5200, [www.casey.vic.gov.au](http://www.casey.vic.gov.au)

## What made the difference?

- Council engaging businesses to help them create healthy eating options.
- Council and businesses working together to fully understand the challenges in the marketplace.
- Council’s commitment to effective program delivery by reviewing the best ways to promote healthy eating.
- Acknowledging that alternative models need to be explored to achieve sustainability.

**Below:** The award scheme encouraged local food outlets to provide good-value nutritious meals. Photo: Courtesy City of Casey and Cardinia Shire Council



# From Little Things, Big Things Grow

“Being able to share the knowledge with her wider community has given her tremendous joy and faith in a healthier future.”

**Below:** Burundi dads, Syriake and Berthrand, cooking a stir fry. Photo: Antonietta Vatta, Mission Australia

**Amid global predictions that the next generation will be one of the unhealthiest ever, a child nutrition project in the City of Greater Dandenong is hoping to buck the trend.**

In the City of Greater Dandenong, the council is harnessing community and council expertise to help parents access information about healthy eating and nutritious foods, particularly for their children. It will lay the foundations for healthy eating habits for life.

Being the second most culturally diverse municipality in Australia, with over half of its residents born overseas, Greater Dandenong Council was particularly keen to involve families from newly arrived and emerging communities.

“Many factors can have a significant impact on whether people establish healthy eating patterns, including low income, a limited grasp of English and unfamiliarity with local foods, shopping practices and cooking methods,” explains Jenny Trezise, project officer for Food for Everyone.

The initiative, which uses peer educators to target parents of children aged 0 to 5, is a partnership between the council's Food for Everyone project and Mission Australia's Communities for Children and Pathways to Prevention Family Nutrition program.

In consultation with workers from the council's Maternal and Child Health Service, as well as refugee nurses and community health and settlement workers, a training program was developed based on peer education principles.

Local community members who had experience working with groups in early years settings and strong links with culturally and linguistically diverse communities were recruited to participate in the training.

Last year, 22 people were trained, representing communities and cultures from Croatia, Serbia, Sudan, Burundi, Congo,







Liberia, Somalia, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Cook Islands, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh and China.

The council employed nutritionist Daphne Amailuk to deliver a four-week peer leader/ playgroup leader training program, exploring the social and health context of nutrition, nutrition in infancy, nutrition in early childhood and shopping skills.

Other topics included breastfeeding, introducing solids, healthy lunchboxes, food safety, shopping tips, reading food labels, healthy cooking ideas and practical food preparation for age-appropriate meals.

Colourful resources (including a ‘Welcome Kit’ with illustrations of fruits and vegetables developed by the City of Brimbank and the Migrant Resource Centre) were used to overcome language barriers and demonstrate what fruit and vegetables look like, how to prepare and cook them, and portion size.

Practical activities were included in the training program as they are generally well received and a fun way to share knowledge.

“Cooking demonstrations are central to improving knowledge and understanding of nutrition. We also ran shopping tours to explore the range of pitfalls families often experience when shopping and to demonstrate ‘smart’ shopping that reinforces healthy food choices,” says Jenny.

After completing the training program, the peer educators went back to their communities with the aim of empowering them to make healthier food choices in culturally appropriate ways.

Playgroup leader Teremoana ‘Mona’ Topa, one of the newly trained peer educators, came to Australia from the Cook Islands 15 years ago. She says that learning about nutrition has changed her family’s life enormously. Being able to share the knowledge with her wider community has given her tremendous joy and faith in a healthier future.

“We are used to thinking that if something tastes good then it is good for our bodies. I learnt this wasn’t true especially with sweets such as cakes, lollies and fizzy drinks,” says Mona.

Mona passed on her learnings to the mothers at her playgroup and says that their positive response has led to major changes in the community’s eating habits.

“Mothers now bring fruit and wholemeal bread and vegetables to playgroup instead of sweets. And at church we have things like carrots and celery with special feasts for family services. Everything is healthy!”

One of the challenges the peer educators faced when delivering nutrition training to their communities was how to incorporate key messages into their traditional lifestyles. Some cultures have particular beliefs, especially about breastfeeding and whether certain foods are safe to eat, such as canned and frozen food. Educators were encouraged to look at ways of maintaining the healthy aspects of people’s traditional diets while incorporating new local foods.

Mission Australia has attracted funds from George Weston Foods, allowing it to build on the learnings of the training program and continue its reach into culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Nutritionist Antonietta Vatta has been employed to support and work with the current peer educators and playgroup leaders to deliver a healthy eating program for parents and children aged 0 to 5 years.

“I have basically followed on from Daphne’s work. My job is to re-energise and encourage them to deliver healthy eating messages in their communities through parent groups and playgroups.”

“It’s really about giving the communities the knowledge and the resources they need, and in the most appropriate way,” says Antonietta.

The partnership between Mission Australia and the City of Greater Dandenong has played an important role in raising the profile of food security and healthy eating, both within council and across local health and welfare agencies. The project won the Victorian 2007 Heart Foundation Kellogg Local Government Award.

Many workers in primary health care agencies and early childhood services have a better understanding of food security and are able to deliver consistent messages about healthy eating and nutrition, promote the importance of breastfeeding, and dispel food myths in a variety of innovative ways.

[For further information about the Food for Everyone project, contact the Manager of Social Development on \(03\) 9239 5199.](#)



**Above:** Cook Island peer educator Mona with Antonietta from Mission Australia. Photo: Helen Ansems, Mission Australia

### What made the difference?

- Leadership by the City of Greater Dandenong and Mission Australia to develop collaborative partnerships between key agencies with similar agendas, as well as across relevant council departments.
- Sharing resources and learnings between key stakeholders, other councils and government to develop a peer educator/playgroup leader kit.
- Adopting an evidence-based peer education model as the most effective way to share information with the target group.
- Partnerships between stakeholders leading to an increase in workforce capacity in the health promotion sector to understand and promote healthy eating to reduce food insecurity.

# Food for All in Frankston

“The Food for All program was fortuitously placed within the social strategy and planning area.”



**Cementing food security in the council’s Municipal Public Health Plan required good connections, good timing and some good old-fashioned luck.**

In Frankston City Council’s innovative Municipal Public Health Plan, priority has been given to actions and strategies that will help residents access more fresh, nutritious foods.

For the first time, the Plan (Frankston Healthy City: Health and Wellbeing Plan 2007–2011) focuses on the determinants of health (such as income, education and environmental factors) rather than the prevention of infectious diseases, and includes food security as a key plank.

The plan’s author, council’s then Community Wellbeing Coordinator, Christine Burrows, says that the Food for All program was fortuitously placed within the social strategy and planning area. “This was all very timely as we were starting to review the old health plan and develop the new one,” explains Christine.

Food security is a new area of work for Frankston, although local awareness had begun with the Frankston Community Kitchens pilot project, underway at the Frankston Community Health Service.

“Community Kitchens focus on increasing social connectedness and healthy eating – they are a health promotion model, not a welfare model. They target people at risk of or experiencing food insecurity. This project was already tilling the soil in Frankston and raising awareness of the issues with the council and agencies such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence,” says Christine.

At the same time, a group of community members approached the council wanting to establish a community garden in Montague Park, Frankston South. This project was very much in line with council’s community development approach and resulted in a number of cross-council actions between Parks and Gardens, Economic Development,

Family Services, Social Strategy and Planning, Environment, Marketing and Infrastructure.

“It was a good project for people to collaborate on because it’s tangible. People feel like they can contribute, as opposed to policy which can seem like just a lot of big words,” says Christine.

From November 2005 to June 2007 the new plan was developed. Partnerships were formed with 17 members from eight organisations to form the Health and Wellbeing Steering Community. Nearly 80 participants contributed to stakeholder roundtables, 30 council staff participated in a health plan priorities workshop, and 446 people responded to a community survey.

Developing the plan also involved 14 council departments, nine other government or statutory authorities, and 16 community groups including schools, food retailers/wholesalers and community garden groups.

The Food for All program (which started in July 2005) fed into the plan, as did research from a Monash University survey.

The survey found that 12% of respondents had gone without food in the previous six months because of a lack of money; 7% because of a lack of transport. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents lived in a ‘fresh food desert’ – they had to travel more than 500m (walkable distance) to access fresh fruit and vegetables. From this local evidence, it was clear that food security was an issue.

The enormous process of developing the health plan was not without its challenges.

“There is often a balancing act between identifying difficult community issues and keeping a positive perception of the municipality and its community,” says Christine. “There is often a fear of anything being put in a negative light.”

*Left: Getting kids to eat and enjoy fruit was one of the key outcomes of the Food for All program. Photo: Courtesy Frankston City Council*





There were also challenges around definitions, perception and language.

“Food security is often confused with food safety. We put food security under the priority of healthy eating – people understand the concept of healthy eating more readily than food security,” says Christine.

The Food for All program, with its focus on council departments working together on issues about food access and encouraging local governments to take the lead in working with community members, has had some inspiring spin-offs in Frankston.

The community garden destined for Montague Park is now up and running. Known as Groundswell Community Garden Incorporated, it’s a flourishing cooperative led by passionate fresh-food advocate and local community member, Regina McLeod.

Regina says the organisation’s relationship with the council, and especially the Food for All program, has been crucial to the establishment and sustainability of the garden.

“Through Food for All we were able to meet with the council to discuss water-saving ideas. From this we secured a federal water grant of \$10,000 in partnership with the local scout group. Water from their tank is now directed

two ways – into their toilets and onto our garden!” says Regina.

“Council’s support has made more things possible and positive. It’s made such a difference to getting a good result.”

Another innovative spin-off from Food for All is the community enterprise in Frankston North, an area with poor access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

Community groups and schools are working together to increase the supply of fresh produce and create a healthier outlook for the community.

Amanda Leck, manager of Community Renewal Frankston North, says local action and communities can make a real difference to food security. “A plan is not a living document until local communities are empowered to put something on the ground,” she says.

Under the auspices of Community Renewal and in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence, they have received funding for the development of a local community enterprise that will sell good-quality, reasonably priced fruit and vegetables, with a home delivery service for seniors and people with disabilities.

Local volunteers will be able to attain certificates in food handling, develop customer service skills and increase community connections.

The community enterprise is not happening in isolation. “Both primary schools have community gardens, and there are three community kitchens with a fourth on the way. The secondary college has a garden and an orchard, and Pines Patch Community Garden has 13 beds and a water tank,” says Amanda.

The school and community gardens are further linked by a garden network that meets to share ideas and resources.

Having food security embedded in the Municipal Public Health Plan enables and supports the development of these valuable community initiatives and contributes to their sustainability.

“It’s all about seeing connections, making connections and being proactive,” says Christine Burrows.

[For further information about Food for All in Frankston, contact Jo Patten, Coordinator, Policy & Planning, \(03\) 9784 1734.](#)

### What made the difference?

- Extensive consultation with the key stakeholders and community members who would be most affected by the policy.
- Identifying synergies and activities to solve food security issues.
- Supporting and developing on-the-ground community activities that reflected the policy.
- Incorporating education and training into local activities.



**Left:** Mahogany Community Kitchen participants plant food for the future at Pines Patch Community Garden. Photo: Courtesy Frankston North Community Renewal



Left: Not a single business is open in this Maidstone shopping strip. Photo: Timothy Marshall

## Mapping Uncovers ‘Food Deserts’ in Maribyrnong

“The graphic portrayal that in Maribyrnong it is easier for people to walk to a poker machine than a fruit shop has resonated strongly.”

**A mapping project in the City of Maribyrnong has produced startling evidence that residents in two-thirds of the municipality do not have easy access to fresh fruit and vegetables.**

Workers at the Western Region Health Centre (WRHC) in Braybrook and Footscray knew from talking to the locals that food security was a big issue. But without hard evidence, the true situation was not really known.

The Centre initiated the *Mapping Maribyrnong: Fruit and Vegetable Access* project as part of their Integrated Health Promotion Plan. The project aimed to find out how accessible and affordable fruits and vegetables were, and what interventions would be needed to improve the situation.

Two student dietitians from Monash University, Esti Adithama and Giang Nguyen, surveyed 40 food outlets across the municipality in 2006.

Jaime Edge, health promotion team leader at WRHC and key worker for the mapping project, said the results confirmed the workers’ suspicions.

“We guessed that the situation was bad, but we wanted to prove how difficult it really was for people in the area to access fresh and nutritious foods,” she says.

The survey showed that although fruit and vegetables were cheaper than the municipal average, they were harder for residents to reach by public transport and easy, safe walking routes.

With the help of the council’s Geographic Information System, specialist maps were produced that showed the reality of the situation and clearly identified three large ‘food deserts’ in Braybrook, Maidstone and West Footscray/Kingsville.

‘Food deserts’ are areas where there are no fruit or vegetable outlets within a 500m radius.

A survey of people living in identified food deserts revealed that 25% found it difficult to shop for fruit and vegetables mainly because of physical disabilities or an inability to carry heavy shopping. New arrivals and refugees also had to navigate an unfamiliar public transport system with children and trolleys.

The maps show the presence of fruit and vegetable shops and the comparative costs of produce across the municipality. They also show the ratios of fruit and vegetable shops to take-away stores, and public transport and toilet access.





“It was important that we looked at things like public transport routes and the location of public toilets. If you are an elderly person who is reliant on public transport and has to catch two buses to get your fresh food, then having access to a public toilet will significantly influence your decision to travel,” says Jaime.

Lucy Marshall, Maribyrnong City Council’s coordinator of the Fruit and Veg for All project, says the maps have become an invaluable resource, but is mindful that the data is already out of date – three fruit and vegetable shops have closed since the survey was completed.

“We have been running food security programs for years but this data shows councillors the extent of food insecurity in their wards, and the maps clearly demonstrate that there are many aspects to food security,” says Lucy.

“We know that access is a strong barrier to people not eating enough fruit and vegetables but there are many other reasons,” she says. “It could be that they don’t have the skills or

knowledge of what different fruits and veggies are, or how to prepare them – this is especially relevant to new arrivals. Also, people may not have the right cooking facilities or they may be time-poor and find it too hard to cook a meal from scratch and so it’s easier to buy fast, less-nutritious foods.”

The municipality is the second most disadvantaged in the metropolitan area. It has lower than average car ownership, and more than one-third of its residents are from non-English speaking backgrounds. The mapping showed what was really going on and how different departments within council could have a direct influence on food security.

Nick Matteo, manager of Community Planning and Advocacy for Maribyrnong, confirms the value of the project.

“The maps are visually powerful and a useful trigger and catalyst for a range of new council activities,” says Nick.

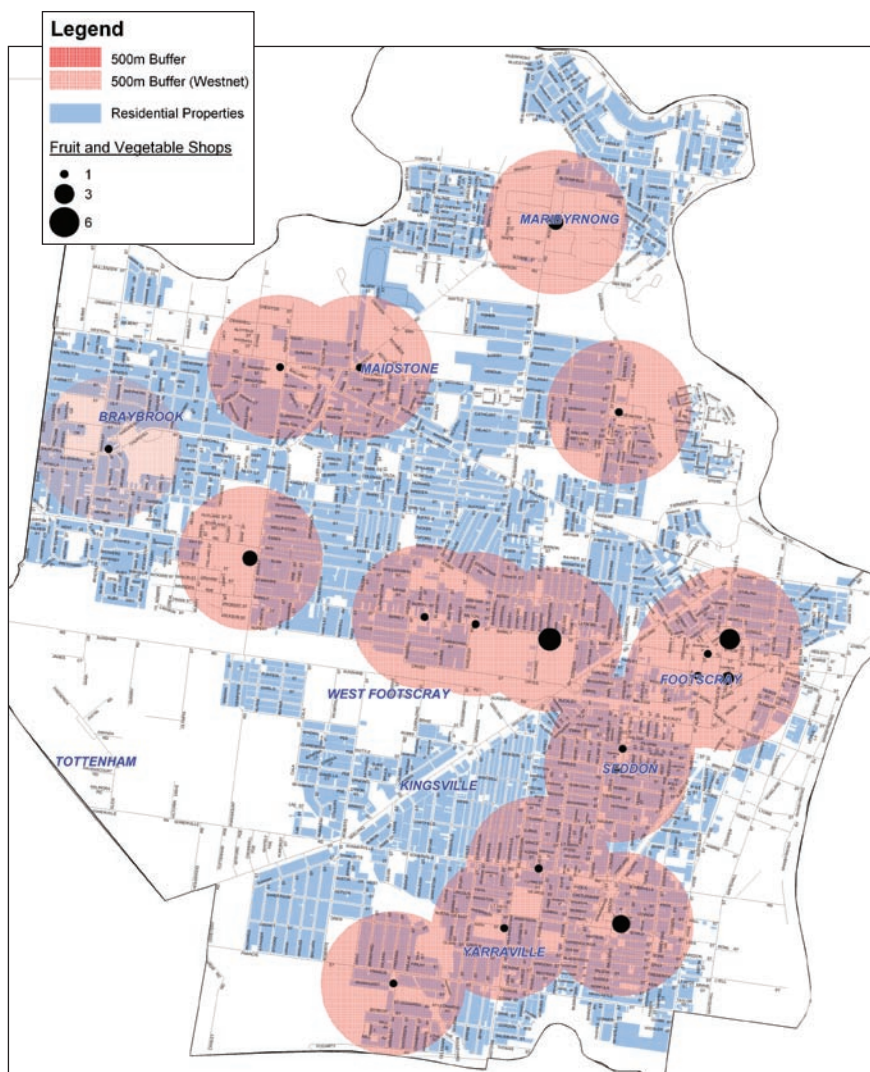
“The graphic portrayal that in Maribyrnong it is easier for people to walk to a poker machine than a fruit shop has resonated strongly,” he says. “The mapping project has provided the council with additional data to mount appeals against the addition or transfer of poker machines within the city, and to negotiate with developers for the contribution of land for community gardens.”

According to Lucy Marshall, the project has acted as a needs assessment for Maribyrnong Fruit and Veg for All and has also influenced policy development within the council.

“Our sustainable transport officer put in a submission to the Department of Infrastructure’s Local Area Access Program to get the West Footscray train station upgraded. Many residents rely heavily on the train to get access to food, and we knew from the maps that this area was part of a ‘food desert’. The officer was able to use this new evidence to support his application,” says Lucy.

Food security is one of the principles now underpinning the council’s annual community grants program, and community kitchens will now be included in the planning and design of new community centres and community hubs.

For more information about the Mapping Maribyrnong: Fruit and Vegetable Access project, contact the Community Planning and Advocacy Department on (03) 9688 0200, [email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](mailto:email@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au), [www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](http://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au)



### What made the difference?

- Collaboration between the Western Region Health Centre and Maribyrnong City Council.
- Presenting data in an engaging, visual map format.
- Recognising that good data can be a powerful advocacy tool for council and local community agencies.
- Allocating dedicated resources to the project.

Left: Map: Courtesy City of Maribyrnong



**Left:** The Shire of Melton consulted a broad range of older people to find out how it could improve access to nutritious foods.  
 Photo: Courtesy Shire of Melton

# People, Partnerships & Research

**Interesting and informative research projects involving the residents of the Shire of Melton have put an increased focus on food security and helped pave the way for new local responses.**

The Shire of Melton is characterised by a diversity of settlement and land use and an unevenness of service provision. Some areas have good public transport and easy access to supermarkets and fresh food supplies. Others, such as the small community of Diggers Rest, with a population of 2000, have no supermarkets and one general store with limited access to fresh foods.

Council's Food for All program supported Djerriwarrh Health Services, Merrimu Services and the council's Department of Aged & Disability Services to look at ways of increasing people's access to fresh foods.

One of the strategies was the introduction of a mobile Veg Out Van, which targeted people living in areas that lacked public transport and had limited food outlets. It replicated a successful project that had been trialled in the City of Maribyrnong.

Insufficient resources, planning and demand meant that the service was unsustainable, but it gave the council an opportunity to look more closely at how it could work with community organisations to improve food security.

Council engaged Djerriwarrh Health Services to do some promotional work for the Food for All program, using its existing health promotion resources and incorporating extra activities in the community to promote the benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables.

These activities complemented the research work led by dietetic students from Deakin and Monash universities: *Investigating Food Security within Melton Shire*, and *Melton Healthy Food Connection*. The students' research included

mapping food outlets and transport routes and a Needs Assessment Survey in Diggers Rest.

The survey revealed that 88% of the residents surveyed found fruit and vegetables difficult to access. Almost 60% said they would eat more fruit and vegetables if these foods were more easily available.

Erin Bonavia, health promotion officer at Djerriwarrh Health Services, says that the research activities generated a stronger understanding of food security issues in the area. She says there is a real sense of community cohesiveness in looking at these issues.

"The students went into the community and through face-to-face meetings were able to get really valuable data. A lot of people didn't understand what food security was but when we explained it as a lack of regular and adequate access to nutritious foods, they understood. The residents really liked the fact that they were being heard – that their opinion mattered," says Erin.

The council regularly holds community development meetings in Diggers Rest, bringing together representatives from schools, residents associations, playgroups and the Lions Club to discuss issues of community interest. Food security is now firmly on the agenda, and people are excited about being part of the solution.

"People have come up with ideas such as having a regular farmers market. Others are interested in setting up a community garden, where residents could meet and interact. Currently they have nowhere to meet – there isn't even a coffee shop," says Erin.

“The residents really liked the fact that they were being heard – that their opinion mattered.”

**Below:** David Vella from the Shire of Melton with offerings from the mobile Veg Out Van.  
 Photo: Courtesy Shire of Melton







People have also expressed an interest in learning horticultural skills so that they can grow their own vegetables, and they are keen for a resource listing the produce that is grown locally so that people can access fresh foods themselves from local growers.

“The momentum and excitement is there. We now need to work in partnership with the council to see where we can go with these ideas,” says Erin.

As part of the Food for All program, another body of research is giving valuable insight into what is happening for older people in the community. *An assessment of the barriers to older people accessing nutritious food in Melton Shire* was commissioned by the council’s Aged & Disability Services and undertaken by RMIT and Monash University, using language-specific facilitators in the focus groups.

Coral Cramer, acting manager for the council’s Aged & Disability Services, says that the research project provided a great opportunity for consultation with a broad range of older people, including those using public housing and council’s community transport services, members of the senior citizens groups, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The research showed that 30% of respondents were unable to shop without assistance and

that 23% had sought food assistance in times of emergency. There was a substantial level of illiteracy amongst the culturally and linguistically diverse participants, which has implications for other services in Melton Shire.

The research highlighted areas where the council is working well to improve access to nutritious foods for older residents, and where further planning is needed. It has also reinforced the importance of really listening to what people are saying.

“Our relationship with a shopping centre that provides free home deliveries for residents who use the community bus is a great success, and we will be developing relationships like this with more supermarkets,” says Coral. “The community bus takes elderly people shopping four days a week. It provides important social connections for many older people. For some, this is their only social activity for the week. Sometimes the importance of this is overlooked.”

Coral says the council knows there will be enormous growth in the shire’s eastern corridor, so they have already planned for a new bus and driver.

The partnerships and research have provided a solid base of local evidence and momentum for food security that will help inform council’s strategic planning.

By integrating and disseminating research findings within council, it has been able to work with the community to find solutions to a very common problem.

For further information about the Shire of Melton’s Food for All activities, contact Social Development on (03) 9747 7200.

### What made the difference?

- Establishing internal and external partnerships and identifying shared needs.
- The availability of dedicated student resources to conduct research with a strong community-participation focus.
- Learning from pilot projects and disseminating research findings strategically within council.
- A commitment from council to put research into practice and use results from the research to plan for future activities and services.

**Below:** Using the Council’s community transport to help people participate in the consultation sessions. Photo: Courtesy Shire of Melton



**Right:** Lex and Glenda Fisher selling produce grown on their farm only 55km from the market. Photo: Sallie Amy



“The positive spirit that comes from being part of committed community action reverberates far beyond the town’s boundaries.”

## Growing Better Community Health

**On the third Saturday of every month, the Robinvale Community Growers Market in Swan Hill becomes *the* place to be for the people of Robinvale.**

The Robinvale market – full of just-picked local produce – comes alive in the local supermarket car park, turning it into a welcoming gathering place for a community rich in cultural diversity.

Situated alongside the Murray River, Robinvale is one of the Swan Hill municipality’s major urban centres. It is becoming known as one of Victoria’s fastest growing towns, with increasing investment from large companies into almond and olive plantations.

The seasonal demand for labour attracts more than 40 nationalities to the region, including Aboriginals, Italians, Greeks, Asians, South Pacific Islanders, Sudanese and Afghans.

This transient labour force creates accommodation issues for hosting towns. Many residents have to pay higher rents, which leaves less money for food.

Being an agricultural and horticultural region, fresh produce is in abundance but is mostly sold away from the area, leaving many locals with little access to the freshest fruits and vegetables available.

Sallie Amy, Food for All project officer for the Swan Hill Rural City Council, says that as well as increasing people’s access to fresh and affordable local produce, the market, which

has been running every month since December 2006, was conceived to be a community meeting place.

“St Luke’s Communities for Children program, through community consultation, developed the idea with a view to it being a neutral environment for people of different cultures to mix together, with the hope that it would lead to increased respect, sharing and understanding,” says Sallie.

The Communities for Children program is supported by the Australian Government as part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. It aims to support the health and early development needs of young children aged 0 to 5 by helping parents and building child-friendly communities.

Communities for Children project manager Maria ‘Bing’ Thomas says that providing children’s activities and opportunities for the parents to engage during the market has produced positive outcomes, some way beyond expectations.

“In Robinvale there are many families that are geographically and culturally isolated. The market gives them an opportunity for safe, social connection,” she says.

Last September, the Robinvale District Health Service (one of the Community Partners



**Left:** Communities for Children project manager Maria ‘Bing’ Thomas helping Clare Smith draw a picture. Photo: Sallie Amy





of Communities for Children) held a bike decorating competition to engage fathers in a family-friendly activity. Not only did fathers turn out but so did grandfathers, big brothers and cousins.

“I think the fathers had more fun than the kids! The market provides opportunities for family gatherings that normally aren’t available here,” says Maria.

Other Community Partners that have provided children’s activities at the market include the Swan Hill Rural City Council’s ‘So Great’ program, the Community & Cultural Services program and the Swan Hill mobile library.

Active participation on market day has also come from many other community agencies and businesses. The Mothers of Preschoolers have run activities for children, and John Pisasale Pharmacy has held displays and given away products such as sunscreen samples.

“We are providing a variety of things to draw people in – people will shop and use the library so we want them to stop and buy local fresh produce at a good price,” says Sallie.

John Katis, a local councillor for 12 years and Robinvale resident for 50 years, has been involved with the market since its inception and is proud of its health focus.

“It’s good for the town economically and great for the health of the community. Many people are deprived of fresh foods – most people buy them in the supermarket and they are many days old. At the market the food comes straight from the growers and is hours old!” says Councillor Katis.

“I used to be a primary producer and now I run a take-away and grocery shop. I know how valuable fresh foods are, especially when catering for the nutritional needs of families.”

Produce from the Manatunga Community Garden – which is managed by the local Manatunga Aboriginal community – is sold at the Robinvale market, providing income to purchase seedlings and equipment. The garden has been operating for 10 years, and the food grown is available for anyone in the wider community who is unable to provide for themselves.

The Swan Hill Food for All project team has been assisting the garden workers with its development so that it can provide food for a greater part of the year. The garden and its involvement with the market has enabled a valuable connection to grow between the council and the local Aboriginal community.

Participating farmers are also reaping the benefits. Glenda Fisher from KingFisher Citrus Products lives 40 minutes from Robinvale and is an enthusiastic stallholder and advocate of farmers markets.

“There are so many big corporations around here and there is so little access to their produce. We are encouraging local growers to use the market as a training ground to get their produce out to the people. People love seeing the face of the grower. And it’s great associating with like-minded farmers – they often have innovative ideas to share,” she says.

Compliance with basic food regulations is required for producers who want to participate in a farmers market. Sallie Amy says that a lot

of people are concerned about paperwork and think that to be involved they have to go through a lot of difficult regulations. “I am trying to get the message across that these regulations aren’t a problem – I can help people if they need it,” she says.

The market has reinvigorated the town in many ways. The positive spirit that comes from being part of committed community action reverberates far beyond the town’s boundaries.

“Being a producer at the market is very healthy mentally. A lot of farmers have given up. We have stepped out of that and have hope that we can continue, that we can grow very good produce that people want. We have hope that we can still do it!” exclaims Glenda.

For more information about the Robinvale Community Growers Market, contact Sallie Amy, Food for All Project Officer, (03) 5036 2376.

### What made the difference?

- Council taking the lead in the development and management of the market and thinking broadly about who else could be involved.
- Having guidelines in place determining what type of goods would be available for purchase (ie, fresh food not crafts).
- Using the market as a conduit for increasing the physical and mental health of the community, and actively encouraging participation by health and welfare services.
- The ability to be flexible and review proceedings, including changing the location of the market and canvassing options for sustainability.



Left: Workers from the Manatunga Community Garden, which supplies produce to the Robinvale Market. Photo: Fiona Gormann



**Left:** Alison Prenter from Uniting Care Wodonga in the cramped space from which she currently supplies emergency food relief. Photo: Courtesy Wodonga Council

**Below left:** How things will look once the project is up and running with a shared warehouse. Photo: Courtesy Wodonga Council



“The FoodShare project will centralise and simplify the collection and distribution of emergency food, and will relieve welfare agencies of the need to have onsite resources.”

## Sharing the Load

**An innovative partnership between Wodonga Council and Wodonga service agencies will revolutionise the way the city’s residents access emergency food relief.**

In the Wodonga area, the demand on agencies to provide emergency relief has skyrocketed.

Increasing housing costs and the drought are forcing more and more people to access support, and people moving to the country from the city are expecting it to be cheaper but finding that it’s not.

Retiring farmers are another emerging group – the emotional and financial stress of the drought is forcing many of them to move into town and they are also starting to access emergency relief.

According to the council’s community project officer for Food for All, Tracey Farrant, enormous time and resources are spent by local agencies in sourcing food and distributing it to the community. “Not having enough to eat is a big issue for many people in the area,” she said.

The FoodShare project will centralise and simplify the collection and distribution of emergency food, and will relieve welfare agencies of the need to have onsite resources.

Individuals and families in need will be referred to shopfronts that will operate just like a retail store with display shelving, fridges and counters, providing a greater variety of foods to choose from, including fresh fruit and vegetables.

The shopfronts will also help people forge important links with primary producers in the area.

Central warehouse space donated by family-owned and community-minded national business Border Express will store large donations and consignments of foodstuffs. This will increase the amount and range of food available.





Recipients of emergency relief will also be able to volunteer, receiving training in food safety and handling, and customer service.

The idea for the FoodShare project came out of the Albury/Wodonga Regional Food Security Network, led by the Wodonga Council. The network is a collection of key welfare and health agencies from Wodonga, Albury and surrounding communities.

They came together for the first time to specifically focus on issues relating to food security. Although the agencies were aware of each others' existence, they hadn't seen the opportunity to work together before and had not developed relationships across the border.

Network members, such as the Salvation Army and Uniting Care Wodonga, were spending a lot of time chasing food supplies and managing food relief when they wanted their main focus to be breaking the cycle of welfare for many families.

The group thought a food bank could be the solution.

They took a close look at the successful Yarrawonga Food Bank and developed a model to incorporate the community's needs. The original coordinator of the Yarrawonga Food Bank is now on the FoodShare steering group and has become an invaluable resource.

Alison Prenter from Uniting Care Wodonga says the project would not have happened without the leadership shown by the council.

"Tracey has been phenomenal", Ms Prenter said. "She has been able to pull together all the food-related networks in the area."

"We've had an emergency relief network before but not one that focuses exclusively on food. As a result we can look at the bigger picture for the first time. Until now, this was impossible – we'd get bogged down by the mass of people who come through needing assistance."

Wodonga Council's director of community development, Patience Harrington, said the council is committed to increasing people's access to nutritious foods and determined to make it happen.

"Food security is fundamentally important to how we design our cities, how we provide accessible public transport, and how we understand that access to food is an issue across the whole community," she said.

"Part of our core business is advocacy. Projects such as FoodShare need to be recognised at a higher policy level or they will not be sustainable. This project gives the council an opportunity to think differently at a strategic level – it creates a different way of working and an improved understanding across council."

The FoodShare project has also provided some surprising and exciting spin-offs for Uniting Care.

"It has been great getting together and sharing ideas", Ms Prenter said. "I've met people who are creating community gardens, and Uniting Care has now dedicated some of its land to growing vegetables, which is wonderful as we can provide some fresh food at times instead of just packaged food."

"When we dug up a strip at the front and side of the church, people said we were mad and that the veggies would get stolen. In three years we have only lost one cabbage and a handful of potatoes. It has built great trust in the community."

Uniting Care has dedicated even more land to vegetable gardens and is considering other areas which could be suitable for community gardens.

FoodShare is an innovative project that shows what can be achieved when a council provides committed leadership and respects the experiences and knowledge that all sorts of community groups and agencies can bring to the table.

"This is about people in need being able to contribute to the solution, not just getting a hand-out," Ms Farrant said. "Patience is a virtue. Don't be put off by something taking time – quality often does."

For further information about Wodonga Council's FoodShare project, contact the community project officer on (02) 6022 9300.

### What made the difference?

- Leadership by Wodonga Council to bring agencies together to capitalise on their knowledge and skills.
- The recognition of a shared need and commitment of the network towards a solution for all.
- Regular and inclusive communication to all partners by the council throughout the project.
- The formation of strong relationships between agencies and business.



Above: Photo: Courtesy Wodonga Council









**Victorian Health Promotion Foundation**  
PO Box 154  
Carlton South Victoria 3053 Australia  
**Phone:** +61 3 9667 1333  
**Fax:** +61 3 9667 1375  
**Email:** [vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au)

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**[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au)**