

41ST PARLIAMENT



Joint Standing Committee on the
Commissioner for Children and Young People

Report 6

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE

*Addressing food insecurity for children and young people
affected by poverty*

Presented by Mrs R.M.J. Clarke, MLA and Hon N. Thomson, MLC

June 2023

Committee Members

Chair	Mrs R.M.J. Clarke, MLA Member for Murray-Wellington
Deputy Chair	Hon N. Thomson, MLC Member for Mining and Pastoral Region
Members	Ms R.S. Stephens, MLA Member for Albany
	Hon A. Makur Chuot, MLC Member for North Metropolitan Region

Committee Staff

Principal Research Officer	Dr Sarah Palmer
Research Officers	Ms Lucy Roberts Ms Carmen Cummings
Additional assistance	Dr Sam Hutchinson Ms Franchesca Walker

Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Tel: (08) 9222 7494

Email: jscccyp@parliament.wa.gov.au
Website: www.parliament.wa.gov.au/jscccyp

Published by the Parliament of Western Australia, Perth.

June 2023

ISBN: 978-1-922759-15-3

(Series: Western Australia. Parliament. Legislative Assembly. Committees.
Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Report 6)

328.365



**Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner
for Children and Young People**

Hungry for change

Addressing food insecurity for children and young people
affected by poverty

Report No. 6

Presented by

Mrs R.M.J. Clarke, MLA and Hon N. Thomson, MLC

Laid on the Table of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council
on 22 June 2023

Chair's Foreword

OVER the past year, the Committee has seen and heard some heart-wrenching accounts of West Australian children not having enough to eat. These came from charity groups, teachers, health professionals, academics, canteen managers, parents and from children themselves. It has been eye-opening. We heard that an alarming number of families are struggling – some because of recent increases in the cost of living, and others because of problems which recur over multiple generations. This is not likely to change in the near future. Some parents are themselves going hungry as they try to make impossible choices between feeding their kids and paying for other necessities. Feelings of isolation, guilt and shame can prevent them from reaching out for help.

We set out to find ways to address food insecurity for children living in poverty, acknowledging that every child has a right to sufficient good food every day. As well as conducting hearings in Perth, Committee members travelled to Albany and Katanning and to remote communities in the Pilbara, Gascoyne and Goldfields. Witnesses made it very clear that the physical problems of under-nutrition and malnutrition can turn into mental health problems and social problems. The ability of students to complete their education or to pursue training opportunities that could lead to employment is compromised, and they remain stuck in the cycle of poverty. It is time to find a way to break this cycle, but we need an ongoing solution, not just quick fixes.

We investigated how food relief and food literacy can assist children experiencing food insecurity. Children need to eat to learn, but they also need to learn to eat. Food relief does not always reach children in need, and its nutritional value is not guaranteed. But without access to good food, lessons on how to prepare good food seem irrelevant. One of the only ways for children to access good food – and potentially to learn about it at the same time – is through a school lunch program. We discovered that a surprising number of our schools are already providing meals and snacks to students from school funds because they see it as a matter of necessity. As one principal told us, it's a 'no-brainer'; hungry kids cannot learn effectively.

WA could build on these programs and extend school lunch in an equitable way to mitigate the impact of food insecurity on our next generation. We gathered ideas for how this could be done on a visit to Tasmania, where a school lunch program initiated by the canteen association is currently being piloted. We visited some schools in low socioeconomic suburbs of Hobart and saw how much the students appreciated a free, hot, hearty lunch. Teachers and principals at these schools told us how it was making a difference to attendance, and how it had impacted positively on concentration and behaviour. It was extremely valuable to see the school lunch pilot program in action, and it assisted us in making some of the recommendations in this report.

We also heard how Tasmania had implemented a Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, which is something we would like to see prioritised in WA. Tasmania has also created a dedicated

minister and department for Education, Children and Youth, making it clear where responsibility for child wellbeing lies. Such investment in our children and young people now will pay dividends in years to come.

We received 494 submissions for this inquiry. Around 450 of these were from students who attend Catholic schools across WA, including in some of the most remote areas where the Catholic school is the only school. In addition to our travels around the state, we reached out to members of the multicultural community via two forums held in Mirrabooka, which provided essential insights into the experiences of newly arrived migrant and refugee families. We thank all those who contributed their insights and experiences, especially those children and young people who made themselves heard. Their voices are important, and we have included some of their frank and heartfelt comments in the report. We are extremely grateful to Julie Dunbabin and the team at School Food Matters for showing us the pilot program in Tasmania, and to all the schools and leaders here and in Tasmania who met with us in relation to the program.

I thank my fellow committee members – deputy chair Hon Neil Thomson MLC (Mining and Pastoral region), Rebecca Stephens MLA (Albany), and Hon Ayor Makur Chuot MLC (North Metropolitan region) – for their work and valuable input into this inquiry, including throughout our extensive travels. I also thank the committee staff who have worked tirelessly on this inquiry: principal research officer Sarah Palmer and research officers Lucy Roberts and Carmen Cummings.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R Clarke', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE, MLA
CHAIR

Inquiry Terms of Reference

The inquiry will consider:

1. The impact of poor nutrition on children and young people and the extent of the problem in Western Australia.
2. Challenges for children and young people in accessing enough nutritious food.
3. The extent to which food relief:
 - a. Is currently accessed by children and young people, including at school and in early childhood education and care settings
 - b. Is effective.
4. The extent to which food literacy programs aimed at children and young people and/or their parents/carers:
 - a. Are currently accessed
 - b. Are effective.
5. Government-funded school lunch programs.
6. Any other existing or potential initiatives.
7. Western Australia's obligations and responsibilities to monitor and address food insecurity as an aspect of child wellbeing.

We are particularly keen to hear about the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the children of refugees and newly arrived migrants.

PLEASE build a cafeteria, I don't want to sit in the rain anymore, it gets cold, my food gets cold, the teachers get a microwave, I think the students should get one too. ... Lots of people beg for money because the canteen is expensive – year 8 student

My stomach hurts but I deal with it ... we run out of food fast because we have a family of 8 and only my dad works – year 7 student

I feel super duper angry, I keep going to school but I super mad at school – year 9 student

How do you feel when you don't get the food you need? Does it stop you going to school?

I start to feel dissy and I still go to school ... sometimes there is not a lot to take – year 7 student

I get hungry and tired, it stops me doing my work – year 9 student

It makes me feel empty and its harder to focus on school and for me to have a good day – year 7 student

I just go to school without [lunch] or I just get 2 mandarins/fruits. I feel bad and know that I'll be hungry but that doesn't stop me from going to school because I'm used to it - year 8 student

hungry and sad ... no food in the house and no money – year 9 student

I start to feel hungry. I feel distracted and feel like I'm missing something – year 9 student

Needs to be cheaper – too expensive up there (in community) – student

[I feel] sad, hangry and poor – year 9 student

What makes it hard to get good food?

no child support, mum is [too] depressed to make food – year 7 student

My family and food situation can at times be difficult and a struggle. It is great my school can provide breakfast, recess and lunch when I'm at school – student

i just moved house and its hard for me to get food cause the fridge dosen't work. and i live far and still takes bus which is an hour trip so cant make lunch – year 7 student

My family is a little bit poor... I will get food from the front office [at school] – year 4 student

my parent's sometimes don't pack me food because of "dicpline" reasons – year 7 student

there is no food around me and there are no shops around me – year 7 student

Many times, the vegetables are so expensive that my family cannot cook a healthy meal with all the important vegetables – year 9 student

There's no food in the house, no one can cook food, mum goes out too much - year 8 student

Sometimes we need a feed before we go out [on country] because we are hungry. Sometimes we are hungry when [youth advocate] isn't there. We text her so we can get a feed. We sent our ideas to the Council. We told [the youth advocate] one of the things we needed was a four o'clock feed. Some kids get in trouble because they are hungry. – Nurtha Way Crew, Coolgardie

Contents

Chair’s Foreword	iii
Inquiry Terms of Reference	v
Executive Summary	xiii
Ministerial Response	xvii
Findings and Recommendations	xix
1 What this inquiry is about	1
<hr/>	
Origins of the inquiry	1
Objectives	3
Definitions and explanation of terms	3
What is food insecurity?	3
What is poverty?	5
What are the State’s obligations?	6
Our approach	10
2 The food insecurity problem facing children in WA	11
<hr/>	
How many food insecure children are there?	11
What makes it hard for children to get enough good food?	13
Inadequate income	13
Where you live	15
Who you are	21
Home situation	24
Age	26
The impacts of food insecurity for children are serious and far-reaching	27
Health impacts	28
Social impacts	31
The poverty and food insecurity cycle	32
3 The role of food relief and food literacy	35
<hr/>	
Food relief	35
Demand for food relief is growing	35

Food relief is provided by an extensive range of organisations	37
A range of structural and personal issues are barriers to access	39
Food relief is often not accessed and its effectiveness is unclear	46
The connection between food relief and food literacy	47
Food literacy	47
Food illiteracy perpetuates food insecurity	47
Food literacy is essential	49
Food literacy delivery is wide-ranging	49
The reach of food literacy programs is limited	53
Food literacy will not solve childhood food insecurity	56
Children need to practice eating well	57
4 The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity	59
<hr/>	
Schools already provide a significant amount of food to students	59
The School Breakfast Program struggles to meet demand	59
Many schools provide emergency food throughout the day	63
Some schools provide regular meals from their own funds out of necessity	66
Schools absorb the costs of feeding students	69
Many school canteens are not sustainable businesses	71
School lunch programs are well-established in other countries	73
There is one small government-funded lunch program in Australia	75
Benefits of school food programs are widely recognised	76
What worldwide studies have shown	76
What contributors to the inquiry have said	78
Food delivery, stigma and attitudes to responsibility are key challenges	84
Long distances and lack of infrastructure present difficulties	85
Students worry about being seen receiving food from the school	86
Perceptions and attitudes affect support	86
5 Key considerations for a school lunch model	89
<hr/>	
What should a school lunch model take into account?	89
Universal is desirable but targeted is more economical	89
The cost of providing a lunch for all students could be shared	92

Which state government agencies should be responsible for the program?	97
Food provision models should be tailored to suit the location conditions	101
What is served and how it is served is critical for uptake	104
Children may be fed on school days but go hungry during the holidays	108
The purpose of a pilot program needs careful consideration	109
A school lunch pilot program could determine the best model	111
5 Food and nutrition in early childhood	115
<hr/>	
Regulations governing child care food provision are not prescriptive	115
Access to food in childcare depends on where you live	119
Nutrition support services for children in the pre-school years are lacking	121
Nutrition of women during pregnancy needs more attention	122
7 Other initiatives to address food insecurity	125
<hr/>	
Place-based solutions are key to addressing food insecurity	125
Community gardens can be an important way for children to access food	125
Market gardens and food hubs would reduce dependence on food transport	128
Food Policy Councils can help communities plan local food systems	132
Social supermarkets provide food relief without shame	132
Community role models can support health behaviour change	134
8 What else is needed to support food security for kids	137
<hr/>	
A rights-based approach shifts the focus from individual blame to collective responsibility	137
A child and youth wellbeing strategy would ensure children's needs are being met	141
Measurement and monitoring is essential	145
There is no measurement of children's experiences of food insecurity	145
Tools for measuring food stress and access to healthy food need support	148
Data is critical for monitoring wellbeing	150
Planning provisions do not adequately consider children's wellbeing	151
Regulation around the location of unhealthy food outlets is still weak	152
Local governments need more direction in adopting junk food advertising bans	154
Public Health Plans are an opportunity to cater for children's needs	155
Coordination and cooperation is fundamental	156

Assigning responsibility would provide clarity	157
An opportunity for leadership	158
Appendices	161
<hr/>	
1 Committee’s functions and powers	161
2 Inquiry process	163
3 Submissions received	167
4 Hearings and briefings	169
5 Acronyms and abbreviations	179
6 Convention on the Rights of the Child: Preamble and Articles 24, 27	181
7 Food literacy programs for adults	185
8 School lunch programs in four other countries	187
9 Results of easy English responses	199

Executive Summary

WHILE Australia has voluntarily entered into international agreements which oblige Western Australia to ensure children receive adequate nutrition (for example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child), this inquiry has found that the needs of some children are not being met in this regard. It is estimated that around 17% of children in WA live with food insecurity, although determining an exact figure is difficult due to a lack of measurement. Insufficient food in childhood can have short term and long term physical, mental and social impacts and can impede the ability to learn. Family income, where you live, belonging to a disadvantaged community and difficult home circumstances can make it challenging for children and young people to access good food. Also, simply being a child is a barrier, since children rely on adults for everyday necessities.

This inquiry investigated the effectiveness of two established approaches to addressing food insecurity – food relief and food literacy programs – before turning its attention to the merits of a school lunch program. Initiatives such as food hubs and social supermarkets were also considered, along with other elements which can support good nutrition for children: a rights-based approach, a child wellbeing strategy, thoughtful urban planning, better measurement and monitoring of food insecurity, and government leadership.

Effectiveness of food relief and food literacy

Food relief is not easily accessed by children, and even adults encounter barriers such as eligibility difficulties and shame in reaching out to charities. Food relief is largely uncoordinated across the state and is not adequately or sustainably funded to meet the ever-increasing demand. The food that is offered does not have to meet nutritional standards in the same way as meals provided to other vulnerable people. While the School Breakfast Program is highly valued by schools across the state, Foodbank WA is finding it difficult to meet demand and cover costs. Food relief is an important but insufficient response to childhood food insecurity.

Food literacy is an essential component of food relief, providing skills to families to aid in the preparation of the food they are provided. Some relief organisations include a literacy component but again, reaching those most in need is hampered by funding, coordination, staffing and design problems. Food literacy usually reaches children by way of school programs, although experts insist that these must have a practical component to be most effective. This is not always provided.

The merits of a school lunch program

While government-supported school lunch programs are well-established in other countries, the only one in Australia is a small federally-funded program for remote community schools in the Northern Territory. Informally, however, an unquantified number of schools in WA provide lunch to students as a matter of need. Students may come to school without lunch or without money for the canteen, or there may not be a canteen. In many schools, canteens are struggling to cover costs unless they increase prices, making it unaffordable for parents. Children who come to school hungry cannot learn effectively. Schools that provide food for

them from their own funds often do so at the expense of other education resources or programs. The impact of a school lunch program on health and wellbeing is difficult to measure, but anecdotal evidence suggests it helps to address food insecurity for individual students and improves attendance, concentration in the classroom, nutrition and social skills. It also relieves parents of the burden of packing a nutritious lunch each day, although it is acknowledged that entrenched Australian cultural attitudes to parental responsibility and freedom of choice may mean some parents prefer to pack their child's lunch.

What a school lunch model should consider

The features of school lunch models around the world are predicated on being either universal – that is, free for all children – or targeted to those most in need. If they are targeted, a means of determining eligibility has to be established, which can be administratively complex, and a discreet way to collect payment to avoid stigmatising students that are eligible has to be considered. A parental co-payment is a commonly accepted model when parents are convinced of the quality and value of a school-provided lunch. Without a co-payment, the cost of a school lunch program for all government school students on all school days is estimated at \$400 million to \$600 million per year.

With the imminent renewal of the National School Reform Agreement, now is the time to put a school lunch program on the national reform agenda. WA could also seek grant funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency for a lunch program in remote schools, similar to the program in the Northern Territory. Irrespective of this, the Department of Education should commit to establishing a pilot school lunch program in a selection of communities across the state. In the longer term, a school lunch program requires a whole-of-government approach. Given the challenges associated with supplying food in schools across a state as vast as WA, flexible place-based models are the best approach. The WA Government should encourage the use of local produce and consider the potential for schools to act as a hub for community food relief. Children need nutritious food every day and school holiday periods remain an ongoing challenge requiring special attention.

Food and nutrition needs in early childhood

Long day care centres in Perth have been shown to spend an average of \$2 per child per day on food, which means they struggle to meet the Australian Dietary Guidelines for core food group intake. The *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012* do not stipulate a minimum expenditure on food, leaving it to the provider's discretion. Services are assessed against the National Quality Standard, which has also been criticised for not placing enough emphasis on food and nutrition. WA should recommend that the next national review of the National Quality Framework includes a review of the standard.

Whether children can access good food through early childhood care also depends on the availability of child care nearby, whether it is affordable and whether food is provided by the service or by parents. Parents in regional and disadvantaged areas of the state are less likely to have access to quality child care, leaving them nutritionally disadvantaged. There are few other places where children can access nutrition programs in the pre-school years.

Place-based solutions, social supermarkets and community role models

Community gardens are one of the only ways children can directly access food. Many communities have edible gardens which are supported by local governments, but it is unclear how often children access the produce. Suggestions have been made to upscale community gardens to market garden size so that they can supply the local community. Food hubs are a step further and have the potential to provide food resilience to communities vulnerable to the vagaries of long-distance food freight. Research conducted by Edith Cowan University (the Food Community Project) reveals high interest in food hubs in regional areas, and a federal committee inquiry into food pricing and food security is also supportive.

Another way people in need can access food in a dignified way is through a social supermarket. Social supermarkets receive discounted or free surplus goods that would otherwise be wasted and sell them for a low price. The goods are presented on the shelves in the same way as any other supermarket. This model has been successfully piloted in Roebourne as a way to address poor access to goods and higher prices than in urban areas.

In culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal communities in particular, training community ambassadors or peer educators is an effective way to promote healthy eating messages. The Department of Health (DoH) should consider supporting this method, which would also address a shortage of dietitians and nutritionists available to perform this work.

What else is needed?

A rights-based approach to food security would ensure individuals are not blamed for being unable to feed themselves or their children. Child impact assessments of all proposed policies, services and legislation would formalise this approach, and a child and youth wellbeing strategy would ensure that child nutrition was being monitored and reported on. Unfortunately, work to establish a child wellbeing strategy has stalled but the WA Government needs to put it back on the agenda as a matter of priority.

Addressing food insecurity is much more difficult without recent and reliable data, and in particular without any measurement of how children are affected. The Department of Health should work on a suitable way to collect data from children on their experiences of food insecurity. Two independently developed tools which would aid understanding are the Food Stress Index and the Food Atlas; we recommend that the Department of Health supports their development and ongoing maintenance.

Child health and wellbeing is not currently central to planning regulations, which can inhibit access to healthy food and expose children to unhealthy food outlets and junk food advertising. Local government Public Health Plans are an opportunity to create healthier food environments for children. Some local government authorities still need government assistance to assess the health and wellbeing needs of children in their communities.

Finally, better coordination of responsibility for children's needs and for food security is required. A minister needs to be assigned responsibility for developing a child wellbeing strategy and there needs to be better ministerial oversight of food relief, with a view to achieving food resilience.

Ministerial Response

In accordance with Standing Order 277(1) of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly, the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People directs that the Premier, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Early Childhood Education and the Minister for Planning report to the Assembly as to the action, if any, proposed to be taken by the Government with respect to the recommendations of the Committee.

Findings and Recommendations

Chapter 1 – What this inquiry is about

Finding 1

Page 10

Western Australia has voluntarily entered international agreements which oblige the State to address children's needs for food and good nutrition. It also has a moral imperative to act.

Chapter 2 – The food insecurity problem facing children in WA

Finding 2

Page 13

It is estimated that approximately 17% of children and young people in Western Australia live with food insecurity. The problem is likely considerably greater than available statistics suggest, as families and children hide the fact that they have insufficient food.

Finding 3

Page 27

Factors that make it difficult for children to get enough good food include:

- Inadequate family income
- Location, with regional and remote areas suffering higher rates of food insecurity
- Being a member of a disadvantaged community or social group, i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and migrants and refugees
- Family and home circumstances
- Because they are a child.

Finding 4

Page 33

The impacts of food insecurity for children include:

- Short term and long term serious physical health problems, including anaemia, tooth decay, diabetes and obesity
- Short term and long term mental health issues
- Social impacts, including food stealing and magpie-ing, and the adoption of self-protective behaviours such as self-restricting, which have long term negative repercussions
- Educational impacts, with research showing that an average student loses 2 hours of learning time when they come to school hungry
- The intergenerational transmission of poverty and food insecurity.

Chapter 3 – The role of food relief and food literacy

Finding 5

Page 36

Demand for food relief has been increasing since at least 2019, and is likely to continue to do so. This will place a considerable further burden on the food relief sector.

Finding 6**Page 40**

A degree of food relief will always be needed in times of crisis, but it is neither a short- nor a long-term solution for food insecurity.

Finding 7**Page 44**

Some of the structural issues facing the food relief system in WA include:

- The 'patchwork' nature of food relief in WA makes it complex to access and creates gaps and duplications in service delivery
- The sector is not adequately or sustainably funded to meet existing and increasing demand effectively
- Operations depend upon a volunteer labour force that is unreliable and in decline
- Food relief does not necessarily provide adequate nutrition and is not subject to the standards and regulations that enforce safety in other food sectors.

Finding 8**Page 46**

Barriers to individuals accessing food relief include:

- A sense of shame and stigma, which can make the experience distressing for some
- Administrative requirements can make access unnecessarily difficult, and may be insurmountable barriers for children and young people
- Difficulties with transport and the location of services.

Finding 9**Page 47**

Food relief in WA is an important but insufficient response to childhood food insecurity.

Finding 10**Page 57**

For food relief to be most effective, people need food literacy. In WA, these are commonly delivered together, or by the same organisations. Food relief organisations need support to integrate food literacy in their operations to aid the health of our food insecure population.

Finding 11**Page 57**

The causes of low food literacy are complex and the reach of food literacy programs is limited by the nature of the problem, as well as funding, coordination, workforce, design and access issues.

Finding 12**Page 58**

Low food literacy exacerbates food insecurity and perpetuates the problem across generations, so it is important to develop food literacy from an early age, and across the life cycle. Schools play an important role in this, as do frontline health workers.

Finding 13**Page 58**

While not the full solution, practical food literacy initiatives are most helpful for children experiencing food insecurity and their families.

Recommendation 1**Page 58**

The Department of Health considers investing in the number and capacity of frontline health workers, such as child health nurses, to support food literacy development for populations at risk of food insecurity.

Recommendation 2**Page 58**

The WA Government works with Fair Food WA to support the food literacy of the food relief sector by implementing the Food Literacy Action Logic Model and developing state guidelines for healthy food relief.

Chapter 4 – The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity**Finding 14****Page 62**

Dependence on volunteer labour places pressure on schools and reduces the reach, impact and sustainability of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast Program.

Finding 15**Page 62**

Current funding arrangements are not sufficient for Foodbank WA to meet both rising demand for the School Breakfast Program and the rising costs of delivering it.

Recommendation 3**Page 62**

The Department of Education reviews government funding of the School Breakfast Program to ensure it covers the real costs of delivering the program – including a paid coordinator within registered schools – to meet demand and increase impact on an ongoing basis.

Finding 16**Page 66**

Food insecure students often rely on school and canteen staff noticing that they need food and having the means to provide it.

Finding 17**Page 71**

Schools are invested in supporting nutrition as an aspect of student wellbeing and to uphold the pre-conditions of learning.

Finding 18**Page 71**

Universal school meal programs already exist informally in an unquantified number of schools across WA.

Finding 19**Page 71**

Some schools feel compelled to provide food for students using school funds, resulting in less funds available for core educational purposes. This leads to inequity between schools, and can affect learning opportunities and outcomes for students.

Recommendation 4**Page 71**

The Department of Education identifies how many WA schools are using their own funds to provide free food for students. It should quantify total costs, measure impact, and identify the elements of successful programs in different contexts across the state.

Finding 20**Page 73**

The Department of Education acknowledges that many canteens, especially in primary schools, are in a fragile state and face an uncertain future.

Finding 21**Page 76**

The only government-funded lunch program in the nation is for remote schools in the Northern Territory, but there is increasing interest in exploring school lunch programs in other parts of Australia.

Finding 22**Page 84**

Anecdotal evidence and observations demonstrated the ability of a school lunch program to address food insecurity for individual students and to improve attendance, concentration, nutrition and social skills. It also relieved parents of the burden of packing a lunch and addressed the problem of lunchbox food safety.

Finding 23**Page 86**

Access to fresh produce is not guaranteed in a state as vast as Western Australia, and some schools are not equipped to prepare food.

Finding 24**Page 86**

Students who are seen to be relying on free food supplied by the school can be stigmatised and bullied.

Finding 25**Page 88**

Australian cultural attitudes to education, parental responsibility and freedom of choice could create resistance to establishing a school lunch program.

Finding 26**Page 88**

A school lunch program would be of great benefit to children in Western Australia and ways to address the challenges of implementation are worth exploring.

Chapter 5 – Key considerations for a school lunch model**Finding 27****Page 91**

A universal lunch program would embrace the concept of nutrition as an integral part of school education and avoid stigmatising children and young people from low income households, but would cost the government more than a targeted program.

Finding 28 **Page 92**

A targeted lunch program would help address food insecurity specifically for children and young people most in need and is more economical, but risks excluding some students who should qualify.

Finding 29 **Page 92**

A targeted program can avoid stigmatising children and young people from low income households if all students participate and pay according to means, and by ensuring that students who do not pay (or pay less) cannot be identified by other students.

Finding 30 **Page 93**

With no parental co-payment, the cost of providing a free school lunch for all government school students on all school days is estimated at \$400 million to \$600 million per year.

Finding 31 **Page 94**

A parental co-payment is considered necessary and reasonable in many places, although it can be difficult to collect.

Recommendation 5 **Page 95**

The Minister for Education uses the renewal of the National School Reform Agreement to put a school lunch program on the national reform agenda.

Recommendation 6 **Page 95**

Provision of a school lunch – particularly for disadvantaged students – be included as an action in Western Australia’s bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth on quality schools reform.

Recommendation 7 **Page 96**

The Department of Education investigates the potential for grant funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency to provide a lunch program for schools in Western Australia’s remote communities, similar to the School Nutrition Projects the agency provides in the Northern Territory.

Finding 32 **Page 97**

Corporate funding is not reliable enough to sustain school lunch programs in the long term, but could be used to support a program or assist students to participate.

Finding 33 **Page 100**

The Department of Health envisages its role in a school lunch program or pilot program to be supportive rather than central, providing nutrition advice and evaluation expertise.

Finding 34 **Page 100**

A school lunch program would be relevant to other Department of Health activities, such as implementation of the Sustainable Health Review recommendations and its whole-of-school healthy eating program.

Finding 35 **Page 100**

The Department of Education regards itself as having a key role in ensuring good nutrition to help students learn, which includes addressing what children eat at school.

Finding 36 **Page 101**

Primary producers can benefit from school lunch programs which stipulate procurement of local produce.

Finding 37 **Page 103**

Whether schools choose to have lunches prepared in a central kitchen or on-site depends on factors such as location and existing facilities.

Finding 38 **Page 104**

Employing appropriately trained staff was considered the best option for schools providing a lunch program, although volunteers and teaching staff may be called on to supervise.

Finding 39 **Page 104**

A school lunch program might increase the number of school food business registrations and inspections local government authorities are required to manage.

Finding 40 **Page 107**

The experiences of other school food programs show that the type of food served and the way it is served needs careful consideration to maximise uptake and minimise waste.

Finding 41 **Page 108**

Parents from other cultures often like to provide food from their own culture for school lunches, but it is often difficult to package and heat. Their children also feel pressured to have lunchbox contents that look the same as other students.

Finding 42 **Page 109**

Children in the poorest parts of the state are fed on school days but often go without meals over weekends and school holidays.

Finding 43 **Page 109**

Some countries address school holiday hunger by providing a means-tested meal program.

Recommendation 8**Page 113**

The Department of Education takes the lead in establishing a pilot school lunch program targeting a selection of low socio-economic metropolitan, regional and remote schools.

Recommendation 9**Page 113**

The State Government should apply a whole-of-government approach in considering a school lunch program model and take into account:

- How a model based on means-testing would identify eligibility and avoid stigmatising eligible students in government and non-government schools
- How corporate funds could supplement state funding
- The need for flexible delivery models according to location
- The need for appropriately trained paid staff
- Ways to ensure food quality is maintained
- Strategies to encourage student uptake
- Cultural preferences and dietary needs
- A direction to school food providers to procure a proportion of fresh food from local primary producers
- The potential for schools to act as a hub for community food relief and food security programs.

Chapter 6 – Food and nutrition in early childhood**Finding 44****Page 119**

The regulations and standards within the *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012* are not prescriptive enough regarding food provision, with no minimum expenditure or food types specified.

Recommendation 10**Page 119**

The Minister for Early Childhood Education recommends that the next review of the National Quality Framework includes a review of the National Quality Standard, with particular regard to the adequacy of the elements related to food provision.

Finding 45**Page 121**

Parents experiencing food insecurity are less likely to send their children to childcare if they are required to provide food, which is more likely to be the case in regional and disadvantaged areas of the state.

Finding 46**Page 122**

Children who do not attend formal childcare have little or no opportunity to access health and nutrition programs in the pre-school years.

Recommendation 11 **Page 122**

The State Government monitors the outcomes from the Early Years Partnership and ensures that understanding of the nutritional needs of the 0 to 4 years age group benefits communities beyond those in the partnership program.

Finding 47 **Page 124**

Babies born to women with poor nutrition are more likely to be below optimal birthweight, which negatively impacts their development.

Recommendation 12 **Page 124**

The Department of Health should support food insecure pregnant women to receive the nutritional support they require to deliver a healthy birthweight baby.

Chapter 7 – Other initiatives to address food insecurity

Finding 48 **Page 128**

Community gardens can be a useful source of free food for children and are well-supported by many local government authorities.

Finding 49 **Page 132**

Edith Cowan University’s Food Community Project is conducting important work to understand the particular food security needs of regional communities.

Recommendation 13 **Page 132**

Relevant State Government agencies and representatives support the investigation of food hubs as a way to address food supply and distribution issues in remote and regional areas, in accordance with Food Community Project research and recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*.

Recommendation 14 **Page 132**

Local government authorities and State Government departments ensure that they are represented on any Food Policy Councils that are initiated in regional areas.

Finding 50 **Page 134**

The social supermarket operating in Roebourne is providing local residents in need with a dignified means of accessing low cost or free food.

Finding 51 **Page 136**

A Care Group model which uses community ambassadors or peer educators could have a two-fold benefit of addressing a) cultural barriers to healthy eating messages and b) the shortage of dietitians and nutritionists available to undertake this work.

Recommendation 15**Page 136**

The Department of Health investigates funding a program to train community peer educators to deliver healthy eating and nutrition messages in their own communities.

Chapter 8 – What else is needed to support food security for kids**Finding 52****Page 139**

A children’s rights-based approach would shift the blame from the individual and broaden the understanding of a child’s experience of poverty and food insecurity.

Recommendation 16**Page 139**

The WA Government places children’s rights at the core of policies and strategies to address poverty and food insecurity.

Finding 53**Page 140**

Child impact assessments are an important tool for ensuring children’s rights and wellbeing are protected, and for ensuring coherence across government policy areas.

Recommendation 17**Page 140**

The WA Government requires all government departments to conduct child impact assessments of legislative and policy developments and changes.

Recommendation 18**Page 141**

The WA Government considers adopting a human rights charter to help ensure better respect for children’s rights.

Finding 54**Page 144**

A child wellbeing strategy would be a valuable tool for improving the implementation of government policy aimed at the wellbeing of children and young people in WA.

Recommendation 19**Page 144**

The WA Government prioritises the development and implementation of a child wellbeing strategy in Western Australia.

Finding 55**Page 148**

There are no surveys that ask children and young people directly about their experiences of food insecurity, leaving a gap in Western Australia’s understanding of its extent and impact.

Recommendation 20**Page 148**

The Department of Health identifies resources to scope a suitable survey methodology for regularly capturing the views and experiences of children and young people in regard to food insecurity. This could be in conjunction with bodies with existing expertise and/or survey instruments, such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Curtin University and the Telethon Kids Institute.

Finding 56**Page 150**

The Food Stress Index and Food Atlas are tools with the potential to provide valuable information about food insecurity, food relief and planning needs throughout the state, provided they receive support for maintenance.

Recommendation 21**Page 150**

The Department of Health considers how it can provide in-kind, resourcing or financial support for the development and maintenance of the Food Stress Index and Food Atlas.

Recommendation 22**Page 152**

The Minister for Planning requests that the WA Planning Commission develops a new (or amends existing) state planning policy that ensures the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Finding 57**Page 155**

There are too many barriers and too few guidelines for local councils considering adopting a ban on junk food advertising.

Recommendation 23**Page 156**

The Minister for Health ensures that state health service providers have sufficient resources to provide information on the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people to local governments, to assist with their Public Health Plans.

Finding 58**Page 157**

There is a lack of clarity around ministerial and departmental responsibility for a Child Wellbeing Strategy.

Recommendation 24**Page 158**

The Premier allocates a minister to take responsibility for overseeing:

- the development of a Child Wellbeing Strategy
- food security, with the twin aims of achieving food resilience and, in the meantime, better coordination of food relief.

Chapter 1

What this inquiry is about

How many West Australian children living in poverty do we think is acceptable? Most of us would answer that the number should be zero, that no child should be saying that there is often not enough food for them.

Colin Pettit, 'Safeguarding the health and welfare of kids a priority', *The West Australian*, 27 August 2020.

Origins of the inquiry

This inquiry explores the relationship between poverty and food insecurity experienced by children and young people and how it affects their wellbeing. Australia lacks a deep understanding of how children and young people are affected by poverty¹ and how children in this situation access essential items such as food.

Poverty affects an estimated 105,000 children in Western Australia and has been the subject of several reports of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP) in the past few years.² The CCYP's landmark inaugural Speaking Out Survey, which collects the views of thousands of children and young people across the state, also revealed 'a link between material deprivation and wellbeing – what it means and feels like to miss out'.³ One in 10 of the students surveyed reported that there was only sometimes enough food for them to eat at home. These students were twice as likely to not like school, 3 times as likely to have poor health and 4 times as likely to have low life satisfaction.⁴

In *Missing Out Matters*, former CCYP Colin Pettit's key recommendation for reducing child poverty was to establish a Child Wellbeing Strategy.⁵ This would be a whole-of-government strategy to map where investment should be targeted and would set out the required actions to ensure vulnerable children and young people are supported. An obvious inclusion in this type of strategy is monitoring how children and young people access nutritious food. Current CCYP Jacqueline McGowan-Jones said that such a strategy 'makes enormous sense'.⁶ This kind of approach is not so different from what is being proposed nationally, with a commitment from the Federal Treasurer in the 2022 budget to introduce budgeting reforms

1 S Bessell, 'Rethinking Child Poverty', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 2021; Prof Sharon Bessell, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022.

2 *Missing Out Matters: Child Poverty in Western Australia in 2021*; *Child Poverty: A Call to Action in 2020*; *Improving the Odds for WA's vulnerable children and young people in 2019*.

3 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Missing Out Matters: Child Poverty in Western Australia*, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Perth, p. 23.

4 *ibid.*

5 *ibid.*

6 Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 October 2022, p. 6.

based on societal wellbeing.⁷ So-called wellbeing budgets are in place in New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and several European countries.

An abundance of literature (cited in Chapter 2) tells us that childhood poverty is linked to poor nutrition and poorer life outcomes generally. Not having access to sufficient nutritious food can affect school attendance and a child's educational outcomes, leading to diminished employment prospects and income-earning capacity in the longer term. The inability to access enough nutritious food in childhood also increases the likelihood of ongoing physical and mental health problems, as well as interactions with the justice system among children who turn to crime to feed themselves.⁸

Consequently, a society in which all children are well-fed should mean less strain on the welfare, health and justice systems. For some it could provide a path out of poverty. Aside from the economic arguments, it is a child's right to have access to adequate nutritious food and water under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

But what are the most effective ways to ensure that food insecure children affected by poverty are well-fed? In investigating this question, this inquiry sought answers to a range of related questions:

- How big a problem is food insecurity for children and young people in WA and who is most affected?
- What particular challenges do children and young people affected by poverty face in accessing enough nutritious food?
- How effective are:
 - o Food literacy programs – do they reach those who need them most?
 - o Food relief – does it reach those who need it most?
 - o School food programs – could a free school lunch program deliver better nutritional outcomes for hungry students, and what is being provided in early childhood education and care?
- Are there any other initiatives that could help address food insecurity for children and young people?
- What are the State's obligations to address food insecurity under international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals, and are they being met?
- How could the State better measure and monitor poverty and food insecurity, and how would a Child Wellbeing Strategy assist in this?

7 Commonwealth of Australia, 'Statement 4: Measuring What Matters', *Budget October 2022-23, Budget Strategy and Outlook*, 2022, pp. 119-142; Margreet Frieling, 'Treasure what we measure: first steps towards an Australian Wellbeing Budget', *Wellbeing Economy Alliance* (web-based), 17 November 2022, accessed 30 January 2023, <<https://weall.org>>; Warwick Smith, 'Chalmers hasn't delivered a wellbeing budget, but it's a step in the right direction', *The Conversation* (web-based), 26 October 2022, accessed 30 January 2023, <<https://theconversation.com>>

8 See Chapter 2 for more detailed discussion.

In considering these questions, the Committee was also aware of the need to understand the unique experiences and needs of newly arrived migrant/refugee children and Aboriginal children, particularly in remote areas.

Objectives

The immediate goals of this inquiry were to:

- raise awareness of food insecurity experienced by children affected by poverty
- find ways to ensure children are receiving enough nutritious food, as is their right.

More broadly, we would hope that the outcomes of this inquiry improve the long-term prospects of children by ensuring:

- They have the opportunity to learn to the best of their ability because
 - a) their early development is not impacted by poor nutrition
 - b) they are sufficiently well-fed to concentrate at school
 - c) they do not avoid going to school because they have no food to take.
- They do not suffer from poor health, now and in the future, due to undernutrition or malnutrition caused by poverty.
- They do not have to commit crimes to feed themselves.
- Their social wellbeing is not adversely affected by not having access to good food.

Definitions and explanation of terms

What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity is a term that has been defined slightly differently by different organisations depending on their purpose for using it. We began this inquiry using the definition from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (UNFAO):

Food insecurity is when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and health life.⁹

The UNFAO definition emphasises that food insecurity may be due to an ‘unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food’, and that food insecurity can be experienced at different levels of severity’.¹⁰

Several other definitions were proposed to us in submissions, and they raise important points for consideration. Centrecare defined food security as occurring when people ‘can get enough food to eat that is safe, that they like to eat, and that helps them to be healthy. They must be able to get this food in ways that make them feel good about themselves and their

9 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Hunger and Food Insecurity*, accessed 19 April 2023, <<https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>>

10 *ibid.*

families'.¹¹ Anglicare WA's submission also emphasised the importance of how people feel about accessing assistance to address food insecurity.¹²

The Edith Cowan University (ECU) submission also provided a comprehensive definition of food security. ECU defined food and nutrition security occurring when:

All people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food of sufficient quantity and quality in terms of variety, diversity, nutrient content and safety to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, coupled with a sanitary environment, adequate health, education and care.¹³

The ECU submission further details six dimensions which are now recognised to make up food security. These are:

- availability – effective food production to supply enough nutritious food
- access – economic and physical resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet
- utilisation – knowledge of basic nutrition and cooking skills, food safety and food preparation facilities
- stability of the supply – food access that can withstand climatic or economic disasters or seasonal events
- agency – an individual's empowerment to make decisions about what food they eat and having their voice represented in food policy
- sustainability – regenerative agricultural practices that protect future ecosystems.¹⁴

Food insecurity can therefore be seen to be a 'lack of regular and reliable access to food to meet growth and development needs. People experience food insecurity when they obtain food in socially unacceptable ways, or they cannot access food in adequate quantities for good health'.¹⁵ ECU reported that while often oversimplified as an issue of poverty and the inability to afford food, the disruption of any of the abovementioned food security dimensions may ultimately impact food security status.¹⁶

The Committee feels that the extra facets of meaning proposed by these definitions, including the emphasis on dignity of access, are important. The definition of food insecurity as laid out in the WA Food Relief Framework Report encompasses this well and will be adopted for the purposes of this inquiry:

A truly dignified food system is one where every individual and family has access to adequate, safe and nutritious food without the need for emergency food relief

11 Ontario Public Health Association. Goals of Food Security Strategy: A Resolution Adopted at the 1995 OPHA Annual General Meeting, Ontario Public Health Association, Toronto, Japan, 1995, cited in Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 4.

12 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 2.

13 Committee on World Food Security, *Coming to terms with terminology*, 2012, Committee on World Food Security, cited in Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 4.

14 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 4.

15 *ibid.*, p. 5.

16 *ibid.*, p. 5.

services. Conversely, food insecurity is ‘the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire safe, nutritious food in socially acceptable ways (...without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies).¹⁷

What is poverty?

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) defines poverty using a variant of the poverty definition adopted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in which the poverty line for a single adult living alone is set at half the after-tax income of the median (middle) household in the overall income distribution, including any social security payments received. Adjustments are then made for larger households and/or the relative costs of housing. This ‘50% of median income’ definition is widely used as a benchmark for the poverty line in Australia. In effect, poverty means living with an income of 50% of median income or less.¹⁸

Poverty lines provide a measure for

the adequacy of incomes to meet the minimum needs of households of different sizes. People whose household’s income lies below the relevant poverty line are unlikely to reach a generally acceptable minimum standard of living unless they have access to other resources such as substantial savings. They are likely to miss out on essentials that most people take for granted such as decent and secure housing.¹⁹

The 2022 Poverty Report by ACOSS provided the dollar figures for the poverty line for different types of families for the 2019-20 financial year. It is worth noting that recent increases in the cost of living will have significantly impacted on these figures, but the figures provide an indication of what is considered to constitute poverty in Australia.

Table 1.1: Poverty line by family type, 2019-20 (\$pw after tax, including social security payments)²⁰

Poverty line (\$per week in 2019)	
Family type	50% median income
Single no children	\$489
Couple no children	\$734
Single 1 child	\$636
Couple 1 child	\$881
Single 2 children	\$783
Couple 2 children	\$1,027

17 Western Australian Council of Social Service, *WA food relief framework*, 2019, cited in Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 2.

18 Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney, *Poverty in Australia 2022: A snapshot*, Sydney, October 2022, p. 15.

19 *ibid.*

20 *ibid.*

How many people live in poverty in Australia?

More than one in eight people (13.4%) live below the 50% of the median income poverty line after taking account of housing costs ...The poverty rate among children is much higher at one in six (16.6%). In total, there are over three million (3,319,000) people in poverty, including 761,000 children.²¹

Households that rely on social security payments are five times more likely to experience poverty.²² Children in sole parent families are 3 times more likely to live in poverty than children in couple families. Children in sole parent families have a poverty rate of 44%, versus 13% of those in couple families.²³

The CCYP WA reported recently that there are approximately 634,000 children and young people living in WA.²⁴ A poverty rate of 16.6% suggests as many as 105,000 children and young people are therefore living in poverty in WA.

A recent Anglicare WA report found that ‘the rate of child poverty in WA has been steadily rising, with the third highest poverty rate in Australia’.²⁵ Additionally;

The rate of children in WA living in severe poverty, defined as living in a household with income at or below 30% of median income, has risen substantially over the last decade. WA rates poorly against national measurements of severe poverty with 11.4% of children in WA living in severe poverty in 2017/18 compared to the national rate of 6.7%.²⁶

A rate of severe poverty of 11.4% of children in WA would equate to 72,000 children and young people living in severe poverty in WA based on the current population.

What are the State’s obligations?

Australia enters into international agreements as a nation. Australia has voluntarily entered into a range of international agreements which oblige it to address people’s right to food, and also children’s specific rights. These agreements entered into at the federal level apply at the state level, and as one witness explained, increasingly to corporations and individuals.

Human rights standards are fundamentally an obligation on the nation, but they also have relevance and importance for subnational governments and Parliaments, businesses and individuals.²⁷

21 Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney, *Poverty in Australia 2022: A snapshot*, Sydney, October 2022, p. 17.

22 Australian Council of Social Service ACOSS, *Poverty in Australia*, accessed 26 April 2023, <<https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au>>

23 *ibid.*

24 Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, *Profile of Children and Young People in WA – 2023*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth, 2023, p. 4.

25 S Garwood, W Simpson and M Kunzli, *Reducing Poverty and Improving Child Development in WA – Snapshot*, Ngala, Anglicare WA, October 2021, p. 2.

26 *ibid.*

27 John Southalan, Adjunct Professor and Barrister, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 2.

The Western Australian state, its executive government and government departments are therefore subject to the same obligations.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Australia signed in 1948, includes Article 25, which states that

everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.²⁸

The second clause of Article 25 makes special mention of children, noting that both 'Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.'²⁹

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was ratified by Australia in 1975 and entered into force in 1976. Article 11 of the ICESCR reiterates that State Parties 'recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.' It commits State Parties to 'take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right', including through specific programs to address need.³⁰

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified by Australia in 1990. The Preamble of the CRC recalls that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 'proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance.'³¹

The CRC contains the following articles which are directly relevant to the issues before this inquiry:

Article 24: (1) States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health... (2) State Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures: ... (c) to combat disease and malnutrition... through, inter alia... the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water...³²

Article 27: (1) States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

28 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations, 1948, Article 25, available at <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>>

29 *ibid.*

30 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, United Nations, 1976, Article 11, available at <<https://www.ohchr.org>>

31 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, United Nations, 1990, Preamble, available at <<https://www.unicef.org>> See also Appendix 6.

32 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, United Nations, 1990, Article 24, available at <<https://www.unicef.org>> See also Appendix 6.

(2) The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capabilities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development. (3) States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.³³

As part of the implementation of the CRC, State Parties are required to submit a report of their progress to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child every 5 years. Australia last reported to the UN Committee in 2018. As the Australian report to the UN Committee makes clear, 'State and Territory governments are responsible for many of the activities that give effect to the CRC.'³⁴ The Australian report points to the existence of children's commissioners at both the Federal, and State and Territory levels as demonstration of its commitment to children's rights.³⁵

In Western Australia, the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006* places the following obligation on the Commissioner:

In performing a function under this Act the Commissioner or any other person must regard the best interests of children and young people as the paramount consideration.³⁶

Additionally, the Act sets out matters relevant to the performance of functions by the Commissioner, and states that the Commissioner must 'have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.'³⁷

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, all of the United Nations Member States, including Australia, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Agenda encompasses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The agenda and development goals combined provide a 'universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity'.³⁸

While all of the SDGs are interconnected and relevant to the issue of food security, four are particularly important:

- **Goal 1**: No poverty: end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

33 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, United Nations, 1990, Article 27, available at <<https://www.unicef.org>> See also Appendix 6.

34 Australian Government, *Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports submitted by Australia under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2018*, Committee on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, 22 November 2018, p. 2.

35 *ibid.*, pp. 4, 10.

36 *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, (Western Australia), s. 3.

37 *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, (Western Australia), s. 20(1)(b).

38 UN Development Programme (2018), cited in Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and the Valuing Children Initiative, p. 3.

- Goal 2: Zero hunger: end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
- Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing: ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- Goal 10: Reduced inequalities: reduce inequality within and among countries.³⁹

It is clear from the above listing of voluntarily entered international obligations that Australian governments, whether at the federal or state level, have an obligation and responsibility to address children's needs for food and good nutrition.

A moral obligation to act

Aside from the nation's international obligations, several contributors to the inquiry raised the issue in terms of it being a moral imperative; that it is simply the right thing to do to act to reduce food insecurity for children in Western Australia. Catholic Education WA viewed supporting children as a social justice obligation on both society and government.⁴⁰ The Director of Centrecare, Adjunct Professor Tony Pietropiccolo expressed a similar view, as follows:

It is a moral issue because when is it okay to consciously leave a child in poverty? It is not as if we do not know. We cannot say we did not know about it and therefore we did not do anything about it. We know, and we still do not do anything about it. The morality of it is terribly important. It then creates a question for us, as a community, as to why it is that we do not do more.⁴¹

Another contributor to the inquiry viewed the matter as one of equity.

In short this is an equity issue. I live in the leafy Western Suburbs of Perth and therefore have access to fresh food on a 24/7 basis. People out of the Perth metropolitan area should not have their health compromised by not having the ability to buy fresh food. They should not have to put up with such poor access to some of the basics of life. It is simply not equitable. I believe it is the responsibility of Government, regardless of party, to make sure that people living outside of the metropolitan area have equitable access to fresh food.⁴²

The comparative wealth of the Australian nation and of the Western Australian state are further factors in the consideration of a moral responsibility to help children escape food insecurity and poverty. As the EON Foundation submitted to the inquiry, 'children in a wealthy state in a wealthy country like Australia should not be going to school hungry, or lacking nutrition because access to fresh food is restricted due to their location.'⁴³

39 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Sustainable Development: Make the SDGS a reality*, accessed 2 May 2023, <<https://sdgs.un.org>>

40 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 8.

41 Adjunct Professor Tony Pietropiccolo, Director of Centrecare Inc, co-founder of Valuing Children Initiative, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 March 2022, p. 2.

42 Submission 21, Dr Beth Walker, p. 3.

43 Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 8.

Finding 1

Western Australia has voluntarily entered international agreements which oblige the State to address children's needs for food and good nutrition. It also has a moral imperative to act.

Our approach

Including the experiences of children and young people experiencing food insecurity was important to the Committee. Not only is this required under our legislation,⁴⁴ it is another right included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁴⁵ And because the Committee also identified refugee/migrant and Aboriginal families as needing particular consideration, it resolved to engage as widely as possible.

To do so, the Committee produced materials in plain English, easy English, and the 7 languages most spoken in WA by new arrivals. We used social media, had an advertisement produced and aired on Indigenous radio across the state, and extended the submission deadline for children and young people. The Committee held forums with local multicultural organisations and travelled to regional towns and remote Aboriginal communities. We also went to Tasmania, to discuss their Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, and see their school lunch pilot program in action. More information about the Committee's approach to the inquiry process is included in Appendix 2.

44 'The views of children and young people on all matters affecting them should be given serious consideration and taken into account', *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA)*.

45 'Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account', Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (ratified by Australia Dec 1990).

Chapter 2

The food insecurity problem facing children in WA

Whatever way you look at it, poverty equals poor nutrition but both poor nutrition and poverty are synonymous with poor education outcomes.

Foodbank WA submission

How many food insecure children are there?

It is difficult to say exactly how many West Australian children and young people experience food insecurity due to the limitations of existing surveys and measurements. The most recent data on food security from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is over a decade old.⁴⁶ We also took evidence that the way the ABS and some other Australian surveys collect information – by asking participants one question about their food security rather than using a multi-question assessment tool covering people’s access, availability and utilisation of food – results in underreporting.⁴⁷ Groups such as Aboriginal people and people living in remote locations are also frequently underrepresented in the data collection and reporting process.⁴⁸

While no definitive statistics are available, it is generally accepted that tens of thousands of WA households experience difficulties accessing food:

- Based on a survey conducted for the 2022 Foodbank Hunger Report, Foodbank WA estimated that 208,000 households in WA face moderate or severe food insecurity and 116,000 children live in severely food insecure households.⁴⁹ This equates to over 17% of children and young people in WA. Moderately food insecure households are defined as having diets of reduced quality, variety or desirability while severely food insecure households have multiple disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.⁵⁰
- Across Australia, households with children are more likely to face food insecurity than those without. Almost one-third of households who had children and participated in the 2022 Foodbank Hunger Report reported they experienced severe food insecurity – 1.5

46 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Health Survey: Nutrition – State and Territory results*, 10 June 2015, accessed 13 April 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>. The ABS is currently conducting another National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, but, as at 14 June 2023, the results are yet to be released. See Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey*, 6 April 2023, accessed 28 April 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey*, 6 April 2023, accessed 28 April 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>

47 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 4.

48 Dr Roslyn Giglia, dietitian and Nutrition and Food Security Manager, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 2; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 5.

49 Kate O’Hara, Chief Executive Officer, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 1.

50 Foodbank Australia, *Foodbank Hunger Report 20er 22*, Foodbank Australia, Australia, 2022, p. 34.

times greater than the national average.⁵¹ Of these households, 60% said ‘their child/ren was/were not eating enough because they just couldn’t afford enough food’.⁵²

- Associate Professor Christina Pollard said that over 60,000 WA families experienced food stress in 2019.⁵³ Food stress is a precursor to food insecurity that occurs when families spend over 25% of their disposable income on food.⁵⁴
- The *100 Families WA* research project, which surveyed 400 family representatives living in entrenched disadvantage in Perth between late 2018 and early 2019, found that almost 60% of children had low or very low food security.⁵⁵
- In the Commissioner for Children and Young People’s 2021 Speaking Out Survey, 8.4% of respondents in years 4 to 12 (around 1150 students) said there was only sometimes enough food for them to eat at home. One per cent (around 135 students) said there was never enough food.⁵⁶

The importance of regular and reliable measurement and monitoring of this aspect of child wellbeing is discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

It is crucial to note that available statistics likely understate the problem, with both children and their families often hiding food insecurity out of embarrassment or shame.⁵⁷ A WA Country Health Service (WACHS) director noted that more remote farming families may be affected by food insecurity than the statistics show because they do not seek assistance ‘until they’re desperate’.⁵⁸ She also said people living in larger communities who do not fit into a particular recognised group are less easily identified.⁵⁹

There are also indications the issue is becoming worse. Since Girrawheen’s Roseworth Primary School began its breakfast club in 2008, the number of children using the service has tripled.⁶⁰ In July 2020 an average of 220 households accessed Foodbank WA services each day but, by the end of 2022, they were regularly seeing 700 households per day, and often over 800.⁶¹ Kate O’Hara, Foodbank WA Chief Executive Officer, told the Committee that ‘the escalation of need across all sectors is scaring us’.

51 Foodbank Australia, *Foodbank Hunger Report 2022*, Foodbank Australia, Australia, 2022, p. 7.

52 *ibid.*, p. 6.

53 Dr Christina Pollard, Associate Professor, academic and Public Health Nutritionist, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, pp. 1, 2. Food stress as a measure is discussed further in Chapter 8: see Timothy J. Landrigan et al., ‘Protocol for the Development of a Food Stress Index to Identify Households Most at Risk of Food Insecurity in Western Australia’, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2018.

54 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 6; Dr Christina Pollard, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, pp. 1, 2.

55 100 Families WA Project, *Insights into hardship and disadvantage in Perth, Western Australia: The 100 Families WA Baseline Report*, Centre for Social Impact, University of Western Australia, Perth, 2019, pp. 6, 24.

56 Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Speaking Out Survey 2021: The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth, 2021, p. 84.

57 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 16.

58 Sylvia Lennon, Director Population Health, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

59 *ibid.* See also Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5.

60 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 1.

61 Kate O’Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 13.

Finding 2

It is estimated that approximately 17% of children and young people in Western Australia live with food insecurity. The problem is likely considerably greater than available statistics suggest, as families and children hide the fact that they have insufficient food.

What makes it hard for children to get enough good food?

Children's access to nutrition food can differ depending on where they live, who they are, and their home situation. Underpinning these is the question of income, because poverty is 'fundamental' to food insecurity.⁶²

Inadequate income

As discussed in Chapter 1, families experiencing poverty have an income that is insufficient to meet their needs. Children in families where money is tight will be at higher risk of food insecurity. A 2020 study attributes the increasing number of Australian families experiencing food insecurity directly to high costs of living, low wage growth and insufficient welfare payments.⁶³

- Between December 2021 and December 2022, prices in Perth rose 8.3%.⁶⁴ Average wages in WA rose 3.6% in the same period.⁶⁵
- The inadequacy of current income support payments was highlighted by contributors who noted that the temporary increase distributed in response to Covid-19 lifted many families out of food insecurity.⁶⁶ Receiving income support has been found to be a significant predictor of food insecurity, with children from families that receive government financial assistance twice as likely to be food insecure.⁶⁷

During this inquiry we were told that high costs of living mean that for many people on low incomes, one small shift in circumstances can make the difference between coping or not.⁶⁸

-
- 62 Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Program Head, Population Health, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 11. See also Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 5; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 5; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA, p. 3; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 5; Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 8.
- 63 FH McKay, BC Haines, H Beswick, H McKenzie and R Lindberg, 'The prevalence, severity and experience of food insecurity in Australia: An investigation of food aid use', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, vol. 28, 2020, p. 2399.
- 64 The only Australian city with higher annual price growth was Adelaide, at 8.6%. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Index, Australia*, December Quarter 2022, accessed 24/04/2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>
- 65 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Wage Price Index, Australia*, December 2022, accessed 24/04/2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>
- 66 For example: Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 9; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 8; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 2.
- 67 Dr Stephanie Godrich, Senior Lecturer in Nutrition, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 2. See also Dr Stephanie Godrich, 'Food, Earth, and Water Resilience' Program of Research Co-lead, Centre for People, Place, and Planet, Edith Cowan University and Project Manager, Food Community, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 2; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 16.
- 68 Rod Pfeiffer, Branch Manager, Foodbank Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

Inadequate income creates conflicting needs for families, with housing prioritised over food.⁶⁹ Professor Sharon Bessell's research shows that poor nutrition is rarely a result of parental neglect, but rather of forced choices: 'it is between food and medicine or it is between food and shoes'.⁷⁰ She explained that some families are in the impossible situation of trying to meet the needs of different family members without the resources to properly do so.

Poverty drives a reliance on the cheapest foods, which tend to be processed carbohydrates, high in fat and sugar and low in nutrients.⁷¹ WA families on insufficient incomes are also resorting to survival approaches such as skipping meals, reducing food portions, forgoing fresh fruit and vegetables, limiting pricier proteins such as meat and cheese, and mixing baby formula to less than required strength to make it go further.⁷² These strategies

Statutory incomes do not cut the bill and families are living below the poverty line. They cannot afford fresh and healthy food.

- Rosie Davidson-Tuck, Shire of East Pilbara

illustrate Associate Professor Pollard's point, that 'you cannot provide an adequate diet if you do not have an adequate income'.⁷³

Newly arrived families from refugee-like backgrounds are in a particularly precarious situation. With little income they are reliant on Foodbank, often with many mouths to feed, and have to decide which family member will skip which meal on an ongoing basis. The Refugee Health Service tracks the

deteriorating body mass indexes (BMI) of children in these families, who can become (or remain) malnourished after their arrival.⁷⁴

At the Edmund Rice Centre, we heard that migrants do not have a lot of money and have to buy cheap food, rather than good food.⁷⁵ Staff have witnessed families reducing their intake of healthy foods in response to Covid-19 challenges and cost of living increases. The centre has also seen an increase in applications for bill assistance.⁷⁶ Refugee and migrant women at Ishar told us that for families with many children, it is difficult to afford even basic things like bread.⁷⁷

69 Participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022. See also: Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 4; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5.

70 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 5. See also Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 2.

71 Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 9; Associate Professor Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 5; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 3.

72 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 8. See also Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 15.

73 Associate Professor Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 5.

74 Dr Sarah Cherian, Clinical Lead, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 3.

75 Hafiz Nazari, Settlement Caseworker, Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022. See also Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 6.

76 Hafiz Nazari and Alaa Al-Batati, Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022. Refugee and recent migrant participants in the briefing held at Ishar on 17 June 2022 made similar comments.

77 Participants, Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, *Briefing*, 17 June 2022.

For many Aboriginal people in WA, poor nutrition, dietary environment and health starts young, ultimately leading to early mortality, and poverty 'sits at the top' of that, as Noongar woman Hazel Ealem'Hansen explained.⁷⁸ In Katanning, the majority of the Aboriginal community rely on Centrelink benefits.

Where you live

In Australia, the relative remoteness of any populated place is determined by measuring road distance to available services.⁷⁹ At the 2021 census, around 1 in 5 West Australians lived outside the Perth metropolitan area.⁸⁰ Contributors to the inquiry made it clear that remoteness is one of the main predictors of food stress.⁸¹ A higher percentage of the population in regional or remote WA experience poverty;⁸² however, it is also the case that these residents find nutritious food unavailable.⁸³ Professor Bessell emphasised that, though there are different factors at play in regional, remote and urban locations, 'geography always makes the difference in terms of children's right to be able to access food'.⁸⁴

Through investigative trips, we heard about the level of food insecurity experienced in different areas of the state. For example, the Salvation Army said an estimated 10% of Albany's population were food insecure, while a former youth worker in Warburton estimated around 90% of children there were malnourished.⁸⁵ A recent cost of living study in the Kimberley reportedly found that over half of the participating households 'did not have sufficient money to purchase food to last the 12 days of the study, or to have electricity 24/7 which impacts directly on their ability to store, cook and prepare food'.⁸⁶

But people also face challenges accessing affordable healthy food in some urban areas, where the combination of 'food deserts', with little or no fresh produce, and inadequate transport can put them at risk of food insecurity.⁸⁷ We heard that low socio-economic environments are more likely to be obesogenic, with research by the Telethon Kids Institute showing that WA children and young people living in disadvantaged areas are exposed to more unhealthy food outlets and outdoor advertising for unhealthy foods and drinks than

78 Hazel Ealem'Hansen, Project Manager, Early Years Initiative, Katanning Noongar Leadership Group, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

79 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Remoteness Areas*, 21 March 2023, accessed 15 May 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/>>

80 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Snapshot of Western Australia*, 28 June 2022, accessed 15 May 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/>>

81 Timothy J. Landrigan et al., 'Protocol for the Development of a Food Stress Index to Identify Households Most at Risk of Food Insecurity in Western Australia', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2018, p. 7; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, pp. 2, 9; Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 4.

82 Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 2; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 6.

83 Submission 18, The Salvation Army, p. 6.

84 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 5.

85 Colette Albino, Corps Officer, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022; Oriwa McKay, Shire of Ngaanyatjaraku, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

86 Submission 25, Department of Communities, p. 8.

87 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, pp. 4-5. Centrecare submitted that those on high incomes can also face food insecurity if they live where it is difficult to access affordable healthy food (Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 5).

those from advantaged areas, including around their schools.⁸⁸ Following UNICEF, the Cancer Council of WA characterised the overabundance of fast-food outlets close to homes and schools as ‘food swamps’.⁸⁹

The work of Dr Alexia Bivoltsis at the Telethon Kids Institute illustrates the importance of healthy food environments for children. She told us:

At the end of the day, people are going to choose the easiest choice—what is most affordable, what they can access the easiest and what is available around them. I think, really, it is about trying to make that healthy choice the easiest choice and ... addressing ... the environmental aspects ... what is your environment like? Do you have fast food outlets around your school? ... Do you have easy access to a supermarket? All of these things are really going to come together to influence your weight and your health.⁹⁰

In October 2022 we visited Burringurrah Aboriginal Community in the Gascoyne, which is over 5 hours from Meekatharra, and a minimum 6-hour drive inland from Carnarvon. The town has not had a functional store for years, so residents face the decision between going to a larger town for cheaper food,⁹¹ driving 40km to the small expensive shop at the Mount Augustus Tourist Park, or placing an order in advance with the Dust Up Project truck, including over \$100 for delivery, and hoping some of it is available.⁹² Choosing to go into town takes children away from school; the trip can take weeks if families have to wait for more money for fuel before they can return.⁹³ Resident Raymond Lockyer explained:

The logistics to get all that stuff out here, to go into town to get it, that’s probably the real burden on the people here. The cost involved to be able to deal with that. And they can’t manage that effectively because most of their income is spent before they even get down the road, so they’re limited in what quantity and quality they can afford.⁹⁴

Burringurrah members stressed that, once procured, keeping food supplies for a 10-person household fresh for two weeks with a standard fridge is next to impossible.

88 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, pp. 3, 6. See also Submission 14, WA School Canteen Association, p. 2; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 8; Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 7; Submission 22, Cancer Council of WA, p. 4.

89 United Nations Children’s Fund and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, *Protecting Children’s Right to a Healthy Food Environment*, UNICEF and United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva, November 2019, cited in Submission 22, Cancer Council of WA, p. 4.

90 Dr Alexia Bivoltsis, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 9.

91 This appears to be a common scenario. In Jigalong, we heard that prices at the Outback Store had risen such that it was cheaper for people to car pool and drive to the Woolworths in Newman (Stephen Farrington, Remote Clinical Manager, Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service, Jigalong, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022). Such choices rely on the availability of working vehicles, fuel, and licenced drivers.

92 Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022. Dust Up Projects is a regionally based project management consultancy assisting agricultural businesses and regional sectors with general freight needs to the East Gascoyne.

93 Glenda Sibson, Burringurrah Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

94 Raymond Lockyer, Burringurrah Community member, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

Figure 2.1: Map of remote Aboriginal communities mentioned



In Newman we heard that in the remote Aboriginal community of Punmu, the store revenue largely funds the administration of the community. Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa executive directors Sue Davenport and Peter Johnson explained that community coordinators need to boost food prices to cover general community costs, including fixing houses to make them liveable. This situation ‘militates powerfully against good nutrition’:

The more profit that the store can make, particularly from non-perishable high margin items like Coke and smokes, the better off the community is.

They suggest that breaking ‘the commercial nexus between the store and the community finances’ would support food security, saying that remote community administration and remote community stores should be separated, and both subsidised to enable healthy eating.⁹⁵

Figure 2.2: Empty Burringurrah Store building, 31 October 2022

Logistical issues limit the availability of quality healthy food for those who live far from major centres. Reliable supply can be impacted by poor road/sea conditions and weather that leads to road and rail closures, by delivery delays, low stock and empty shelves, by large distances resulting in food



95 Sue Davenport and Peter Johnson, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, Newman, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

spoilage, and by reduced food quality and shelf life.⁹⁶ Lack of variety is another issue.⁹⁷ And, while contributors said the availability of personnel to service remote areas was a challenge, they characterised all of these situations as being down to management priorities and decisions, noting that liquor stores in remote WA are kept well-stocked, and mining camps in remote WA locations are fully equipped and serviced to the required standard.⁹⁸

When nutritious food is available in remote areas, high (or even exorbitant) prices can keep it beyond reach.⁹⁹ While the cost of food has risen significantly across the country in recent years,¹⁰⁰ greater price volatility can occur in regional and remote areas.¹⁰¹

Figures 2.3 and 2.4: Lack of fresh produce at Coles Kununurra, 11.59am 8 July 2022¹⁰²



Small population sizes can mean no food retailers or only one, which limits buying power, restricts choice and keeps prices high.¹⁰³ Associate Professor Francis Mitrou from Telethon Kids Institute observed that \$15 cauliflowers are beyond the social incomes of people in remote communities: 'It is pretty obvious that they cannot afford to buy the healthy foods. It is a structural issue in society and in Western Australia.'¹⁰⁴

Issues relating to food security in remote Indigenous communities were addressed by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs' 2020 report on its *Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*. It recommended defining stores in remote Indigenous communities as essential services as

96 Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 2; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 2; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 9; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, pp. 13-14; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 9.

97 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, pp. 13-14.

98 Submission 21, Dr Beth Walker, p. 3; Dwayne Mallard, Wajarri facilitator and spokesperson, Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

99 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 3. See also: Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 2; Submission 1, Name withheld, p. 1; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA, p. 3.

100 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 7; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 6; Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 11.

101 The difference can vary between 20% and 49%. See: Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 14; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 9; Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 2; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 7.

102 Submission 21, Dr Beth Walker, p. 2.

103 Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 2; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 14;

104 Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 8.

opposed to profitable businesses,¹⁰⁵ a category laid out in state legislation.¹⁰⁶ The Department of the Premier and Cabinet advised that the WA government currently has no position on this recommendation.¹⁰⁷

When it comes to reliable nutrient intake in remote areas, water is the missing piece of the picture. The Telethon Kids Institute raised this issue,¹⁰⁸ and we heard first-hand about concerns at Parnngurr (Pilbara), Burringurrah (Gascoyne), Pia Wadjarri (Mid West), Mt Margaret, Menzies, Leonora and Warburton (all in Goldfields-Esperance). Contributors noted the following concerns:

- High levels of nitrates and uranium
- Tap water regularly running out without notice
- Communities reliant on bottled water for extended periods
- Pallets of bottled water left in the sun indefinitely, untested
- Kidney dysfunction, liver failure and leukaemia.¹⁰⁹

Residents have concerns about the levels of contaminants in their tap water. They explained that, because the acceptability of levels is determined by averages, they are still ingesting higher than recommended levels of contaminants on many days. These materials accumulate in their bodies over time. Even in Leonora, where reverse osmosis filtration was installed years ago, nurses still hand out bottled water for bottle-fed babies, saying that levels have remained a little high and they are reluctant to give children tap water.¹¹⁰

I will start at water. That is in the human rights space, as far as I am concerned. We have issues here in Western Australia, where we have communities that do not have access to the quality of drinking water that we would expect. I will just put that on the table.

- Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute

105 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, December 2020, p. xxi.

106 Australian Government, *Australian Government response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs report: Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, 2 December 2021, p. 8.

107 Peter Facey, Assistant Director, Remote Aboriginal Communities, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 6.

108 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 3; Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 8.

109 Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Annabel Landy, Councillor, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Naomi Sprigg dos Santos, Senior Project Officer, Child Safety, and Cheryl Cotterill, former Aboriginal health worker, WA Country Health Service, Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022. Pia Wadjarri Aboriginal Community was purportedly kept on bottled water for 18 months. Damian McLean told us that kidney health is a problem in Warburton due to previous high nitrate levels; however, the town got a reverse osmosis unit in 2022 (Milyirrtjarra Aboriginal Corporation, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022).

110 Naomi Sprigg dos Santos and Cheryl Cotterill, WA Country Health Service, Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

The Department of Communities (DoC) said it was actively working on a solution for Burringurrah and two other communities, but said that in general using water for growing food was very low risk in places like Burringurrah. Unfortunately, this view had not been shared with residents. The school at Burringurrah had stopped growing vegetables in its greenhouse after being told it was unsafe to use the water on them. And residents of Pia Wadjarri said it took 12 months of elevated levels before DoC issued a ‘don’t drink’ notice.¹¹¹

Figure 2.5: Out-of-commission greenhouse at Burringurrah Remote Community School, 31 October 2022



DoC said it supported the principle of providing advice to support people to make good choices in relation to using their water.¹¹² Responsibility for water in remote communities was outsourced by DoC until April of this year, when transfer of services to the Water Corporation began.¹¹³ DoC advised that the new arrangement ‘will, over time, ensure remote Aboriginal communities receive the same standard of water services as similar sized communities in regional Western Australia’; however, this does not constitute a commitment to a continually safe and reliable water supply.¹¹⁴

In remote areas, high levels of nitrate in the water also causes problems with building maintenance,¹¹⁵ further compounding challenges to food security caused by inadequate housing.¹¹⁶ Functional kitchens with spaces for food storage, working refrigerators, freezers and stoves of suitable size (along with reliable and affordable power to run them), benches for food preparation, and running water for keeping them clean are often lacking in remote

111 Jasmine Harris and Dwayne Mallard, Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

112 Mike Rowe, Director General, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, pp. 8-9.

113 Government of Western Australia, *Transfer of remote power and water a licence for success*, media release, 1 April 2023. See also Mike Rowe, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, pp. 3, 8-9.

114 Mike Rowe, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 3.

115 Damian McLean, Milyirrtjarra Aboriginal Corporation, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

116 Naomi Sprigg dos Santos and Cheryl Cotterill, WA Country Health Service, Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

Aboriginal communities.¹¹⁷ Lack of working health hardware – the equipment needed in and around homes to support health – forces a reliance on ready-made foods of low nutritional value.¹¹⁸ Curtin University’s Public Health Advocacy Institute submitted that ‘a regular housing maintenance program responsive to community needs is critically needed to ensure food security’ in our remote communities.¹¹⁹

Contributors to this inquiry consistently stated that food security cannot be achieved in isolation, and is inextricably linked to determinants such as employment, sufficient income, good environmental health, and especially safe and secure housing.¹²⁰ While the quality and availability of housing is an issue in remote Aboriginal communities,¹²¹ this is also the case elsewhere in WA. The Salvation Army noted the ‘critical’ situation in Perth with the residential vacancy rate at 0.6% (a healthy rate is considered to be around 3%), and lower in regional areas. Housing for those that can find it takes up an unsustainable portion of income for families experiencing poverty.¹²²

Who you are

Food insecurity and poor nutrition is more prevalent in certain groups. Although Aboriginal people are underrepresented in some food insecurity studies,¹²³ it is broadly accepted that they have less secure access to food than non-Aboriginal people.¹²⁴ The 2012–13 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey found that more than 22% of Aboriginal people lived in a household that, in the previous 12 months, had run out of food and could not afford to buy more. Only 3.7% of the non-Aboriginal population had had the same experience.¹²⁵

Given that Aboriginal people make up a sizeable proportion of the population living in remote WA,¹²⁶ they are also more likely to experience the challenges that come with accessing food outside metropolitan areas, including high food costs. As a high percentage of residents in remote areas earn a low income, Aboriginal people must spend a greater proportion of their income on food. In some Aboriginal communities, an estimated 34-80%

117 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, pp. 9, 12; Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 3; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA Branch, p. 4; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 7; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 16; Submission 26, Curtin University, p. 13.

118 Submission 12, Anglicare, p. 9; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 7; Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 3.

119 Submission 26, Curtin University, p. 13. See also Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 13.

120 For example: Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 6.

121 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 3.

122 Submission 18, The Salvation Army, pp. 8-9. See also Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 11.

123 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 2.

124 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 2; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 6; Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 1; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 5; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 5; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 7.

125 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4727.0.55.005 - *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: Nutrition Results - Food and Nutrients, 2012-13*, 20 March 2015, accessed 13 April 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>

126 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Western Australia: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary*, 1 July 2022, accessed 20 April 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles>>

of household income is required to purchase food for a healthy diet, compared to 30% for the lowest income families more generally, and 14% for the average family.¹²⁷

The time and effort required to source food is also greater for Aboriginal people who live in remote WA. Annabel Landy, a Shire of East Pilbara Councillor from the Martu community explained that locals from Punmu drive 2 hours to the store at Kunawarritji – because they get their fresh fruit and veg from the Northern Territory – rather than making a 10 hour overnight trip to Hedland or Newman.¹²⁸

Aboriginal people withstand these challenges because living on their traditional country supports their spiritual health, and they have cultural responsibilities to protect and care for it. In Burringurrah, Raymond Lockyer explained:

The people who are out here now they live here because we all got connection to this part of the country, in this vicinity, and that's why we live here. And our old people walked this earth many years ago. We gotta look after this place. And we gotta look after the people who come here and stay here too. And you can't do that until we have food security.¹²⁹

The lack of basic infrastructure means residents often have to leave, leading to small populations and lack of services.

Traditionally, Aboriginal people would source food as needed and cook communally, which is not compatible with western food systems. Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa staff explained to us, 'a store is a very whitefella way of running food – that is that every family goes to the shop and buys their food and takes it home and cooks it on their stove'. Consequently, Martu people have adapted a different lifestyle: they shop for their food every day, and often three times a day.¹³⁰ Because food storage and advance meal planning are not part of their cultural practices, the diet of Aboriginal people in remote WA can be heavily determined by what the local store has on offer.

What are the basic human rights, the basic needs of this community? That is not over and above a flamboyant ask. How do we have an adequate supply of food, hygiene and health care products that's of a high quality, being nutritious, and that there is the resources, infrastructure and personnel within the community to facilitate this?

- Dwayne Mallard, Burringurrah Aboriginal Community

Aboriginal people also have cultural obligations to share with family members, meaning that whatever there is gets shared:

127 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 9.

128 Annabel Landy, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

129 Raymond Lockyer, Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

130 Sue Davenport and Peter Johnson, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, Newman, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022. Similarly, in Burringurrah we were told that food is on a daily basis; they do not have a week's supply of food. (Marilyn Hake, WA Country Health Service, Burringurrah, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.)

People struggle with keeping food in a fridge. Everybody will eat out of whichever person's fridge currently has food in it.¹³¹

[It is] not a nuclear family culture. How do you tell family that they can't stay? They no longer have a home, they were evicted, couldn't pay the rent so they come and stay with you.¹³²

Cultural events such as funerals and sorry business also impact on food security in Aboriginal communities.¹³³

We were also told that intergenerational trauma has a 'massive impact' on some Aboriginal families' ability to function and provide food security.¹³⁴ An Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA) Youth Committee member said one reason children do not have access to enough food when they're young is because their parents are 'struggling with their own trauma'.¹³⁵

Children from migrant and refugee-like families also have an increased risk of food insecurity and malnutrition, as many contributors to this inquiry told us.¹³⁶ A 2018 study assessing the nutritional needs of newly resettled WA refugee children and adolescents found nutritional deficiencies were common, with 12% experiencing iron deficiency, 7% experiencing anaemia and 41% not consuming enough dairy. A third of children did not consume meat due to food insecurity.¹³⁷ Refugees may also under-consume water because they have come from places where the water is not safe to drink, so they become accustomed to drinking packaged beverages instead.¹³⁸ This situation is similar to that experienced by some Aboriginal people in remote areas of WA.

The Refugee Health Service (RHS), which provides refugee health care in WA as part of the Child and Adolescent Health Service (CAHS), said over three-quarters of RHS families reside in the most disadvantaged areas following resettlement. This, in turn, reduces their accessibility to fresh and affordable food and places them in close proximity to a disproportionate number of fast-food franchises.¹³⁹ Other contributing factors include previous experience of malnutrition, limited health literacy in a new context, difficulty finding culturally suitable food, and restrictive eating disorders that may be linked to trauma and adverse early childhood experiences.¹⁴⁰

131 Stephen Farrington, Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service, Jigalong, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

132 Naomi Sprigg dos Santos, WA Country Health Service, Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

133 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 14.

134 Meryl Hansen, Katanning Noongar Leadership Group, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

135 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 4.

136 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, pp. 3, 9; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 4; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 6; Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 1; Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 1; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 5; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 16.

137 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 5.

138 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 6.

139 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 7.

140 *ibid.*, p. 4; Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022; Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, *Briefing*, 17 June 2022.

People's status within Australia determines their eligibility for government entitlements and services and makes the positions of those in detention, seeking asylum, on temporary visas or negatively determined especially precarious, with the latter entirely reliant on community and non-government organisations for food, money and housing.¹⁴¹

These children and families are below the poverty line; many parents and children have significant mental health sequelae and ongoing food insecurity.¹⁴²

Cultural backgrounds tend to affect refugees' experiences in seeking food security. In Katanning, we heard that the local Karen refugee community are well-nourished because they know how to keep poultry and grow vegetables. By contrast, the Hazara, who feel ashamed if they cannot work, may not seek the help they need with income and food.¹⁴³

Home situation

Whether or not children and young people get enough good food is also determined by their family and home situation. We received substantial evidence on the different contextual challenges families face that can threaten children's food security, including:

- Unemployment and underemployment¹⁴⁴
- Working poor – Foodbank WA said that, out of all Australian states, WA has the largest percentage of food insecure people in paid work (59%). Twenty-three per cent of people experiencing food insecurity in WA have a mortgage.¹⁴⁵ Some parents work multiple low-paid jobs with the result that they are not present to provide food for their children.¹⁴⁶
- Lack of transport – families experiencing poverty may struggle to afford fuel, or may not have a car or a licence.¹⁴⁷ For those with access to public transport, carrying food home limits purchasing power and necessitates frequent trips.¹⁴⁸ Navigating these systems is additionally challenging for new arrivals.¹⁴⁹
- Renting¹⁵⁰
- Homelessness¹⁵¹ – at the Albany Youth Support Association, we learnt that a lot of homelessness is not visible. Further, at times up to 60% of youth staying in the refuge are

141 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 3; Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, pp. 7-8.

142 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 8.

143 Otieno Ndong'a, Katanning Migrant Resource Centre, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

144 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 8.

145 Kate O'Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 2. See also: Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 10; Rod Pfeiffer, Foodbank Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022; Submission 15, OzHarvest, p. 6.

146 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 6.

147 Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Amber Giblett, WA Country Health Service, Albany, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Kevin Guinness and Abby Phillis, Garlbagu, Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 2; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 8.

148 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 15; Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 3.

149 Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 3.

150 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 16; Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 1.

151 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 12.

transgender, and many have a history of trauma.¹⁵² Young people can end up homeless and hungry because they are not able to live with their parents.¹⁵³ Families can end up living in cars, tents, caravans or sleeping rough due to the housing crisis or domestic violence, with limited access to store, cook and prepare food.¹⁵⁴

- Couch-surfing – we were told that for both visitors and hosts, a lack of stable accommodation can make it difficult to feed kids well.¹⁵⁵
- Overcrowding – refugees can struggle to provide enough food to go around all members of often large families. In remote WA, Aboriginal family homes are also typically highly occupied.¹⁵⁶ The Aboriginal Health Council of WA explained that ‘children’s access to food is impacted when overcrowded households are unable to access and/or store the food required to meet the needs of larger numbers of people’.¹⁵⁷
- Chronic health and mental health conditions¹⁵⁸ – some children also become carers for one or more parents.¹⁵⁹
- Living with disability¹⁶⁰
- Addiction¹⁶¹
- Other caregivers – we heard that, especially in Aboriginal families, children are not always with their parents. While aunts, uncles and grandparents look after the children, they are not always able to provide them with enough good food.¹⁶² Additionally, grandparents do not receive Centrelink support for caring for their grandchildren.¹⁶³
- Family breakdown – families can struggle to establish new homes on limited incomes¹⁶⁴
- Domestic violence – a 2018 WA study found that the costs of continually relocating means families cannot acquire the basics.¹⁶⁵
- Single parents¹⁶⁶ - single parents can face low incomes, little support, and pressure to work or be job-seeking while raising children.

152 Ian Clarke, Chief Executive Officer, Albany Youth Support Association, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

153 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 43.

154 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, pp. 7-8.

155 Katanning Shire Council, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

156 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5.

157 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 12. See also: Submission 12, Anglicare WA, pp. 7-8.

158 Submission 2, name withheld, p. 1; Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 2; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 10.

159 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5.

160 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 11; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 5.

161 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 8.

162 Angelica McLean, Housing (Thrive Program) and Oriwa McKay, CDP (Community Development Program) Engagement Officer, Shire of Ngaanyatjaraku, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

163 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 6.

164 Adjunct Professor Tony Pietropiccolo, Centrecare Inc/Valuing Children Initiative, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 March 2022, p. 3; Ian Clarke, Albany Youth Support Association, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

165 N. Philippson, *Exploring the Experience of Food Insecurity in Single-Parent Families*, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2018, p. 64, cited in submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 10. See also Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 7.

166 Kate O’Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 2; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 16; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 5; Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 1; Submission 2, name withheld, p. 1.

- Trauma – disadvantaged children of all kinds may experience family dysfunction and trauma,¹⁶⁷ and poverty can itself be a traumatic circumstance.¹⁶⁸

Both Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities submitted that these and other life stressors such as death, accident, job loss and discrimination increase the odds of families facing food insecurity, especially when many of them are experienced at once.¹⁶⁹ Families in this situation can find obtaining the right help difficult, as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones acknowledged:

A lot of people do not know about the services. Navigation of the service system when you are trying to navigate every day, just getting through the day, is virtually impossible.¹⁷⁰

Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) families also find that available support service providers and programs are often not engaged, culturally competent or appropriate, or trauma informed.¹⁷¹

Unfortunately, when parents and caregivers face poverty it is hard for them to model eating well to their children. Parents may themselves never have developed food literacy such that they know how to source and cook nutritious meals,¹⁷² especially in cases of intergenerational poverty.¹⁷³ Some parents may have the knowledge, but lack the food, facilities, time, health or energy to pass it to their children.¹⁷⁴

Age

Fundamentally, food insecure children do not get the food they need *because* they are children. They are largely dependent on people and conditions beyond their control, and their direct access to food is limited.¹⁷⁵ This includes their direct access to food relief, as will be discussed in the next chapter. We received evidence that children without food are unable to fend for themselves, especially when younger.¹⁷⁶

I do question whether an eight-year-old should have to be so resilient that they are not telling their parents when they are hungry

- Professor Sharon Bessell

167 See SBP Letters of Support in Submission 10, Foodbank WA and Supplementary Submission.

168 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 11.

169 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 10; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 8.

170 Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 October 2022, p. 9. See also Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 9.

171 Hazel Ealem'Hansen, Julie Hayden, Wendy Hayward, Katanning Noongar Leadership Group, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022; Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 3.

172 Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 5; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 4; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA Branch, p. 3.

173 Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 7.

174 Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 3; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 2; Australian Health Promotion Association WA Branch, p. 3.

175 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, p. 6; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 3.

176 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 20.

However, in order to eat, food insecure children employ strategies from sharing food to crime to bin-diving.¹⁷⁷ Some residents at the Albany Youth Support Association refuge have had to 'fight for food' because it has not been readily available.¹⁷⁸ Some children interviewed for a South Australian food insecurity study had become 'over-responsible' and knew how to plan and prepare meals.¹⁷⁹ Older children also care for younger siblings and split their food so each can get something meagre.¹⁸⁰ Devastatingly, children have an acute awareness of family hardship and quickly learn not to ask for what cannot be provided.¹⁸¹

When considering the challenges families face in providing enough good food, Professor Bessell emphasised, 'we need to be very careful that we are not misunderstanding poverty as neglect'.¹⁸² The Tasmanian CCYP Leanne McLean echoed this warning, saying:

I don't know any parents who don't want to feed their child well; it's generally what parents want to do, regardless of the situation they find themselves in ... I think we have to be careful to not enter a space where we inadvertently blame parents for the state that they may find the nutrition of their family in when really those underlying drivers of poverty and education, varying forms of disadvantage, are where that lies.¹⁸³

Finding 3

Factors that make it difficult for children to get enough good food include:

- Inadequate family income
- Location, with regional and remote areas suffering higher rates of food insecurity
- Being a member of a disadvantaged community or social group, i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and migrants and refugees
- Family and home circumstances
- Because they are a child.

The impacts of food insecurity for children are serious and far-reaching

Not being able to regularly access sufficient, nutritious food has significant and long-term impacts on the bodies, minds, education and relationships of children and young people.

177 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 5; Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, p. 6; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5.

178 Ian Clarke, Albany Youth Support Association, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

179 S. Velardo, C. Pollard, J. Shipman, S. Booth, 'How Do Disadvantaged Children Perceive, Understand and Experience Household Food Insecurity?', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 18, no. 8, 2021, p. 4039, cited in Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 11.

180 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 6.

181 Professor Sharon Bessell, Associate Professor, Public Policy, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, p. 6.

182 *ibid.*, p. 5.

183 Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

Health impacts

We received considerable evidence about the health implications of food insecurity, with many inquiry participants noting children are at increased risk of:

- anaemia¹⁸⁴
- nutrient deficiencies or imbalances¹⁸⁵
- tooth decay or poor dental health¹⁸⁶
- wasting, stunting or being underweight.¹⁸⁷

As food insecure households often favour diets that are low in cost but high in energy, fat and sugar, it is also frequently associated with obesity, overweight and type 2 diabetes.¹⁸⁸

Associate Professor Francis Mitrou from Telethon Kids Institute explained:

You have this paradox of people who are overweight but are actually malnourished ... Because of the quality of their diets, it is actually obesogenic. It is causing spikes in their insulin, which causes fat to be deposited, so to speak.¹⁸⁹

In the past, type 2 diabetes was seen as an adult disease but children are now being diagnosed at 8 or 10 years old.¹⁹⁰

As they get older, people who experienced poor nutrition in childhood are at increased risk of developing other chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, musculoskeletal disorders, stroke and some cancers.¹⁹¹ These conditions may not emerge

184 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 5; Marilyn Hake, Clinical Nurse Specialist, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Naomi Sprigg dos Santos, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022; Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 2; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA, p. 2.

185 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA, p. 2; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 5; Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 5.

186 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 3; Geraldine Ennis, Regional Director of the Great Southern, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 5; Submission 22, Cancer Council Western Australia, p. 3.

187 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 1; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 3; Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 3; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 3; Marilyn Hake, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

188 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 5; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 5; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 6; Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 9; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 2; Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 2; Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, pp. 5–6; Submission 2, Name withheld, p.1; Marilyn Hake, WA Country Health Service, Burringurrah, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

189 Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 9.

190 Naomi Sprigg dos Santos, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Type 2 diabetes in Australia's children and young people: a working paper*, AIHW, Canberra, 2014, chapter 3, pp. 22–33.

191 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association, p. 2; Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 6; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 2; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 6.

until adolescence or adulthood, but their foundations are laid years earlier (and, in some cases, while *in utero* – see Box 6.1, Chapter 6).¹⁹²

Food insecurity also impacts the mental health of children and young people. This is partly physical: diet affects mood and cognitive skills and without access to healthy and nutritious food, children and young people can struggle in these areas.¹⁹³ However, it also arises from the ‘deep understanding’ that children have about the financial challenges facing their families.¹⁹⁴ Stress, depression, anxiety and worry were some of the mental health conditions cited during the inquiry,¹⁹⁵ along with low self-esteem and low self-efficacy.¹⁹⁶ Severe food insecurity has also been associated with an increased risk of suicidal ideation.¹⁹⁷

But what is sadder, is the kids that come in who have wrists sized like this [loops thumb and forefinger] and they just go, “Nah I’m not hungry.” They’re passed that stage. They’ve learnt to disassociate from their hunger, so they just... they don’t feel hungry.

*- Jasmine Harris, Principal,
Burringurrah Remote Community
School*

Supportive self-restricting is another possible outcome. Some children, aware of the difficulties their families face in accessing food, stop telling their parents or guardians when they are hungry. This experience, which public policy expert Professor Bessell described as children ‘constantly bearing the load of having to determine what it is that they can and should be able to ask for’, can affect how they see themselves and their futures:

If you are learning at a very young age not to ask for a new pair of shoes, not to ask to go on the school excursion, not to ask when you are hungry, you also learn not to ask for other kinds of opportunities. That has an often devastating effect on children as they grow up and as they think about what their futures might be able to provide them.¹⁹⁸

Experiences of poverty and food insecurity can also be experienced as traumatic by some children, and affect their ongoing relationship with food and may manifest in disordered eating’.¹⁹⁹ There is a risk that experiencing severe food insecurity perpetuates ‘the cycle and psychology of food scarcity’.²⁰⁰

192 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 2.

193 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA, p. 2; Submission 23, Geoffrey Holt, pp. 1–2

194 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 10.

195 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 6; Submission 15, OzHarvest, p. 2; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, pp. 5, 10; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 5; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 5.

196 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 11.

197 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 6.

198 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, pp. 6–7.

199 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 3.

200 *ibid.*

Aboriginal communities are particularly affected by conditions related to poor nutrition, with high rates of obesity, tooth decay, type 2 diabetes as well as conditions of the skin, ear, kidney, and heart.²⁰¹ Anaemia is also very prevalent, with Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service Remote Clinical Manager Stephen Farrington estimating it affects around 80-90% of children and young people between the age of 6 months and 15 years that he sees in the East Pilbara.²⁰² One Aboriginal Health Council of WA member service estimated that around three-quarters of the children they saw in their clinic had anaemia.²⁰³ By comparison, the condition affects approximately 8% of all Australian children under the age of 5 (the ages when children are generally most susceptible to anaemia).²⁰⁴

Tooth decay (also known as dental caries or cavities) affects many food insecure households²⁰⁵ due to their calorie-dense diets.²⁰⁶ The Refugee Health Service submitted that

If kids don't eat properly they end up with dental caries. If you've got a sore tooth, you can't eat. And if your teeth are rotten and they've fallen out – I don't care what food you put on the table, these kids can't eat.

- Geraldine Ennis, Regional Director, Great Southern, WA Country Health Service

60-80% of the RHS cohort have dental caries.²⁰⁷

Children can access free dental care from the School Dental Service once they turn 5,²⁰⁸ but some children have already had all their teeth removed by then.²⁰⁹

Children with poor nutrition are disadvantaged when it comes to learning. If they have experienced food insecurity in utero or in early childhood, their physical and cognitive development (i.e. speech development) can be affected,²¹⁰ and by school age they may already

face greater learning challenges than their peers.²¹¹ They are often irritable, and struggle to concentrate or regulate their behaviour, making it difficult for them to engage in the classroom.²¹²

201 Hazel Ealem'Hansen, Katanning Noongar Leadership Group, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022; Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 2; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, pp. 3–4; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 2.

202 Stephen Farrington, Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service, Jigalong, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

203 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 4.

204 The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, *Clinical Practice Guidelines: Anaemia*, January 2019, accessed 21 April 2021, <<https://www.rch.org.au>>; Shalini Balendran and Cecily Forsyth, 'Non-anaemic iron deficiency', *Australian Prescriber*, vol. 44, no. 6, 2021, p. 193.

205 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, pp. 5, 12; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 3; Geraldine Ennis, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA, p. 2.

206 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 2; Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 5; Submission 2, Name withheld, p.1.

207 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 7.

208 North Metropolitan Health Service, *Dental Health Services*, n.d., accessed 21 April 2023, <<https://www.dental.wa.gov.au/>>

209 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 2.

210 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 5; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 5.

211 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 2.

212 Ros Sambell, Lecturer, Edith Cowan University; Chair, National Nutrition Network – Early Education and Care, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 3; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA, pp. 2–3.

A 2015 survey of Australian teachers estimated that the average student lost approximately 2 hours of learning time when they came to school hungry.²¹³ Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA Nutrition and Food Security Manager, explained this can have long-term ramifications if the causes of their behaviour are not properly understood:

They get labelled not only as the naughty child but the dumb child. That is not necessarily the case, but unfortunately the label goes with them. That is really unfortunate because their opportunity is diminished every day.²¹⁴

Ear infections are common in anaemic children,²¹⁵ which reduces their ability to hear what is being said in the classroom.²¹⁶ Children who lose teeth due to dental caries can also suffer a learning disadvantage, as a teacher in Jigalong told us: 'If you don't have the teeth you can't make the sounds and then you can't hear the sounds, and it's a challenge for literacy.'²¹⁷ Lack of good food means some students are tired and lethargic and struggle to absorb the information they are being taught.²¹⁸

Social impacts

When poverty means food is not forthcoming at home, children may use other methods to access food, including:

- stealing food or money to obtain food²¹⁹
- hoarding²²⁰
- sharing food with their friends at school²²¹
- 'magpie-ing', whereby students pressure other students with lunch money to buy them food at the school canteen.²²²

Inquiry participants shared stories of children breaking into school during the holidays when food relief programs were not available,²²³ stealing food out of other children's lunchboxes

213 Foodbank Australia, *Hunger in the Classroom*, Foodbank Australia, Australia, 2015, p. 4.

214 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 14.

215 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 4.

216 Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 3.

217 Karina Ferrada, Jigalong Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

218 Submission 1, Name withheld, p. 1; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 5; Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 2.

219 Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 October 2022, p. 8; Naomi Sprigg dos Santos and Cheryl Cotterill, WA Country Health Service Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022; Oriwa McKay and Angelica McLean, Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022; Annabel Landy, Councillor, and Emma Landers, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, p. 6; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 5.

220 Submission 2, Name withheld, p. 1; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 6.

221 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, p. 6.

222 Cre Millar, Canteen Manager, Applecross SHS, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 7.

223 Angelica McLean and Oriwa McKay, Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

during school or from houses, shops and roadhouses;²²⁴ and taking money from teachers' wallets to buy food at the school canteen.²²⁵

Because of the shame that often comes with not having enough food, children and young people will often withdraw from social situations as a form of self-protection. They are less likely to invite friends to their house because they are embarrassed of their inability to provide a snack or refreshment.²²⁶ Studies indicate they tend to miss school excursions and after-school sport, and do not attend other children's birthday parties,²²⁷ either because of the cost involved or because they lack the energy to participate.²²⁸

The poverty and food insecurity cycle

There are multiple flow-on effects from the health, educational and social impacts of food insecurity. When students struggle to engage with learning because of the physical or cognitive challenges arising from poor nutrition, they are more likely to leave school without the skills necessary to secure well-paid and permanent employment.²²⁹ This, in turn, directly impacts their ability to source regular and nutritious food.

When children steal to feed themselves, they risk entering into the criminal justice system. For some, this sets off a cycle that is difficult to break.²³⁰ The effectiveness of therapeutic interventions is also impacted, with many young people arriving at youth justice programs hungry – an issue that must be addressed before participants can meaningfully engage.²³¹

When children grow up in food insecure households, they tend to have low food literacy, lacking the skills and knowledge required to select and prepare nutritious meals (see Chapter 3). Food insecure children may become mothers whose children face long-term health risks because of the nutrition they received in their first 1000 days (see Chapter 6). They may become fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunties or uncles who send children to school with pies or energy drinks for lunch.²³² Their children will likely face the same health, educational, and social difficulties they experienced, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

224 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, p. 6; Emma Landers, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; WA Country Health Service, Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

225 Participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

226 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, pp. 2–3; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, pp. 5–6.

227 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 11.

228 Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 5; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 17; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 11; Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 November 2022, pp. 6, 7.

229 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 38; Geraldine Ennis, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 4; Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 3.

230 Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 6.

231 *ibid.*

232 Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service, Jigalong, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

Finding 4

The impacts of food insecurity for children include:

- Short term and long term serious physical health problems, including anaemia, tooth decay, diabetes and obesity
- Short term and long term mental health issues
- Social impacts, including food stealing and magpie-ing, and the adoption of self-protective behaviours such as self-restricting, which have long term negative repercussions
- Educational impacts, with research showing that an average student loses 2 hours of learning time when they come to school hungry
- The intergenerational transmission of poverty and food insecurity.

Chapter 3

The role of food relief and food literacy

We need to empower the next generation so that they can break the cycle going forward. Give them a feed and teach them how to feed themselves.

Youth Committee member, cited in Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 15.

Food relief

Food relief (or food assistance) is the provision of food to people in need and is a key part of broader emergency relief.²³³ Generally, it enables people to obtain free or low-cost food as shelf items, hampers, and ready-to-eat meals. These are accessed through referrals to relief organisations, food vouchers, community food pantries and community gardens. Some food relief also occurs through schools. This assistance is often realised through government funding, charity donations of money and goods, business sponsorships, and fundraising by relief organisations. In WA, it is most often delivered via the community sector.

Food relief in emergency situations, such as natural disasters, is co-ordinated by the Department of Communities.²³⁴ The focus in this inquiry, however, is on food relief for people in ongoing situations of poverty.

Aside from food relief distributed through schools and youth organisations, children often cannot access food relief directly. Predominantly, food relief is oriented to adults. For families, this means that parents must access a food relief program and then make it available to children. This section of the report therefore examines the broader food relief sector, with the assumption that children will have at least indirect access to some of these programs. Programs that supply food to children through schools are discussed in Chapter 4.

Demand for food relief is growing

The demand for food relief has grown considerably in recent years. Foodbank research from 2019 found that food insecurity was a growing problem even before the Covid-19 pandemic, with 'demand for emergency food across Australia ... increase[ing] by 22% in the preceding 12 months'.²³⁵ More recent research from Foodbank for the 2022 Hunger Report found that food insecurity and the need for food relief has continued to grow.

Food insecurity has been on the rise over the last 12 months, with 23% of Australian households perceiving that they now struggle financially to access food

233 WACOSS, *WA Food Relief Framework Report 2019*, Perth, 2019, p. 5.

234 Mike Rowe, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 3.

235 Foodbank Hunger Report 2019, quoted in Government of Tasmania, *Food Relief to Food Resilience: Tasmanian Food Security Strategy 2021-24*, Communities, Sport and Recreation, Department of Communities Tasmania, Hobart, August 2021, p. 6.

more often compared with last year ... those with dependent children were more likely to have felt the pressure than those without.²³⁶

Of particular note is that a large proportion of people now seeking emergency food relief have a household member who is employed (54%), have a mortgage (30%), or may never have needed to seek assistance before. Foodbank expects the diversity of people using food relief to keep growing because of the range of external factors impacting households which may never have experienced food insecurity before.²³⁷

Additionally, of those identified as food insecure, fewer than half had accessed formal food relief. This means that there is a large amount of unmet need in the community.²³⁸ As the current cost of living crisis continues, it is likely that demand for food relief will increase. This will place further demand on the food relief sector.

Finding 5

Demand for food relief has been increasing since at least 2019, and is likely to continue to do so. This will place a considerable further burden on the food relief sector.

Several contributors to the inquiry emphasised that sometimes there is a public perception that the need for food relief is a short-term emergency event. However, in reality, it is often a chronic, ongoing experience for people living with poverty and food insecurity.

Over half (55%) of those living in food insecure households had experienced the situation more than monthly. As the level of food insecurity intensifies, it becomes an even more constant experience – with 70% of severely food insecure households experiencing it at least monthly.²³⁹

While the need for food relief may have become chronic for some families, Foodbank's research suggests that many are not benefitting from such relief.

Currently, the food relief sector is delivering support for approximately one million food insecure households in a typical month. However, overall, this is equivalent to just about two in five (38%) food insecure households receiving support from formal food relief services over the last 12 months.²⁴⁰

The research shows that while there is low participation in formal food relief amongst women, older people and those living on a lower income, those with dependent children have a higher likelihood of reaching out for support.²⁴¹

236 Foodbank, *Foodbank Hunger Report 2022*, October 2022, p. 1.

237 *ibid.*

238 *ibid.*

239 *ibid.*, p. 11.

240 *ibid.*, p. 24.

241 *ibid.*

Food relief is provided by an extensive range of organisations

In the course of this inquiry, it has become clear that the term ‘food relief system’ is something of a misnomer in WA. ‘Food relief patchwork’ may be more accurate. Even the largest dedicated food relief organisation, Foodbank, does not have state-wide coverage.

What has been notable from the evidence is how many generous, dedicated organisations and individuals are doing their best to address the needs of the community, particularly for children. Actors in this sector range from large organisations such as Foodbank and OzHarvest, through to schools and local government community programs, to charity organisations and small churches.

In recognition of the challenges faced by the sector and the *ad hoc* nature of operations, Fair Food WA (FFWA) was founded in 2017 to lead the development of a strategic framework. Fair Food WA is funded by Lotterywest and hosted by the Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS), the peak body for the community sector. The WA Food Relief Framework Report was published in 2019, and provides an overview of the situation as it was then. It is worth noting that in the intervening years, the Covid-19 pandemic, natural disasters and the cost of living crisis have all changed the landscape in terms of food insecurity and food relief in WA.

Some of the organisations active in the sector who made contributions to the inquiry are detailed below. This is not an exhaustive list of all of the entities working so hard in this area.

Foodbank is a national organisation which, along with its branch in WA, works with the food and grocery industry to source surplus and donated food product to distribute as food relief. The organisation has 6 branches in WA – in Perth, Kalgoorlie, Peel, Bunbury, Albany and Geraldton – and has conducted a feasibility study into expanding into the Pilbara and the Kimberley, starting with Newman and Kununurra.²⁴² Foodbank food is provided to other food relief organisations; to schools for the school breakfast program; and to families and individuals directly through their shopfronts.²⁴³

OzHarvest is a food rescue organisation that collects surplus food from supermarkets, cafes, restaurants and other food businesses and redistributes it to schools and charities, but not to individuals. It operates in Perth and the greater metropolitan region.

SecondBite is another food rescue operation active in WA.

Other charities do food rescue operations in less formal ways.

Local governments, particularly those in regional and remote areas, are involved in the provision of food relief. The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) informed the inquiry that some of the work undertaken by local governments in relation to food security may ‘be specifically targeted food insecurity initiatives, but often it comprises

242 Kate O’Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, pp. 3-4.

243 Submission 10, Foodbank WA.

an aspect of the work they do to support their local communities'.²⁴⁴ This will depend on the circumstances and needs of the local community, and may include:

grants to, or facility use agreements with, community groups that provide food relief, support for community gardens, financial counselling and in extreme cases emergency provision of food through support for or operation of local supermarkets.²⁴⁵

The Committee saw one example of this during its visit to Newman. Staff from the Shire of East Pilbara's Community Services team described how the shire's youth program provides hot meals out of school hours. The manager reported most attendees at the youth centre are Aboriginal young people aged 10-16. As the staff described it, 'The kids come to us hungry. We don't know how long they've been hungry for, but when they come to us they are starving'.²⁴⁶ The centre provides healthy food as part of its program, and makes the meal into a social occasion and an opportunity to chat with the attendees.²⁴⁷

The acting Chief Executive Officer of the East Pilbara Shire made a comment that echoed throughout the inquiry: 'If you provide food [at an event or program] you know you're going to get a lot of people attending'.²⁴⁸ This sort of *ad hoc* food provision can be viewed as a type of informal food relief.

Many schools that made submissions to the inquiry reported that in addition to the school breakfast program (and any lunch programs that they may run), they provide hampers to families as needed. Roseworth Parent and Child Centre, which supports 5 schools in the Girrawheen area, said food is always provided at community events and always runs out.²⁴⁹ Another school runs a community pantry for families and is liaising with a charity for the provision of emergency food parcels.²⁵⁰ Koondoola Primary School's chaplain organises food hampers through the Salvation Army or Foodbank, which are then delivered to the home.²⁵¹ All of the schools connected to Roseworth Parent and Child Centre have seen an increase in food relief needs within the local community.

Charities such as the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, Uniting WA and many others provide significant amounts of food relief to families in need. In Albany, the Committee visited the Salvation Army operation, which provides hampers directly to families, as well as food to other charities in Albany, Denmark, Mt Barker and Tambellup. The Salvation Army runs a drop-in café one day a week with an all-day breakfast, as well as a food rescue and distribution operation. It is heavily reliant on donations, and some funding through

244 Western Australian Local Government Association, Letter, 3 March 2023, p. 1.

245 *ibid.*

246 Community Services, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

247 *ibid.*

248 Emma Landers, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022. See also Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 1; Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

249 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 1.

250 *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

251 *ibid.*, p. 2.

Lotterywest. It provides hampers as well as pre-prepared meals and fresh food, and is largely staffed by volunteers.²⁵²

Migrant organisations such as the Edmund Rice Centre (ERC), and Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services Centre also reported to the Committee that they refer clients to Foodbank and other charities to access food relief. The ERC has a partnership agreement with St Vincent de Paul.

There are many other charities, churches and community groups providing food relief to the community on a more or less formal basis.

Many contributors to the inquiry reported that people will seek assistance from friends and family in order to feed their children and themselves. Children often cited grandparents and other extended family as places to get a meal when there was no food at home.²⁵³ Fair Food WA reported:

Research has demonstrated that families who experience food insecurity will access charity food as the very last resort. Families will first look towards their natural support networks of family and friends, and may instead purchase low nutrition, cheaper and more calorie dense food, or even go hungry before accessing the charity food system.²⁵⁴

This suggests that people may have exhausted all personal resources before they reach out to food relief organisations. It is unfortunate if they are then met with barriers that prevent them accessing assistance. Some of these barriers are discussed below.

A range of structural and personal issues are barriers to access

The inquiry received evidence of both structural issues with food relief, and the perceptual or personal issues for the people attempting to access the system.

Food relief is a short-term, band-aid solution

The inquiry was told by several contributors that food relief is not a solution to food insecurity. Anglicare WA stressed that the 'food relief system, on the whole, does not address root causes of food insecurity, but instead, helps to mask the structural inequalities which drive demand for such services'.²⁵⁵ The Salvation Army emphasised that food relief cannot provide security in the longer term.²⁵⁶ Another contributor argued that 'food relief and providing food is not the answer to food insecurity; creating some of the structures to support families on pathways out [of poverty] is'.²⁵⁷ The witness made clear:

I am not suggesting not feeding children, particularly in those regions where it is very, very important and malnutrition is a real problem. What I do know from all

252 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

253 See submissions 35-487, Catholic Education WA. See Appendix 9.

254 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 12.

255 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 13.

256 Submission 18, The Salvation Army, p. 12.

257 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 2.

the work that we have done is that feeding people does not fix food insecurity. What we need to do is look at the causes and look at the levers that we have.²⁵⁸

While it is acknowledged that food relief is a short-term band-aid response to food insecurity, it remains an important tool for addressing hunger for children, who have no control over their family circumstances. To grow healthily, children need good food now.

Finding 6

A degree of food relief will always be needed in times of crisis, but it is neither a short- nor a long-term solution for food insecurity.

Patchwork nature, duplication and gaps

Throughout the inquiry, it became clear that there are many organisations attempting to address food insecurity for children. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, there is a lack of adequate monitoring and measurement, both of food insecurity and the effectiveness of attempts to address it across WA. The absence of a state-wide system or effective coordination means that both duplication of effort and gaps can occur in service delivery. As the Food Relief Framework Report identified in 2019, 'There are major gaps in transport logistics and infrastructure between food retail, food rescue and food relief organisations.'²⁵⁹

In the absence of systematic monitoring, it is difficult to know the full picture of what is happening on the ground. One expert told the Committee that when conducting a survey of food relief organisations, 'just in inner-city Perth, when we were looking, we knew of five or six, but there were 30 or so that we discovered.'²⁶⁰ Yet in other areas of the state, even the large organisations do not have adequate coverage. Foodbank WA told the inquiry that

Unfortunately, our food relief activity does not extend into the Pilbara and Kimberley areas and we do have pockets ... through the Wheatbelt that need a higher level of servicing than our current logistics infrastructure supports.²⁶¹

While Foodbank is making efforts to commence operations in Newman and Kununurra, the huge distances involved mean that there will still be large areas of the state with no access to Foodbank food relief services²⁶² Small initiatives such as *Feed the Little Children* in Broome are providing place-based support in remote areas, but, as with this program, inadequate and unreliable funding often limits their reach and sustainability.²⁶³

258 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 3.

259 WACOSS, *WA Food Relief Framework Report 2019*, Perth, 2019, p. 8.

260 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 3.

261 Kate O'Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 3.

262 *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

263 Feed the Little Children is a volunteer organisation that began in 2006 when a police crime analyst realised that rates of petty theft committed by hungry kids in Broome went up on Friday and Saturday nights. The organisation began delivering hot meals to kids, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers on those nights, with good results, and had aims to expand the service to every night of the week. It received Lotterywest funding and was providing 600 meals per night at the end of 2021, when it was forced to close temporarily due to lack of funding (Vanessa Mills, 'Broome children's charity closes, raising fears for vulnerable, hungry kids' *ABC News*, 26 October 2021, p 1).

Even in larger regional centres such as Albany there are gaps and overlaps. These became evident as the Committee visited different organisations around town last year. For example, the Salvation Army, despite being a distribution hub for fresh food, did not have access to a commercial kitchen, and was unaware of nearby kitchens that could possibly be accessed. And other charities and organisations providing food relief were unaware that the Salvation Army was able to access and distribute fresh food supplies.²⁶⁴

Anglicare WA also raised the complexity of the food relief system as a barrier:

The emergency relief sector can be complex and difficult to navigate given the number and types of providers across the state. Whilst existing individuals and families accessing emergency relief are familiar with this system, the lack of awareness of services becomes a barrier for people new to the need for this form of assistance.²⁶⁵

The establishment of Fair Food WA (FFWA) and the WA Food Relief Clearing House are an attempt by the community sector to address these problems, in recognition that 'improvements to the service system could be better made to respond to the increased need.'²⁶⁶ However, the FFWA submission to this inquiry calls for greater clarity and coherence around efforts to address food insecurity for children in WA. As FFWA stated, 'it remains unclear as to which government agencies (aside from the valuable contribution of Lotterywest) hold the leadership role in mitigating the impact of food insecurity'.²⁶⁷ The opportunity for government to provide leadership in this space is addressed further in Chapter 8.

Insufficient funding

There is insufficient funding throughout the food relief system to meet demand. We were repeatedly told that the resources available to food relief organisations were insufficient; this was true both in terms of funding and for donated food – especially nutritious, fresh food to meet the dietary needs of children. Several contributors commented that they needed additional funding to supplement the food provided by Foodbank with fresh items.

The Edmund Rice Centre reported that clients were being turned away from St Vincent de Paul and other partner agencies due to a lack of adequate funding.²⁶⁸ St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies) described the situation in April 2022:

Vinnies are witnessing unprecedented demand for food relief and has seen a significant increase in requests for food support over the last few years. From 30,000 people in 2017-18 to 45,000 in 2019-20 to an estimated 60,000 plus people in 2021-22. Our capacity is limited to 55,000 people for food relief based on existing resources. In real terms and referrals, our actual need is around 110,000

264 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

265 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 11.

266 Submission 15, OzHarvest WA, p. 6. Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 2.

267 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, pp. 2-3.

268 Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

across the state. At the moment Vinnies is doing around \$100,000 a month in Food Cards and around \$100,000 worth of food in donated hampers.²⁶⁹

OzHarvest reported that there 'are 23 charities on the waiting list for food, and those we already support say they can always take more to meet demand'.²⁷⁰ Some agencies are only able to provide assistance once in a 6-month period. As the cost of living crisis continues, it is fair to assume that the situation is no better now.

Foodbank WA also said they could be more efficient if their funding was more secure, as the cycle of applying for short-term tenders and grants is resource-intensive.²⁷¹

Reliance on volunteers

The efforts of most, if not all, food relief organisations rely on volunteers. A volunteer workforce has a unique set of features and challenges. The attraction of volunteers is that they enable agencies to deliver a greater service than that for which they are funded. For example, Foodbank WA volunteers provide significant labour, assisting with sorting and packing food, shopfront service, and bundling. As CEO Kate O'Hara described, 'If we did not have them, it would be a significant model of costs for us'.²⁷²

Foodbank WA provided the Committee with a detailed description of the challenges they face maintaining sufficient volunteers, and their experience is no doubt indicative of the issues faced by all community organisations reliant on a volunteer workforce.

We currently have some 200 volunteers that are regular, fortnightly, each week and so on, across the branch network and the mobile van network, and that volunteer base has a rigorous relationship management program going on it, because we know there is ongoing decline in volunteering, so we have really stepped up our vested interest and support to all our volunteers and communication to keep them on board and supportive.²⁷³

Foodbank has developed innovative approaches to address shortages in the availability of volunteers, including recruiting corporate volunteers²⁷⁴ and those from the justice system (Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women and Bunbury Prison).²⁷⁵

We have the girls from Boronia come in twice a week into the Perth branch, and we call it our happy days when they are in, because they significantly impact the smooth flow and operation on the Perth branch, because of their approach, their attitude, they are keen and friendly – everything. It works really, really well. We

269 Email correspondence with St Vincent de Paul Society WA, quoted in Submission 24, Fair Food WA, pp. 12-13.

270 Submission 15, OzHarvest, p. 3.

271 Kate O'Hara, Chief Executive Officer and Miranda Chester, School Breakfast Program Manager, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

272 Kate O'Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 8.

273 *ibid.*, p. 7.

274 *ibid.*

275 *ibid.*

would ideally love to have them five days a week, but we do not have the funding for that, as the guard needs to be funded.²⁷⁶

Other charities are also considerably reliant on volunteers. The Salvation Army in Albany has only 11 members and relies on 120 volunteers to operate.²⁷⁷

The insecure nature of food relief operations that rely on volunteers is obvious. Foodbank WA's innovative approaches to securing volunteers through corporate volunteer programs and the justice system are commendable, but these options are not available to many of the smaller scale operations active in this space.

Safety and nutrition concerns

Several contributors raised concerns about the healthiness of the food provided in food relief packages. This is not surprising given the reliance upon donated and rescued food. Organisations may have little choice as to what can be distributed. Additionally, a reliance on donated and rescued food may mean that food relief is unable to meet people's cultural and religious requirements and preferences.²⁷⁸

The Salvation Army in Albany reported that 'in the past, an emergency relief box would have contained baked beans, tinned spaghetti, pasta sauce, pasta or rice, coffee, biscuits, sugar. That does not meet nutrition needs long-term, especially when talking about a child'.²⁷⁹ In Burringurrah, the Committee was told that the food that was available was often packets of two-minute noodles.²⁸⁰

Food relief agencies are certainly aware of this issue, and several, such as Foodbank, OzHarvest and the Salvation Army, briefed the Committee on their efforts to address this problem. However, a reliable supply of higher quality, nutritious food requires more funding.

The food relief sector is not subject to the same food safety regulations as other parts of the food sector. Contributors raised concerns that food relief services are provided to vulnerable people who may be more at risk of medical issues including nutritional deficiencies and diet-related disease. In other contexts, food services to vulnerable people in hospitals, nursing homes, aged care facilities and childcare centres are required to undergo third-party audits.²⁸¹ As FFWA commented:

People who are the highest risk of long-term complications of foodborne illness such as rough sleepers and people living in overcrowded housing may be placed at further risk due to the under-regulation of the food they receive from food relief services. Food that is directed to vulnerable populations should have the same protective measures as food prepared and served to paying consumers. Food safety and quality are an integral aspect of managing food donations and

276 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 7.

277 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

278 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 16.

279 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

280 Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

281 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 16.

distributions and it is paramount to minimising the risk of distributing or serving unsafe foods.²⁸²

FFWA therefore argues for extension of the relevant food legislation to the provision of charity food as outlined by recommendations in Fair Food WA's submission to the Environmental Health Directorate's review of the *Food Act (2008)*.²⁸³

Finding 7

Some of the structural issues facing the food relief system in WA include:

- The 'patchwork' nature of food relief in WA makes it complex to access and creates gaps and duplications in service delivery
- The sector is not adequately or sustainably funded to meet existing and increasing demand effectively
- Operations depend upon a volunteer labour force that is unreliable and in decline
- Food relief does not necessarily provide adequate nutrition and is not subject to the standards and regulations that enforce safety in other food sectors.

Shame of accessing food relief

Throughout this inquiry, the issues of stigma and shame were regularly raised as barriers to people accessing food relief. This issue is significant;²⁸⁴ for example, Anglicare WA reported clients who apply for assistance but are so embarrassed that their referrals expire before they obtain it.²⁸⁵ We heard that the belief that others need assistance more is a further barrier, as Foodbank's research also found.²⁸⁶

People who are struggling still feel like they're not struggling enough to be able to utilise the service or they're too scared because of the general labels that go around for people who do use those services. They ask themselves: do we really need help that much that we'd go in and utilise that service? People fully feel embarrassed.²⁸⁷

For parents, there is the added fear of being seen to be an inadequate parent for not being able to provide for their child, with possible consequences for those with involvement with child protection.²⁸⁸

For some, the actual act of seeking food relief can be a difficult experience. As one witness stated, 'Children and families experience emotional and physical health consequences of being food insecure, particularly for parents and children it can be a traumatising experience, as can be going to seek food relief'.²⁸⁹

282 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 16.

283 This submission was made to the Environmental Health Directorate of the WA Health Department in April 2022. The full text of the submission is available at <<https://www.wacoss.org.au>>

284 Foodbank, *Foodbank Hunger Report 2022*, October 2022, p. 27.

285 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 12.

286 Foodbank, *Foodbank Hunger Report 2022*, October 2022, p. 27.

287 Parent, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, Albany, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

288 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 2.

289 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 2.

Linked to this is the problem that for migrants and refugees, food relief programs are not always 'culturally accessible, known to parents of refugee-like backgrounds nor always accessible due to language barriers, shame or stigma associated with poverty'.²⁹⁰

Administrative processes

For some, the administrative processes required to be able to access food relief pose a significant barrier. Some organisations require an appointment, which may need to be made up to 7 days in advance. Others require proof of financial need. Community members in Albany described how challenging meeting these requirements may be for a family:

It might be the case that last week it was ok in a household, and then within 7 days the world has just fallen apart, all the bills come in or something like that ... so it's hard to know that you needed to make an appointment in advance, when things were fine, for when they became difficult ... 7 days is a long time when it comes down to family breakdown or escaping or anything like that. It's a long time.²⁹¹

In Katanning, we were advised that food relief can be organised through an appointment with a financial counsellor, but that person is booked out 3 weeks in advance. Edmund Rice Centre stated that it is difficult for their clients to meet the eligibility criteria. Staff saw clients every day and knew their situation, but could not tick the right boxes on the forms to make them eligible.²⁹²

The Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA) also commented on the challenge of meeting administrative requirements. Aboriginal health workers reported that

in both metropolitan Perth and regional and remote communities ... some clients faced a number of challenges when accessing food relief, including the need to show bank and Centrelink statements to prove financial need and long wait times to receive inadequate amounts of food for overcrowded houses.²⁹³

Administrative systems also demonstrated 'a lack of understanding of family structures, [and] cultural practices of food sharing'.²⁹⁴

Of course, these barriers become almost insurmountable for children and young people. For example, in order to access Foodbank supplies:

the individual must call The Emergency Relief and Food Access Service or visit the website and establish a connection with a charity and be given a referral which entitles the individual to shop from a Foodbank branch, charity branch or mobile Foodbank.²⁹⁵

The Australian Health Promotion Association submitted that, while a valuable service, 'it is not always practicable or accessible for children and young people, as accessing food relief

290 Submission 19, Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, p. 8.

291 Parent, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, Albany, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

292 Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

293 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 14.

294 *ibid.*

295 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA Branch, pp. 4-5.

using this system requires the individual to have access to a phone, transport, identification documentation and an EFTPOS card with funds available'.²⁹⁶

Thus, administrative processes exclude some of the most vulnerable people in society, who are unable to navigate the system. This particularly includes children and young people.

Physical access

Location and the individual's access to transport are also barriers. If a person does not have access to a car, it may simply be impossible to access a food relief service. The Child and Parent Centre described this challenge:

The Foodbank van visits the local area in Balga a couple of times a week. However, for a family in Girrawheen to access low cost parcels, who do not have a vehicle they would need to travel by bus to Mirrabooka and then catch a bus to Balga. You then have the problem of how they will get home with their food parcels.²⁹⁷

Or, as one witness made clear, they may choose a more easily accessible, but less healthy option:

Transport becomes a problem for people when accessing Foodbank ... Generally, people will go to what is nearest to them. If it is a McDonald's and they can afford that, they will do that, so their nutrition gets affected by the availability and the immediacy of it ... now, with petrol going up, there is even less chance that people will go out of their way to go and get food from certain outlets.²⁹⁸

These problems become even more difficult to navigate in regional and remote areas, where fuel prices are higher, distances are longer, and there may not be public transport options available.

Finding 8

Barriers to individuals accessing food relief include:

- A sense of shame and stigma, which can make the experience distressing for some
- Administrative requirements can make access unnecessarily difficult, and may be insurmountable barriers for children and young people
- Difficulties with transport and the location of services.

Food relief is often not accessed and its effectiveness is unclear

As set out in the terms of reference, the inquiry sought to understand the extent to which food relief is accessed by children and young people and the extent to which it is effective. It is clear that it is impossible for children and young people to directly access most forms of food relief. It is therefore difficult to ascertain to what degree children and young people are

296 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA Branch, pp. 4-5.

297 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 3.

298 Adjunct Professor Tony Pietropiccolo, Centrecare Inc/Valuing Children Initiative, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 March 2022, p. 4.

accessing food relief, as this will most often be via parents or carers. What we have learnt is that many adults do not access food relief when they need it due to a range of barriers.

Schools in areas with vulnerable populations provide access to food relief items such as hampers and free pantries. These are aimed at the parents/carers. The way in which schools provide food to children as part of a school program is discussed in the next chapter.

The effectiveness of food relief in addressing food insecurity for children and young people specifically is not known. What is clear from the evidence is that the food relief system is disjointed. This is discussed again in Chapter 8.

The sector is also under-funded, but directing government funding to food relief instead of to family and income supports seems counter-intuitive. The more money a government needs to direct to food relief, the more it could be viewed as failing in its ability to provide adequate support for citizens to purchase food independently – noting that most income support measures are provided by the Federal Government.

Finding 9

Food relief in WA is an important but insufficient response to childhood food insecurity.

The connection between food relief and food literacy

Food relief is less effective in addressing food insecurity for children and young people when they (and their families) lack the knowledge and skills for practicing good nutrition. Foodbank WA nutrition and food security manager Dr Roslyn Giglia emphasised this connection:

you can provide all the food relief you like, but if you do not teach children and adults how to choose, prepare, cook and share a meal, they cannot move beyond that.²⁹⁹

Knowing how to choose nutritious foods, and having the skills to plan meals to a budget, store and prepare food, and enjoy it with others are all aspects of food literacy.³⁰⁰ In Tasmania, we learnt that food literacy can be conceptualised as ‘eating well’ – it is all of these abilities together, rather than a narrow focus on obtaining enough nutrients.³⁰¹

Food literacy

Food illiteracy perpetuates food insecurity

Food literacy varies depending on people’s life opportunities and circumstances. Some people were never taught how to boil water.³⁰² Others may lose food literacy as they work

299 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 4.

300 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 3. See also Submission 12, Anglicare WA, pp. 13-14.

301 Monique Reardon, Public Health Nutritionist, Department of Health, Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

302 Rod Pfeiffer, Foodbank Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

more and cook less and become more reliant on fast food and takeaway.³⁰³ In remote areas where fresh healthy produce is less accessible and affordable, healthy food habits can deteriorate or fail to form.³⁰⁴ And, as discussed in Chapter 2, inadequate income pushes poor families towards less nutritious foods.

Children experiencing poverty 'might only have familiarity with a very narrow selection of highly processed foods'.³⁰⁵ When children grow accustomed to 'highly palatable' 'junk' or low-nutrient foods it shapes their preferences and forms a 'significant roadblock' to healthy eating habits.³⁰⁶ We heard examples of this in briefings with Ishar and Edmund Rice Centre, where participants observed that kids did not want to eat healthy foods like salad, and only liked 'chips, sweet things'.³⁰⁷

Not knowing which foods are good for you, or the 'right ones' to eat more often, are problems identified by the AHCWA Youth Committee as stemming from experiences of

I would love to give them healthy snacks but it's easier to buy already packeted things from the shelf of the supermarket and give it to them. And they are now used to those teddy bears and choc chip stuff and that's all they want.

- Participant at Ishar Women's Multicultural Health Services briefing

quick, easy and cheap foods at home when growing up.³⁰⁸ Products high in sugar are also habit-forming; we were told that this is a significant problem in remote Aboriginal communities where residents continue to demand and buy full-sugar drinks, despite health promotion messages and cheaper low- and no-sugar alternatives.³⁰⁹

It can be difficult for families facing hard times to risk learning new recipes for fear of children wasting food unfamiliar to them.³¹⁰ And, living in

the regions or buying cheaper food can mean that produce is of poor quality, mouldy or out-of-date, creating negative associations with healthy food.³¹¹

The many reasons that caregivers in poverty are unable to pass down the knowledge and skills to eat well result in children bearing a 'burden of inherited low food literacy'. This contributes to 'chronic physical and mental health issues and lower social and economic participation, thus exacerbating existing inequalities and perpetuating the cycle of entrenched disadvantage' and food insecurity.³¹²

303 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 4. See also Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 3.

304 Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 2.

305 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 15.

306 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 6; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 15.

307 Participant, Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, *Briefing*, 17 June 2022; Jordan Iley, Youth Program Coordinator, Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

308 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 4.

309 Gina O'Connor, Families Program (Kunawarrtji), Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Ted Box, Milyirrtjarra Aboriginal Corporation, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

310 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 16.

311 Participant, Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, *Briefing*, 17 June 2022; Jordan Iley, Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

312 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 6; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5.

Food literacy is essential

Conversely, food literacy mitigates food insecurity.³¹³ Contributors to this inquiry thus emphasised that building and supporting food literacy for families experiencing poverty and food insecurity is vital.³¹⁴ We heard that food literacy is important:

- at all ages (from pregnancy,³¹⁵ from early childhood,³¹⁶ and continuing through adolescence)³¹⁷
- so adults can teach children³¹⁸ and break generational cycles³¹⁹
- in schools³²⁰ and beyond schools³²¹
- for oral health³²²
- as early as possible for newly arrived refugees.³²³

Food literacy delivery is wide-ranging

In WA, food literacy for adults is delivered through food relief and health organisations, both through formal programs and in *ad hoc* fashion. Children’s exposure to formal food literacy is through schools, with a few exceptions. Anglicare WA submitted that for teens and adults, ‘food literacy programs are particularly valuable because they provide an opportunity to “catch up” on skills for life that participants might have missed out on as a result of growing up in food insecure households’.³²⁴

Food literacy for adults

As discussed above, adults are the ‘gatekeepers’ of food for children.³²⁵ Hence, it is essential that caregivers are supported in making good decisions when it comes to nutrition.

The integration of food relief with voluntary food literacy education has the potential to build individual capacity and community capital, ‘empowering recipients to be able to do more with the resources that they do have.’³²⁶ Co-delivery was recommended and is

313 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 3.

314 Rod Pfeiffer, Foodbank Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 3; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 14; Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 18.

315 Geraldine Ennis, WA Country Health Service, Albany, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

316 Ian Clarke, Albany Youth Support Association, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 7; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 15; Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 9; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 16.

317 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 16; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association, p. 6.

318 Hazel Ealem’Hansen, Katanning Noongar Leadership Group, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 15.

319 Dr Roslyn Giglia and Kate O’Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, pp. 4-5.

320 Participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 27; Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 18.

321 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association, p. 6.

322 Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, pp. 12-13.

323 *ibid.*, p. 6.

324 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 15.

325 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 15; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 3.

326 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 15; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, pp. 42-43.

practiced by Anglicare WA, which also embeds food literacy across its housing, parenting and financial support services.³²⁷

Much of the learning on offer through food relief organisations happens informally, and the Committee heard examples of volunteers and non-specialist staff talking to people about how to shop to stretch their budget, use a cookbook, and create a nutritious meal, as well as referring them to formal programs.³²⁸ Anglicare WA said that these practices are widespread across the community sector.³²⁹

There are various formal food literacy programs for adults in WA and those mentioned in the course of this inquiry are detailed in Appendix 7. Those with most reach include Foodbank WA's *Food Sensations for Children* aimed at parents of young children, and Cancer Council's *Packed With Goodness* program, aimed at parents of school-aged children. Many successful programs come and go according to funding.³³⁰

Some programs work across age groups to engage the whole family in healthy eating. For instance, the WA School Canteens Association (WASCA) delivers the *Fuel to Go and Play* program through Community Nutrition Services, funded by Healthway, to support community groups, venues, centres, sporting clubs and caterers to create healthier food environments.³³¹ The 22 Child and Parent Centres, located at or near primary schools across WA, include food literacy as part of their services, as do the 56 WA schools which run the KindiLink play and learn initiative for Aboriginal families.³³²

Food literacy in schools

Schools actively support children and their families to develop healthy eating habits.³³³ They play a large role in formal food literacy education and all WA are required to cover food and healthy eating as part of the mandated curriculum from pre-primary through to year 10.³³⁴ Schools are encouraged to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework to help them support the health of the whole school community, including through good nutrition.³³⁵ The Department of Education's Healthy Food and Drink in Public Schools policy requires a whole-

327 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 14.

328 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, pp. 14-15.

329 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 15.

330 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 3; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 10; Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 3; Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mount Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August, 2022; Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

331 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 3.

332 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2. See also Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 3; Narelle Ward, Principal, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

333 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2;

334 Mandy Hudson, School Curriculum and Standards Authority, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 10; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7.

335 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2; Jim Bell, Department of Education, Deputy Director General, Student Achievement, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

school approach to good food, both in the classroom and the canteen, as well as at school events, excursions and camps.³³⁶

In addition, schools engage guest speakers to address students on nutrition, and run programs of their own devising such as life skills groups or healthy lunchbox initiatives, either using their own resources or by seeking time-limited funding.³³⁷ Students in CARE (Curriculum and Reengagement in Education) schools often prepare their own meals at school and help cater for school functions.³³⁸ In Warburton, the school serves all students breakfast, recess and lunch in a large curtained room set up communally with tables and chairs. Modelling eating well through the social aspect of eating is part of their goal in developing the children's food literacy, as the deputy principal explained:

That's why this is set up this way – it's coming in and stopping and eating. The design of the room is to show families too what possibly could happen at home.³³⁹

Many WA schools also run externally developed programs that give students the opportunity to develop food literacy in a hands-on way.³⁴⁰ These include:

- Crunch&Sip, whereby students bring water and a serve of fresh fruit or vegetables into the classroom which they eat and drink with their peers at a morning work break. The program reaches over 30% of all WA students through registered schools, although many other schools run the program unofficially.³⁴¹
- OzHarvest's FEAST (Food Education and Sustainability Training) cooking activities. Last year, 70 WA schools enrolled.³⁴²
- Until the end of last year, Foodbank WA ran a similar practical nutrition and cooking program called *Food Sensations for Schools*. Part of the School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program, it was funded by the WA Government to reach 4,632 students across 80 WA schools in 2021, though more than half of the schools who wanted the program were not able to receive it.³⁴³
- School garden programs, which can impact the wider community. Some schools create their own gardens, while others partner with organisations such as EON Foundation, Food Ladder or the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program to provide students

336 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2; Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 10.

337 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7; Rebecca Jolly, Canteen Manager at Oakwood Primary School, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 3; Submission 3, Fiona Angelatos, p. 1.

338 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7.

339 Scott Fatnowna, Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022. See also Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7.

340 Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

341 Submission 22, Cancer Council WA, pp. 8-9.

342 Submission 15, OzHarvest, p. 5.

343 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 7. See also Participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022. Funding for the program was part of the School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program service agreement with the DoE, DPIRD and BHP (in the Pilbara). The Department of Health was part of this arrangement until the end of 2021 (Dr Andrew Robertson, Transcript Clarification, 12 April 2023, p. 1).

and their families with practical food growing and cooking experience.³⁴⁴ Chapter 7 has more on these and other community garden initiatives.

In consideration of the myriad existing programs, the Department of Health (DoH) implemented a state-wide Whole of School Healthy Eating Program (WOSHEP) in July 2022 to foster a more co-ordinated approach to food literacy in and beyond the curriculum in all WA schools.³⁴⁵ The program replaced the RefreshED resources developed for teachers by

A single, well-planned, experiential nutrition education session that engages all students in cooking simple, healthy recipes can be successful in improving students' knowledge and attitudes to healthy eating.

- Edith Cowan University submission

Edith Cowan University in 2014,³⁴⁶ and coincided with the discontinuation of Foodbank WA's *Food Sensations for Schools*³⁴⁷ and the ending of WASCA's funding to provide a customised menu and recipe assessment service to WA schools.³⁴⁸

There have been concerns that the new program – branded as 'FreshSNAP (School Nutrition Advisory Program)' – is being delivered without regard for the specific needs of WA schools and that it leaves a gap in face-to-face nutrition education.³⁴⁹ The Minister for Health's office advised that the program 'will

utilise contemporary, innovative approaches that are expected to increase the reach of support to schools throughout Western Australia, including in regional and remote areas'.³⁵⁰ It began in earnest this year and has yet to be evaluated.

Beyond schools

The Australian Health Promotion Association submitted that food literacy programs are especially important during adolescence when food habits solidify. As not all young people attend school, there was a need to offer these programs in other settings.³⁵¹ In Albany the Committee visited the Youth Support Association where staff teach refugee residents to

344 See: Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 3; Submission 6, EON Foundation; Submission 16, Food Ladder; Karina Ferrada, Jigalong Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Margaret Butterworth, Deputy Principal, Leonora District High School, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

345 Stacey Hearn, Chief of Staff to the Minister for Health, Letter, 10 January 2023, p. 1; Dr Gina Ambrosini, Chronic Disease Prevention principal policy officer, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 4-6.

346 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, pp. 29-30; Dr Gina Ambrosini, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 5.

347 We were told that Food Sensations for Schools was ending on account of Nutrition Australia winning the tender to deliver the WOSHEP for DoH (Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 10); however, the Minister for Health advised that this decision rested with the DoE (Stacey Hearn, Chief of Staff to the Minister for Health, Letter, 10 January 2023, p. 2; see also Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript Clarification*, 16 November 2022, p. 1). The DoE considered that DoH's new WOSHEP would be providing almost the same service at no cost to schools and so varied its contract with Foodbank WA (Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 9).

348 Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, Letter, 22 November 2022, p. 1.

349 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, pp. 3, 10-11; Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, Letter, 22 November 2022, p. 1.

350 Stacey Hearn, Letter, 10 January 2023, p. 2. See also Dr Gina Ambrosini, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 4.

351 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association, p. 6.

budget, shop, store food, cook and eat together.³⁵² At the time, the Salvation Army was preparing to roll out their 'Kids in the Kitchen' program at the refuge, initially with 16-25-year-olds, and then with younger children.³⁵³ Similar cooking classes are run at the Newman Youth Centre, and at Anglicare WA crisis and transition accommodation for young people.³⁵⁴

Culturally appropriate programs

Some programs already discussed are inclusively designed to be accessible to culturally and linguistically diverse and low-literacy children.³⁵⁵ Others are developed specifically with and for Aboriginal kids, such as Child and Adolescent Health Service's Deadly Koolinga Chef Program³⁵⁶ or the Deadly Sista Girlz healthy lifestyle program run by the Waalitj Foundation.³⁵⁷ Foodbank WA runs the Superhero Foods initiative, with resources co-designed to include Aboriginal child characters and bush foods.³⁵⁸ They also deliver the Fuel Your Future food literacy program to Pilbara youth aged 12 to 18; however, this program will cease in June of this year when BHP funding for nutrition education ends.³⁵⁹

The reach of food literacy programs is limited

The inquiry heard that nutrition education in schools is 'somewhat ad-hoc' or inconsistent across schools, and that focus gets particularly lost in high schools.³⁶⁰ Contributors lamented the loss of home economics as a part of the curriculum, saying that when it is an elective subject many children do not choose it.³⁶¹ Aboriginal young people submitted that they valued the practical skills gained from these classes.³⁶²

The problem we have is none of the programs are sustained, and they are often developed locally, work, and then funding disappears.

- Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University

Too often, funding for food literacy programs is tenuous and does not allow for the kind of engagement that leads to behaviour change.³⁶³ In some cases, programs are discontinued before some people in need find out about them.³⁶⁴

352 Ian Clarke, Albany Youth Support Association, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

353 Colette Albino, Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

354 Emma Landers, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 14.

355 See FEAST, for example (Submission 15, OzHarvest, p. 5).

356 Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 8.

357 Deadly Sista Girlz, Katanning, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 15.

358 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, pp. 7-8; J. Tartaglia, R. Giglia, J. Darby, 'Developing culturally appropriate food literacy resources for Aboriginal children with Foodbank WA's Superhero Foods®', *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2022, pp. 150-162.

359 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, pp. 4-5; Jennifer Tartaglia, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 26 May 2023.

360 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 27; Amber Giblett, Acting Regional Health Promotion Coordinator, Great Southern WA Country Health Service, Albany, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

361 For example: Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 4.

362 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 15.

363 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 4; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 6.

364 Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, *Briefing*, 17 June 2022; Julie Hayden, Chief Executive Officer, Badgebup Aboriginal Corporation and Early Years Initiative, Katanning Noongar Leadership Group, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022; Submission 18, The Salvation Army, p. 10.

Not enough courses are easily accessible. Some organisations restrict locations, numbers, and eligibility for their programs due to funding and staffing constraints, and it can be hard for participants to get to available classes by public transport.³⁶⁵

As with food relief, shame and fear of judgement can prevent some adults from engaging with food literacy programs.³⁶⁶ In Katanning, we heard that some people lack the confidence to come along to a nutrition program, or are afraid that people ‘would be judgy’. Being seen attending in a small town exposed people to shame.³⁶⁷

Teaching people about good food requires informed consideration of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, issues and practices.³⁶⁸ Dr Sarah Cherian, paediatrician and clinical lead at the

Mainstream WA programs fail to target key groups, especially those with limited English proficiency, linguistic or ethnocultural diversity and/or cater for parents who may be illiterate or have limited formal education

*- CAHS Refugee Health Service
Submission*

Refugee Health Service (RHS), explained that an interpreter is not part of health budgets, with the result that many food literacy programs exclude those with no or limited English. A Healthway grant had enabled RHS to develop pictorial healthy eating resources in several different languages, but limited funds meant not every language could be catered for.³⁶⁹

Both CaLD and Aboriginal contributors advocated for programs developed with and led by them.³⁷⁰ At the very least, facilitators are needed to broker relationships and allow those from other cultural

backgrounds to engage with nutrition promotion messages. Gina O’Connor, a Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa staff member who works in the Families Program at Kunawarritji, attested to this:

We’re really a facilitator for other programs coming in often ... If that isn’t there from us it’s just like hitting a brick wall. People are there for a few hours and the message isn’t delivered.³⁷¹

Research with migrant families has shown that knowledge-sharing between established and newly arrived community members about recipes, cooking skills, and where to access culturally appropriate foods is highly effective.³⁷² For both at-risk groups, a model based on peer educators could help. (See Chapter 7).

365 Child and Parent Centre, Mount Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Submission 18, The Salvation Army, p. 10; Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 12. Participants at the Ishar Multicultural Women’s Health Services briefing reported a 6-12 month waiting list to access Food Sensations courses run by Foodbank WA (17 June 2022).

366 Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 8.

367 Participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

368 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

369 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6. See also Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 9.

370 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 15.

371 Gina O’Connor, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

372 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 16.

It is hard to get food literacy education to those who most need it. Socio-economically disadvantaged families are dealing with many challenges and can thus be hard to reach.³⁷³ One deputy principal explained that when her school ran *Food Sensations for Parents* and offered a free crèche and other incentives it was still hard to get families to attend; for the ones who did attend it was a case of 'preaching to the converted'.³⁷⁴

Part of the problem is that learning food literacy together, especially for adults, is not normalised in our society: 'There's an absence in our culture of a space for people to learn to cook'.³⁷⁵ Because of this, Foodbank WA emphasised the importance of working with community-based parenting organisations. Foodbank suggested that Child and Parent Centres, being linked to schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, are ideal places to recruit parents to food literacy programs.³⁷⁶ Telethon Kids Institute also suggested empowering child health nurses to deliver training, as they already play an active role in engaging with parents and identifying food insecurity.³⁷⁷

A school principal made a similar observation, adding that there were not enough child health nurses to see the children in need at the schools in her area.

These professionals are often the first ones to recognise issues in families around food and nutrition and they can be best placed to discuss these issues with families. They have very little time to do this due to being under staffed. Our low socio economic suburbs need more human resources in this area to provide early intervention and support. This is a preventative measure as by the time they get to school, habits have been established and it can be difficult to change lifestyle habits.³⁷⁸

Many contributors told us that it is hard to measure the long-term impact of food literacy interventions because progress is gradual and improvements are incremental.³⁷⁹ Even if a program is well received, it may not necessarily lead to lasting behaviour change because food habits are ingrained. We heard this in relation to WACHS offering sugar-free drink tasting and education sessions with people in Kunawarrtiji:

The women who were involved and engaged in that activity bought that sugar-free drink for a while, but if it isn't constant, and the Coca-Cola is still just right next to it ... and that's your habit, you just pick that one.³⁸⁰

373 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 9; Participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

374 Submission 3, Fiona Angelatos, p. 1.

375 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

376 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 9.

377 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 5. See also Submission 2, name withheld, p. 2.

378 Submission 2, WA school principal, name withheld, p. 2.

379 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 15; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 3.

380 Gina O'Connor, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa staff commented that ‘you’re not going to buy a banana if it will cost you \$5’, and felt that the problem in regional and remote areas is a lack of integration of health messaging with what is available and affordable in the community shops.³⁸¹

People may know what is best to eat but that may not be what is accessible, so information about eating well remains theoretical. Contributors stated that knowledge about good food was sometimes not the problem: ‘In order to address that issue of nutrition and making healthy choices it’s very hard to just *tell* people what the healthy choice is – because they know it’.³⁸²

Rather, people need health-enabling surroundings, as researchers at Edith Cowan University (ECU) submitted.

Achieving dietary behaviour change is complex, challenging, dynamic and predominantly contextual. The home, school and community environments in which students live ... are critical to acting on their knowledge of healthy choices.³⁸³

Considering the scale of our exposure to unhealthy food advertising, outlets and products, which is most concentrated in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, ECU recommended both planning responses (discussed in Chapter 8) and the development of broader food literacy, including ‘an understanding of food systems in which dietary choices are made’.³⁸⁴ They suggest that a shift away from individual behaviour and towards a holistic understanding of existing systems ‘may help schools to effectively engage and support adolescents to become critical and reflective consumers of food products’.³⁸⁵

Food literacy will not solve childhood food insecurity

As noted above, all the food literacy in the world is of minimal use if families lack the means to access and buy appropriate, fresh and healthy foods on an ongoing basis.³⁸⁶ Even if adequate incomes were guaranteed, there will always remain a need for food relief in times of crisis and emergencies. It is vital that the food relief sector itself practices food literacy to ensure food relief recipients have access to safe and nutritious foods.³⁸⁷ Researchers from WA have collaborated to develop the Food Literacy Action Logic Model, which harnesses expertise in tertiary education to build food literacy capacity within the charitable food sector for the benefit of clients.³⁸⁸ The government should consider supporting

381 Michele Bentink and Peter Johnson, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

382 Gina O’Connor, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022. See also Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 30.

383 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 30.

384 *ibid.*, p. 31. To this end, a multi-disciplinary team at ECU have co-designed and evaluated a computer game called ‘Farm to Fork’ for use in high schools.

385 *ibid.*, p. 32.

386 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 19; Anne-Marie McHugh, Child and Adolescent Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 4.

387 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 17.

388 T Lawlis, R Sambell, A Douglas-Watson, S Belton, A Devine, ‘The Food Literacy Action Logic Model: A Tertiary Education Sector Innovative Strategy to Support the Charitable Food Sectors Need for Food Literacy Training’, *Nutrients*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2019, p. 837.

implementation of the model. Victoria is developing guidelines for healthy food relief that could be adapted here.³⁸⁹

Children need to practice eating well

To be food literate families need both knowledge and skills.³⁹⁰ For people living with food insecurity, opportunities to practice eating well are most helpful. Practical programs directly improve food access and nutrition, build skills and support healthy habits. Inquiry contributors emphasised that the value of food literacy programs is ‘in the doing’: face-to-face, hands-on, experiential, embedded and immersive approaches have the most impact.³⁹¹

Box 3.1: Online learning

The Covid-19 pandemic made organisations such as Foodbank WA move their food literacy programs online, and they have retained the option as part of a hybrid delivery model. Foodbank WA said that there is a lot of encouragement to deliver nutrition education online because it is cheaper, but it is not their preferred medium because ‘people do not experience the same connectivity with others in the group’. The organisation submitted that research shows it is hard to maintain behaviour change through online education alone. This reliance on e-learning has made Foodbank WA question the approach of the organisation contracted to deliver the DoH’s Whole of School Healthy Eating Program.

Source: Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 6; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 5.

For children, partaking in cooking, gardening and meal programs provides them with a lived understanding of good food. Schools are an environment within the state’s control and they can be places where children and young people integrate nutrition knowledge and practice food skills daily, and together with their teachers and peers, ‘for up to 13 years of their young formative life’. As Food Ladder stated, ‘This type of exposure and knowledge creates life-long change and embeds food production and healthy eating in our cultures’.³⁹²

Finding 10

For food relief to be most effective, people need food literacy. In WA, these are commonly delivered together, or by the same organisations. Food relief organisations need support to integrate food literacy in their operations to aid the health of our food insecure population.

Finding 11

The causes of low food literacy are complex and the reach of food literacy programs is limited by the nature of the problem, as well as funding, coordination, workforce, design and access issues.

389 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 4.

390 On these components of food literacy, see E Truman, D Lane and C Elliott, ‘Defining food literacy: A scoping review’, *Appetite*, vol. 116, 2017, pp. 365-371.

391 Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 8; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 5; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 29; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 32; Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 3; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 15.

392 Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 8.

Finding 12

Low food literacy exacerbates food insecurity and perpetuates the problem across generations, so it is important to develop food literacy from an early age, and across the life cycle. Schools play an important role in this, as do frontline health workers.

Finding 13

While not the full solution, practical food literacy initiatives are most helpful for children experiencing food insecurity and their families.

Recommendation 1

The Department of Health considers investing in the number and capacity of frontline health workers, such as child health nurses, to support food literacy development for populations at risk of food insecurity.

Recommendation 2

The WA Government works with Fair Food WA to support the food literacy of the food relief sector by implementing the Food Literacy Action Logic Model and developing state guidelines for healthy food relief.

Chapter 4

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

It is actually greater than providing food ... It allows children to be educated, and education is the pathway out of poverty. We all know that.

Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA

Schools already provide a significant amount of food to students

There are currently 1,144 schools in WA across the government and non-government sectors. These include primary and secondary schools, education support centres, and community kindergartens, catering for 484,850 students from ages 3 to 18. Around 64% of the state's schools are in the metropolitan area.³⁹³

From around the age of 5, students should attend school for just over half the days in a year.³⁹⁴ As detailed in Chapter 2, food insecure children are more likely to miss school and it is harder for them to learn when they do attend. In the course of this inquiry we heard about these issues firsthand. We also heard that schools are strongly invested in tackling food insecurity as an important part of student wellbeing. Both the Department of Education (DoE) and Catholic Education WA (CEWA) viewed a nutritious diet as an essential precondition for learning.³⁹⁵

The extent to which WA schools currently feed food insecure students is greater than many people realise. A high proportion of schools run food programs that range from simply warding off hunger to helping students eat well and be healthy.

The School Breakfast Program struggles to meet demand

Foodbank WA established its School Breakfast Program (SBP) in 2001 in response to a call for help from a primary school. What began as an initial trial rapidly expanded, and so far in 2023 the SBP is being delivered to 476 schools which receive over 74,000 breakfasts per week.³⁹⁶ Schools continue to register throughout the year: by the end of 2022, a total of 501 schools were registered to receive the program,³⁹⁷ constituting around 44% of all WA

393 Department of Education, *Summary Statistics of Schools and Full-Time Students; Summary Statistics of Metropolitan Schools and Full-Time Students; Summary Statistics of Country Schools and Full-Time Students*, Western Australia, 10 March 2023. These figures include 6 schools of distance education which together have 666 students.

394 In 2023, public school terms include 193 school days, which equates to almost 53% of the year (Department of Education, *Term Dates*, 2023, accessed 20 April 2023, <www.education.wa.edu.au>).

395 Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 2; Dr Laura Allison, Chief Psychologist, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, pp. 4, 6.

396 Miranda Chester, School Breakfast Program Manager, Foodbank WA, emails, 21 April 2023 and 27 April 2023.

397 Miranda Chester, School Breakfast Program Manager, Foodbank WA, email, 21 April 2023.

schools. The trend is one of increasing demand: between 2015 and 2021, the number of students receiving the SBP rose 16%.³⁹⁸

Both public and non-government schools can choose to opt in to the SBP.³⁹⁹ Currently public schools make up around 85% of those receiving the program.⁴⁰⁰ Those schools with an ICSEA ranking⁴⁰¹ between 6 and 10 are automatically eligible, while others can demonstrate need through supplying a letter. In 2021, schools with an ICSEA between 6 and 10 made up 86% of those registered for the SBP. Schools identify their need for the program as stemming from having Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and/or students at risk. Schools that select the latter category commonly cite both 'poverty' and 'family food insecurity' as being relevant issues.⁴⁰²

All schools registered for the SBP receive 7 shelf-stable core food products (wheat biscuits, oats, canned fruit, canned spaghetti, canned baked beans, long-life milk and Vegemite. Schools in the metro area are also able to collect fresh food, such as bread, yoghurt and fruit). Foodbank WA says that it is not a 'one-size-fits-all' model:⁴⁰³ schools run their programs in a variety of ways, with many supplementing the offered products with other products procured by the school or through donations.⁴⁰⁴ It is also up to each school to determine how and how often they offer breakfast, and whether it is available to all or only some students.⁴⁰⁵ Some schools welcome parents or siblings of students to join in with breakfast.⁴⁰⁶ Typically, breakfast is offered before the start of the school day, in contrast to similar programs overseas where it is incorporated into the timetable.⁴⁰⁷

We heard that often the success of the SBP rests with the principal or other staff members, such as teachers or chaplains, being passionate about running it.⁴⁰⁸ This puts breakfast clubs in a precarious position if their champions move on.⁴⁰⁹ Volunteers, including teachers, support staff, parents, students and community members, run the SBP at most schools.⁴¹⁰

398 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 5.

399 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 6.

400 Kate O'Hara and Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

401 The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) ranks the average levels of schools' students' advantage, with 1 being the most advantaged and 10 being the most disadvantaged.

402 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, pp. 4-5.

403 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 6.

404 For example: Submission 4, Warwick Senior High School, pp. 1-2.

405 S Hill, M Byrne, E Wenden, A Devine, M Miller, H Quinlan, D Cross, J Eastham and M Chester, 'Models of school breakfast program implementation in Western Australia and the implications for supporting disadvantaged students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 145, 2023, p. 2.

406 For example, Roseworth Primary School in Perth's north-eastern suburbs (Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre, Roseworth, p. 1).

407 S Hill, M Byrne, E Wenden, A Devine, M Miller, H Quinlan, D Cross, J Eastham and M Chester, 'Models of school breakfast program implementation in Western Australia and the implications for supporting disadvantaged students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 145, 2023, p. 2.

408 See for example: Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

409 See for example: Jennifer Hanna, executive committee member, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 5.

410 S Hill, M Byrne, E Wenden, A Devine, M Miller, H Quinlan, D Cross, J Eastham and M Chester, 'Models of school breakfast program implementation in Western Australia and the implications for supporting disadvantaged students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 145, 2023, pp. 2, 7.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

Analysis of SBP schools surveyed between 2015 and 2017 showed that more than half drew on teaching and support staff to run breakfast.⁴¹¹

In schools that rely heavily on staff volunteers, running a breakfast club can be a considerable burden. For example, at Warwick Senior High School in 2021, between 2 and 4 staff volunteered their time every morning, equating to between 7 and 14 weeks of full-time work. The school submitted that specific funding from government to employ a breakfast coordinator to attend, and to organise volunteers and resources, would be more appropriate.⁴¹² Around 11% of SBP schools have created such a position; however, it is at the schools' expense.⁴¹³

Schools commonly report difficulty recruiting sufficient volunteers to keep the SBP viable.⁴¹⁴ For a program that aims to improve equity in access to nutrition for students, dependence on volunteers from within and beyond schools may reduce the reach and impact of the program, including where it is most needed.⁴¹⁵

The WA Government began supporting delivery of the SBP in 2007.⁴¹⁶ Between 2011 and 2021, the departments of Education and Health contributed to the running of the program under a single service agreement managed by DoE.⁴¹⁷ The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and Woodside have also supported the program over the years.⁴¹⁸ BHP has supported the program in the Pilbara⁴¹⁹ since 2011; however, this will cease at the end of 2023.⁴²⁰

At present, the State contributes \$1.1 million to run the Foodbank SBP through DoE and DPIRD.⁴²¹ This funding covers part of the food product cost; the Channel 7 Telethon Trust

411 S Hill, M Byrne, E Wenden, A Devine, M Miller, H Quinlan, D Cross, J Eastham and M Chester, 'Models of school breakfast program implementation in Western Australia and the implications for supporting disadvantaged students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 145, 2023, p. 8; Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program Final Report*, 28 February 2018, p. 33.

412 Submission 4, Warwick Senior High School, pp. 1-2.

413 S Hill, M Byrne, E Wenden, A Devine, M Miller, H Quinlan, D Cross, J Eastham and M Chester, 'Models of school breakfast program implementation in Western Australia and the implications for supporting disadvantaged students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 145, 2023, p. 7; Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program Final Report*, 28 February 2018, p. 33.

414 Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program Final Report*, 28 February 2018, pp. xv, xix, 33; SO Ichumar, EE Dahlberg, EB Paynter, FMC Lucey, MR Chester, L Papertalk and SC Thompson, 'Looking through the Keyhole: Exploring Realities and Possibilities for School Breakfast Programs in Rural Western Australia', *Nutrients*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2018, p. 1.

415 See S Hill, M Byrne, E Wenden, A Devine, M Miller, H Quinlan, D Cross, J Eastham and M Chester, 'Models of school breakfast program implementation in Western Australia and the implications for supporting disadvantaged students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 145, 2023, p. 8.

416 Kate O'Hara and Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

417 Dr Andrew Robertson, Chief Health Officer and Assistant Director General, Public & Aboriginal Health Department of Health, *Transcript Clarification*, 12 April 2023, p. 1.

418 Kate O'Hara and Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

419 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2.

420 Kate O'Hara and Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

421 Martin Clery, Executive Director, Statewide Services, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 5.

funds the remainder, and has been supporting the SBP since 2005.⁴²² State funding also covers the cost of transporting food to regional and remote locations, and some project staff. Foodbank WA covers the costs of administration and transport of products to their Perth Airport central branch.⁴²³

Over the past few years, the number of schools accessing the SBP has consistently exceeded the number specified in the service agreement.⁴²⁴ While DoE's contribution towards the SBP is indexed,⁴²⁵ and the portion dedicated to food product has recently increased,⁴²⁶ Foodbank WA has used this money to cover rising fuel costs. Current funding does not cover the cost of delivering the SBP, yet Foodbank WA continues to stretch its resources to accommodate growing demand.⁴²⁷

We heard repeatedly that the SBP is highly valued,⁴²⁸ and the long-term involvement of the overwhelming majority of SBP schools is evidence of this – most schools that sign up to receive the program register in subsequent years.⁴²⁹ DoE said that feedback from schools that participated in engagement workshops at the end of 2022 was that they 'really value the school breakfast program and they think it makes a real positive impact for their kids and their school community'.⁴³⁰

Finding 14

Dependence on volunteer labour places pressure on schools and reduces the reach, impact and sustainability of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast Program.

Finding 15

Current funding arrangements are not sufficient for Foodbank WA to meet both rising demand for the School Breakfast Program and the rising costs of delivering it.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Education reviews government funding of the School Breakfast Program to ensure it covers the real costs of delivering the program – including a paid coordinator within registered schools – to meet demand and increase impact on an ongoing basis.

422 Jim Bell, Department of Education, Letter, 28 April 2023, p. 1.

423 Kate O'Hara and Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

424 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2.

425 Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 9.

426 This increase is due to funds being diverted from the Food Sensations in Schools program, run by Foodbank WA under the *School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program* service agreement until December 2022.

427 Kate O'Hara and Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

428 For example: Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 6; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, pp. 23-24; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 15; Mr Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 8.

429 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 6.

430 Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 8.

Many schools provide emergency food throughout the day

It is perhaps unsurprising that students in need of breakfast may also need other meals. While not the primary purpose of the SBP, schools are allowed to use breakfast products to provide non-breakfast meals to students in need during the school day.⁴³¹ These 'emergency meals' account for around a quarter of all meals supplied through the SBP and are provided by over 84% of schools registered for the program.⁴³²

The most current figures from Foodbank WA reveal that they provide more than 26,000 emergency meals per week.⁴³³ In comparison, last year Foodbank WA was providing the same number of schools 21,596 emergency meals per week.⁴³⁴ As noted in a submission from a child and parent centre, 'the number of children using this service is steadily increasing'.⁴³⁵

Schools commonly provide emergency food outside of the SBP.⁴³⁶ This happens both in designated recess and lunch breaks⁴³⁷ and when students leave class because they are hungry.⁴³⁸ Food given to students in this way is either procured by schools,⁴³⁹ provided through special programs, or donated.⁴⁴⁰

Some schools have a 'lunch club' in addition to breakfast club,⁴⁴¹ while others provide something simple for students who don't have lunch or recess – for example, a vegemite or cheese sandwich, cheese on toast, cheese and crackers, or defrosted sandwiches.⁴⁴²

The not-for-profit organisation Eat Up Australia provides a sandwich service for students in need. Its program started small in 2013 in country Victoria but now operates in 650 schools across 5 states/territories – 88 in WA (this is less than 10% of WA's schools). The program provides cheese sandwiches, sandwich ingredients or gift cards for ingredients as well as

431 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 4; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 11.

432 Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program Final Report*, 28 February 2018, p. 51; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, pp. 12-13; p. 51; Miranda Chester, School Breakfast Program Manager, Foodbank WA, email, 27 April 2023.

433 Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, email, 21 April 2023.

434 Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, email, 20 February 2023.

435 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre, Roseworth, pp. 1-2.

436 See: Submission 3, Mrs Fiona Angelatos, p. 1; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 6.

437 For example: Submission 2, name withheld, p. 1; Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11; Shane Woods, Katanning Noongar Leadership Group, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

438 Staff member, Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, *Briefing*, 17 June 2022.

439 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 11; Submission 3, Mrs Fiona Angelatos, p. 1.

440 For example: by SecondBite (Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, pp. 2-3); by OzHarvest (Submission 2, name withheld, p. 1); by the local Lions club (participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022).

441 Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

442 Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, pp. 2-3; Margaret Butterworth, Leonora District High School, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022; Staff member, Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, *Briefing*, 17 June 2022; Rebecca Bampton, President, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 4.

donated snacks and fruit when available. It relies on volunteer labour and food donations from a range of organisations and businesses.⁴⁴³

The Deadly Sista Girlz program in Katanning provides healthy food that participants can take at any time of the school day, such as fruit, popcorn, vegie snacks, rice crackers and dip.⁴⁴⁴ And some schools provide fruit,⁴⁴⁵ including for recess,⁴⁴⁶ or for students who do not bring any food to eat in class as part of the morning Crunch&Sip program.⁴⁴⁷

The Committee received evidence of individuals taking personal responsibility for feeding students in need. For example, one canteen manager explained:

At our canteen, we always make sure that children get a lunch. We are often taking it out of our own pockets and providing them with a lunch. If they do not quite have enough money for their lunch order, we just add in those additional dollars ... Sometimes, teachers' assistants or teachers actually pull money out of their own pockets for students.⁴⁴⁸

We heard that some schools have developed systems to manage students needing food. For example, at Applecross Senior High School the canteen gives the chaplain tickets similar to those the school uses for rewards. The chaplain hands these to hungry students who exchange them for meals from the canteen.⁴⁴⁹ But systems for the provision of emergency food sometimes scare off students in need: 'I give out blue slips and the child disappears. That causes a massive anxiety on top of just the basic not being able to concentrate and being exhausted, does it not?'⁴⁵⁰ Canteen staff mitigate this risk by knowing the food insecure students and providing them food outside of the established system.⁴⁵¹

WA School Canteen Association (WASCA) president Rebecca Bampton had encountered different policies at different schools.

At one, I had to fill in a form and send the child with that form to the office. The office would fill in another form and send it back to me. The office would then telephone the parent or the caregiver, and I would provide the lunch, put on the form how much the lunch cost that went on the back to the office. I knew the children. They would come to me and say, 'I've forgotten lunch' and if I gave them a form, I would not see them, so I would feed those children. I knew the ones. ... The other school was a lot more simple. I was supposed to send the children to the office, where they would be given cheese and crackers but, again, more often than

443 Eat Up Australia, *Eat Up 2022 Evaluation Report*, Melbourne, November 2022, p. 7.

444 Staff and students, Deadly Sista Girlz Katanning, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

445 Such as Roseworth and Hudson Park Primary Schools (Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, pp. 1-2).

446 For example: Margaret Butterworth and Jonathon Attwell, Leonora District High School, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

447 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 5; Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre, Roseworth, pp. 1-2.

448 Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 3.

449 Cre Millar, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 3.

450 Naomi Putland, Canteen, kitchen and garden manager, Highgate Primary School, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 5.

451 Cre Millar, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 3.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

not, I would feed the children because I wanted them to have something nutritious.⁴⁵²

These examples show that providing students with food on an emergency basis is at times only possible because individual school or canteen staff notice or come to know their situation. Foodbank WA maintains that this is a particular strength of having an ‘unofficial’ approach to student food insecurity:

We feel that because we do not have the lunch program so widely known, it allows the teachers who see the children coming to breakfast program to form a really good understanding of what is happening. They have an intimate knowledge if then that child requires lunch.⁴⁵³

However, this approach relies on the concern of particular staff and/or volunteers, similar to the breakfast club.

In addition to feeding students while at school, some schools provide a community pantry or send emergency food parcels home to support struggling families.⁴⁵⁴ One metropolitan school has even built partnerships with food distributors and local churches to provide a weekly ‘shop’ for parents at the school – a service used by half the parent cohort.⁴⁵⁵

There are other organisations which operate on a smaller scale than Foodbank WA to provide food to needy students and their families through schools. OzHarvest began running the *Nourishing Our Schools* program in Perth in 2020. With support from the Telethon Trust, in 2022 it supported over 1000 students across 65 schools, providing food for students to eat at school and hamper boxes for school families. OzHarvest had seen a notable increase in the number of schools needing to provide food to vulnerable students since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁵⁶

The opportunity for hungry students to help themselves throughout the day to fresh food grown in school gardens and to take produce home are also benefits espoused by the organisations which manage them (e.g. EON Foundation and Food Ladder⁴⁵⁷). This was echoed by teachers at the schools we visited that ran these programs.⁴⁵⁸

Overall, for many food insecure students the opportunity to obtain good food as needed throughout the school day is not guaranteed, but rather dependent on unreliable factors including volunteer labour, donations, funding of programs and the commitment, presence

452 Rebecca Bampton, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 4.

453 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022.

454 For example: Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre, Roseworth, pp. 1-2; Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 2; Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 8.

455 Submission 2, name withheld, p. 1.

456 Submission 15, OzHarvest, pp. 2, 4.

457 Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 7; Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 8.

458 Karina Ferrada, Jigalong Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Margaret Butterworth, Leonora District High School, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

and attention of particular teaching, support or canteen staff. One WASCA member summed up the situation as follows:

What I can hear from these ladies, and in my experience, it is very patchy. The chaplain is doing a little bit, teacher is doing a little bit, the canteen manager is doing a little bit. There is that massive stigma but there does not seem to be an overall system.⁴⁵⁹

Finding 16

Food insecure students often rely on school and canteen staff noticing that they need food and having the means to provide it.

Some schools provide regular meals from their own funds out of necessity

Feeding students on an emergency or ‘as needed’ basis is not an option in schools with high levels of food insecurity amongst students. Out of necessity, some WA schools feed all of their students during the school day. For some of these children school is the primary source of nutrition.⁴⁶⁰ These comprehensive services have developed independently of each other, but in response to similar situations. Many of them are long-standing. While it is true that Australia has never had an official school lunch policy, it became clear that school meal programs have quietly existed here for a long time, including in some of the most difficult to service parts of our state.

Remote schools

The clearest example is remote schools, many of which have predominantly Aboriginal populations. In remote communities, ‘schools are often the provider of breakfast, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea before children travel home’.⁴⁶¹ Midday meals are substantial and often hot.⁴⁶²

In remote Catholic schools, 90-100% of students are fed at school. Staff voice concerns that students have no nutritious food when out of school, and some send sandwiches home for the evening. These staff reflected:

the situation whereby the school supports students by providing all meals during the school day, and often food to take home, has been the case for so long that it is accepted and expected practice. The students rely on the meals provided by the school.⁴⁶³

There is variety in the way this substantial meal provision is realised. At the Catholic school in Beagle Bay in the Kimberley, the school purchases food which is cooked by a local

459 Naomi Putland, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 2.

460 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5.

461 Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11; see for example: Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 21, and Supplementary Submission p. 31.

462 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 12.

463 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 5; also Angelica McLean and Oriwa McKay, Shire of Ngaanyatjaraku, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

Aboriginal woman.⁴⁶⁴ At another Kimberley school the teachers do all of the food preparation, cooking, dishes and cleaning in their own time because they are unable to find canteen or cleaning staff.⁴⁶⁵

This was also the case at Burringurrah Remote Community School, one of three remote schools we visited during the inquiry. The school has provided meals to students for at least 14 years,⁴⁶⁶ including breakfast and hot lunches; however, the reliability and quality of this program has waxed and waned with staffing and funding.⁴⁶⁷ Jasmine Harris, the current principal, has a nutrition background and has been able to revive the meal program. She explained that she brought a car full of food when she started at the school and spent the first week cooking. Ms Harris now shares the cooking with a community employee and a teacher, sometimes with the help of students, and she is working on training community members to provide the meals.⁴⁶⁸

Figure 4.1: Fruit time, left, and tuna pasta for lunch, right, at Burringurrah Remote Community School



At Jigalong Remote Community School, the partner of one of the local Aboriginal rangers makes lunches for all the students every school day, using produce from the EON garden whenever possible. The school also serves breakfast using donated food, and fruit for recess bought from the store or provided by the local mine.⁴⁶⁹

In Warburton we were shown the nutrition program that is run at all 8 campuses of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School. The school in Warburton provides breakfast, recess, hot lunch and afternoon crunch and munch. Shelf-stable supplies come from Foodbank WA, and the school purchases all of the meat, fruit and vegetables. Meals are prepared in the well-

464 Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 12. See also Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program Final Report*, 28 February 2018, p. 9.

465 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 21.

466 Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 October 2022, p. 7.

467 Marilyn Hake, WA Country Health Service, Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

468 Jasmine Harris, Burringurrah Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

469 Karina Ferrada, Jigalong Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

equipped home economics room by a senior community woman with a health background.⁴⁷⁰

In Warburton and Jigalong staff explained that they were lucky to secure a suitable person to produce school meals. Relying on this type of luck means the sustainability of school meal programs in remote WA is often tenuous. In Burringurrah this concern was clear: 'As a systems person, what I look at is: when you [principal] are gone, what happens to the cooking program? When you're gone and your skill set goes?'⁴⁷¹

Figure 4.2: Daily menu, left, and Education Assistant Charlotte Hinchliffe making sausage casserole for lunch, right, at Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton Campus, 1 November 2022



While the schools we saw had adequate spaces and facilities to cook meals on scale, there are also remote schools without kitchens, canteen facilities or cooking staff.⁴⁷² When these significant challenges are considered, it is easy to understand why school meals are seen as particularly important in remote areas.⁴⁷³

Regional schools

Many of WA's regional schools face similar challenges to remote schools when it comes to student food security. The SBP Letters of Support submitted by Foodbank WA include examples from every region of the state of schools supplying recess and lunch, and some schools attest that this need is increasing.⁴⁷⁴

470 Scott Fatnowna, Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

471 Dwayne Mallard, Burringurrah Community spokesperson, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

472 Submission 1, name withheld, p. 1.

473 For example: Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 17; Mr Jim Bell, Department of Education, Letter, 28 April 2023, p. 1.

474 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, Supplementary Submission. The Letters of Support are provided by schools seeking to have the School Breakfast Program.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

At the Clontarf Academy⁴⁷⁵ at North Albany Senior High School, students receive breakfast, break-time food and cooked lunch every day, because they would struggle to get through the day without the food. The North Albany Academy has 40 students and achieves around 80% attendance.⁴⁷⁶ This is an important but small impact. Shire of East Pilbara president Anthony Middleton noted that Clontarf's programs do not cover the majority of the children and young people in town, despite running in all three schools there.⁴⁷⁷

Metropolitan schools

In its submission, Catholic Education WA (CEWA) spoke of 5 schools in the Perth metropolitan area with high levels of food insecurity. These schools all offer substantial meals daily, including breakfast, recess and in many cases cooked lunch, although some only offer this once a week. One provides full meals to both boarders and day students 'as a matter of need' through a commercial caterer.⁴⁷⁸ CEWA said that 'in schools where help is readily and commonly available to students who are hungry, the students are able to disclose', but 'metro schools can have difficulty identifying cases of food insecurity due to the stigma attached to not having food available at home'.⁴⁷⁹

Wherever they are located, cost and quality are ongoing factors. Although many schools use the SBP products from Foodbank WA, when serving main meals daily these alone do not provide adequate variety and nutrition. As Jasmine Harris summed up: 'If you're having spaghetti on toast you're having wheat on wheat, with a bit of sugar thrown in. It's not nutritious.'⁴⁸⁰ The Committee also received feedback that SBP products are not always suitable (culturally or for dietary reasons) and not always available.⁴⁸¹

Schools absorb the costs of feeding students

In addition to running the SBP, a significant number of public and private schools provide lunch and other meals using their own funds and resources, having decided 'this is just the best thing to do'.⁴⁸² DoE is aware of this situation, submitting that, 'Schools can (and many do) optionally deliver a locally sourced and managed program to provide meals to students in their schools if a local need is identified using their one-line budget'.⁴⁸³ We learnt that this is indeed the case for schools in both sectors: there is no separate funding provided to schools for food, and so they absorb the costs.⁴⁸⁴

475 Clontarf runs academies for male Aboriginal students embedded in schools throughout Australia, with 33 operating across metropolitan, regional and remote WA.

476 Peter Watters and Graeme Simpson, Clontarf Foundation, North Albany Academy, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

477 Anthony Middleton, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

478 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, pp. 4, 6-7.

479 *ibid.*, p. 5.

480 Jasmine Harris, Burringurrah Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022. See also Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 3.

481 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, pp. 8, 9.

482 Matthew Lester, Acting Executive Director, Environmental Health, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

483 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2.

484 For example: Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 22; Jasmine Harris, Burringurrah Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 3.

The cost to schools of the paid time that staff spend facilitating school meals, and the personal cost for those staff who donate their time and sometimes their food, remain unquantified.⁴⁸⁵ One deputy principal explained that the crowding of competing demands within a limited curriculum is ‘causing burnout and failed programs, as generally benevolent staff just keep working harder to support all these needs’.⁴⁸⁶ Yet the principal of a remote school explained that ‘he has no qualms about committing a substantial portion of the school budget to staff its school meals program and supplement the Foodbank-supplied products, noting that it “pays off for the general health of the kids, and their ability to learn long-term”’.⁴⁸⁷

However, resources being spent on food reduces what can be spent on education. In Warburton, the deputy principal said the money they spent on food could be well-used by

We don't buy additional resources like books because we're buying and supporting the food for children.

- WASCA hearing

the school in their two-way science integrated curriculum.⁴⁸⁸ Another principal told WASCA that they take funds from their literacy program to feed food insecure students.⁴⁸⁹ Both WASCA and CEWA identified that this impacts every student, whether food insecure or not, as fewer resources are directed to core school functions.⁴⁹⁰

Under DoE's student-centred funding model, additional funding is allocated for Indigenous students, students for whom English is an additional language or dialect and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁴⁹¹ Commonwealth education funding also takes into account the circumstances of schools with disadvantaged students and applies needs-based loadings. In practice, it seems that at least some of this money is commonly being used to meet students' basic needs for adequate nutrition,⁴⁹² despite the model specifying that these additional allocations are provided to help schools address the higher and additional learning needs of students with these characteristics.

We also heard that the current school funding model does not capture all students affected by poverty and food insecurity:

there is a big group of children who are not acknowledged. It may be that their parents are on a disability pension or are on Centrelink payments. They find that

485 See submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 8; Submission 4, Warwick Senior High School, pp. 1-2.

486 Submission 3, Fiona Angelatos, pp. 1-2.

487 S Hill, M Byrne, E Wenden, A Devine, M Miller, H Quinlan, D Cross, J Eastham and M Chester, 'Models of school breakfast program implementation in Western Australia and the implications for supporting disadvantaged students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 145, 2023, p. 9. See also Submission 7, Catholic Education WA.

488 Scott Fatnowna, Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton Campus, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

489 Jennifer Hanna, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 5.

490 *ibid.*; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7.

491 Department of Education, *Funding public schools*, accessed 30 March 2023, <www.education.wa.edu.au>

492 Scott Fatnowna, Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton Campus, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022; Jennifer Hanna and Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, pp. 5, 14.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

that [nutrition] is the area that the school is not being provided any funds to support them, but the school does need to support them.⁴⁹³

Principals have the discretion to use funds from their one-line budget as they see fit, but it appears inequitable that some schools, by circumstance, feel compelled to use school funds to feed children simply so that these students have a chance at learning.

DoE does not collect central information on the number of public schools currently spending a portion of their education budget to provide lunch and other meals, or how much they are spending.⁴⁹⁴ Hence, the extent of school food provision in WA schools is unknown.⁴⁹⁵

Finding 17

Schools are invested in supporting nutrition as an aspect of student wellbeing and to uphold the pre-conditions of learning.

Finding 18

Universal school meal programs already exist informally in an unquantified number of schools across WA.

Finding 19

Some schools feel compelled to provide food for students using school funds, resulting in less funds available for core educational purposes. This leads to inequity between schools, and can affect learning opportunities and outcomes for students.

Recommendation 4

The Department of Education identifies how many WA schools are using their own funds to provide free food for students. It should quantify total costs, measure impact, and identify the elements of successful programs in different contexts across the state.

Many school canteens are not sustainable businesses

Canteens are part of the food landscape in our schools. About 800 WA schools sell food in some way, and around 400 of those are members of WASCA.⁴⁹⁶ At least 75% of public schools have canteens run by Parents and Citizens' (P&C) associations. Some schools use licensed businesses or contracted services to run their canteen,⁴⁹⁷ and some schools run the canteen themselves, with a paid canteen manager on school staff.⁴⁹⁸ WA school canteens range from small-scale operations offering occasional service from limited facilities to well-equipped kitchens serving meals five days a week.⁴⁹⁹

493 Jennifer Hanna, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 5.

494 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 2; Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 4.

495 Matthew Lester, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

496 Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 12.

497 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 3.

498 Jennifer Hanna, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 10.

499 *ibid.*, p. 12.

While canteens emphasise healthy food under the traffic light system, unhealthy options are still sold, and we were told that children whose diets are already poor are more likely to choose less nutritious foods when given canteen money.⁵⁰⁰

Struggling families can find it hard to provide packed lunches and for many of them the canteen is an important service. DoE submitted that ‘school canteen and food services also support families who are becoming more reliant on school canteens for at least one meal a day’.⁵⁰¹ However, it is not a cost effective solution, and can in turn exacerbate poverty, particularly for families with multiple children.⁵⁰²

This situation is worsening as canteens are forced to pass on rising costs to students:

We run on a shoestring budget, generally speaking, and our costs have gone through the roof. It has been challenging for us but also for families, I think.⁵⁰³

Parents have complained that our prices are becoming too high and, for some, they are just becoming unaffordable for some families on a regular or even an occasional basis for some families. We do not want that; we try our best to provide low-cost, healthy meals.⁵⁰⁴

School canteens are made vulnerable by their dependence on volunteers, which schools are struggling to recruit.⁵⁰⁵ Schools are finding it harder to form P&C associations and consequently P&C-run canteens are reducing their services, with many closing.⁵⁰⁶ This is especially the case in primary schools; however the situation is increasingly extending to high schools.⁵⁰⁷

The DoE acknowledged that while many canteens currently run at a profit or break even, the reality facing schools is that their canteen will run at a loss.⁵⁰⁸ Staff of some canteens run as a for-profit business are essentially unwaged volunteers because the canteens ‘just do not make money’, according to one manager.⁵⁰⁹

When problems sourcing labour and running costs are considered, it is not surprising that the DoE sees canteens ‘becoming more and more difficult’ to operate, and considers them a

500 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 3; Submission 23, Geoffrey Holt, p. 2.

501 Submission 11, Department of Education, p. 3.

502 Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12.

503 Naomi Putland, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 8.

504 Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 9. See also Cre Millar, p. 8.

505 Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12; Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 9.

506 Glenys Cunningham, Deputy Principal, Koondoola Primary School, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022; Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 9; Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12.

507 Cre Millar, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 15.

508 Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12.

509 Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, pp. 9-10.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

‘fragile arrangement’ in some schools.⁵¹⁰ Small schools especially find it hard to make their canteens financially viable, regardless of demand.⁵¹¹

The questionable sustainability of the canteen system in WA schools is cause for concern. One canteen manager expressed her worry for the future of canteens and the students who rely on them for their food security.⁵¹² The DoE sees the situation as underscoring the importance of the SBP.⁵¹³ Principal Narelle Ward commented:

It is a real issue, and schools are creatively thinking of ways they can service their school communities, which I believe is why we are seeing an increase in school breakfast programs and school lunch programs and other pastoral supports and needs for students in our communities.⁵¹⁴

Finding 20

The Department of Education acknowledges that many canteens, especially in primary schools, are in a fragile state and face an uncertain future.

School lunch programs are well-established in other countries

When asked whether they had considered a long-term strategy to address the precarious situation faced by school canteens, the DoE pointed to their early engagement with WASCA in relation to developing a school lunch program.⁵¹⁵ Such programs have long existed in other parts of the world. In countries such as Finland and Sweden the lunch program is universal, which means it is free for all students regardless of household income. In other countries free meals are provided only in disadvantaged areas, to students from low-income households, or to students in specific year groups.

There are a variety of food provision and payment models. Meals may be prepared on-site or made in bulk at a central kitchen and delivered to schools in the area. In some places they are delivered as pre-packaged or frozen meals that only require heating. In many countries families that can afford to pay are charged the full price, while those receiving welfare payments are subsidised. Payment is usually via a tap and pay system.

Reasons for establishing school food programs vary. In two of the countries where they have been in place the longest – Finland and the United States – they were a response to social upheaval. As Finland was drawn into World War II, a school lunch was seen as a way to ensure future soldiers would be fit enough to serve.⁵¹⁶ In the post-war years, school meals were retained to address poverty and malnutrition and contribute to educational equality. In

510 Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12. See also Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12.

511 Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 12.

512 Rebecca Jolly, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, pp. 9-10.

513 Jim Bell, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12.

514 Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12.

515 Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 13.

516 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Professor, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, pp. 1-2.

1943, legislation requiring one municipality to offer elementary school students free school meals was passed, and by 1948 free meals were being provided for all Finnish pupils.⁵¹⁷

The United States school lunch program had its origins in the Depression years when farmers were struggling with falling produce prices. The federal government bought surplus crops from farmers and employed women to cook for school students. By 1941, school meal programs were being supported in all states. School meal provision fell away during the war years, but in 1946 Congress passed the National School Lunch Act after it was shown that men rejected for war service because of poor health had suffered from poor nutrition in childhood.⁵¹⁸ The United States national school lunch program is not universal; only eligible students are offered free or reduced-price meals. Individual cities, however, have chosen to offer universal programs, and around half of the states are in various stages of adopting or considering universal free school meal legislation.⁵¹⁹

England's lunch program, established in 1944, was free until the 1980s when only families receiving benefits were deemed eligible. Since 2014, all children in pre-primary to year 2 have been offered a free hot meal, with eligibility criteria applied to students in other years. Scotland's system is similar, providing free lunches for pupils from pre-primary to year 3.

Japan's School Lunch Act, implemented in 1954, also grew from concerns about food shortages and poor nutrition following World War II. Lunch is provided to all students following strict nutritional guidelines and is highly subsidised.

In France, most families pay for a lunch plan but the cost is generally subsidised by the municipal authority. Lunch consists of a vegetable starter, a main dish, cheese, and fruit or dessert. Italian school lunch is similar, but although it is subsidised for low-income families some families consider it too expensive and poor value.⁵²⁰

The world's biggest universal lunch program is in Brazil, which provides for around 42 million children in 160,000 public schools. It was established for primary school children in 1988 and in 2009 was expanded to all students enrolled in basic education from the age of 6 months.⁵²¹ The program has strong links with the agriculture sector, with a mandate that at

517 Finland Toolbox (Finland Promotion Board), *School Food – Building Finnish equality since the 1940s*, 2023, accessed 6 April 2023, <<https://toolbox.finland.fi>>

518 Emelyn Rude, 'An Abbreviated History of School Lunch in America', *Time*, 19 September 2016, accessed 6 April 2023, <<https://time.com>>

519 Leah Butz, 'States that have passed Universal Free School Meals (So Far)', *Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center* (web-based), 21 February 2023, accessed 1 March 2023, <<https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org>>

520 Julie Dunbabin, *Factors that enable school lunch programs to impact positively on student health and wellbeing*, report for Elvie Munday Churchill Fellowship, Winston Churchill Trust, 2020, p. 78; Vicky Hallett, 'What's for lunch? At some schools, everyone eats the same thing', *The Washington Post*, 21 October 2019, accessed 11 April 2023, <www.washingtonpost.com>

521 E Sidaner, D Balaban and L Burlandy, 'The Brazilian school feeding programme: an example of an integrated programme in support of food and nutrition security', *Public Health Nutrition*, vol. 16, no. 6, 2013.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

least 30% of the school meal budget must be spent on produce from smallholder farmers, helping to keep them on the land.⁵²²

New Zealand is one of the most recent adopters of a school lunch program. The first schools were invited to join in 2019, with 974 schools participating by the start of 2023. The program targets schools with the greatest socio-economic barriers. There is no set menu, but a typical weekly menu includes wraps, vegetable sticks, dips, salads, soups and hot lunches.

Lunch programs in other countries are brought into being through a combination of legislation and government policies. The United States has multiple pieces of legislation that address feeding disadvantaged children which must pass Congress approximately every 5 years under the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill (see Appendix 8). In some countries multiple levels of government are involved in delivering the program. For example, in Italy and France local governments fund the canteen staff, state government funds the buildings and equipment, and federal government oversees dietary guidelines. (See Appendix 8 for more detail about the programs in the United States, England, Finland and New Zealand.)

There is one small government-funded lunch program in Australia

In Australia the only ongoing government-funded lunch program is the School Nutrition Projects (SNP) program operating in more than 70 remote schools in the Northern Territory (NT). This is around half of the territory's schools, but these schools account for less than 20% of students across the territory.⁵²³ (While around 70% of NT schools are in remote and very remote areas, only 44% of the student population attends these schools.⁵²⁴) The program receives federal government funding through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, which covers the operational costs of providing breakfast, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea (or any combination of these) for each day of the school term for students from pre-primary to year 12. Parents/carers are expected contribute to cover the cost of food (up to \$40 per week per child).

The SNP was introduced in 2007 as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. School nutrition providers are contracted to manage the program for a particular school or schools. The providers may be community-based organisations, private businesses, non-government organisations, philanthropic organisations or schools, but must employ local workers to prepare and serve meals. They must also ensure the meals adhere to the NT Department of Education Canteen Nutrition and Healthy Eating Policy.

Government interest in establishing a school lunch program is gathering momentum in certain states, however. Tasmania is currently running a two-year school lunch pilot program with 30 schools and is working on support to have it rolled out to all of its schools. It was initiated by School Food Matters, formerly the Tasmanian School Canteen Association.

522 Chris Arsenault, 'Free school meals in Brazil help local farmers stay on the land', *Thomson Reuters Foundation* (web-based), 30 August 2016, accessed 26 April 2023, <www.reuters.com>

523 A 2017 evaluation of the program estimated that around 5,800 children were receiving meals.

524 Northern Territory Government of Australia, *Teach in the Territory*, 2023, accessed 9 May 2023, <<https://www.teachintheterritory.nt.gov.au>>

The Australian Capital Territory also recently announced a school meals pilot in five Canberra schools, to begin in the second semester of 2023,⁵²⁵ and a school lunch pilot program was pledged by the Victorian Opposition ahead of that state's election in November 2022.⁵²⁶ In WA, the WA School Canteen Association is seeking funding to conduct a school lunch pilot in partnership with Telethon Kids Institute.

Finding 21

The only government-funded lunch program in the nation is for remote schools in the Northern Territory, but there is increasing interest in exploring school lunch programs in other parts of Australia.

Benefits of school food programs are widely recognised

What worldwide studies have shown

The long term benefits of school food programs are hard to formally quantify. While aspects such as attendance and participation are reasonably simple to measure, long term health and learning outcomes are less easily evaluated. Positive effects can take years to manifest and even then it is hard to isolate the impact of school lunches or breakfasts from other factors. Nevertheless, studies have attempted to evaluate the impact of school food programs, mainly in the United States.

A rapid review of international evidence on the impact of school food provision for socio-economically disadvantaged students was commissioned by the New South Wales Ministry of Health in 2020.⁵²⁷ The researchers found 56 relevant articles for the period from 2000 to 2020, of which 23 related to breakfast programs, 21 to lunch programs and 12 to breakfast and lunch programs. The majority of studies were from the United States. The articles reported that overall, school meal programs protected vulnerable children from food insecurity. Where programs were based on nutrition guidelines, a healthier diet (including higher fruit and vegetable consumption) was more likely.

The review found that universal delivery increased overall breakfast and lunch participation and reduced the risk of stigmatisation. Stigma could also be reduced by masking which students received free meals. There was inconclusive evidence on whether free universal school meal programs reached students most in need. There was mixed evidence for improvements in school attendance and academic performance, although free school meals increased the attendance of the most economically disadvantaged students. School meal

525 Yvette Berry, MLA, *Free Meals in Schools pilot for five public schools*, media release (ACT government), 27 March 2023.

526 Liberal Party (Victoria), *Liberals and Nationals' healthy lunches are ready to order*, media release, 29 October 2022.

527 This was prompted by a recommendation from a 2018 parliamentary inquiry into fresh food pricing. The review analysed only published studies of school food provision, hence some programs were not examined.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

programs were highly valued by school staff, parents, children and volunteers and were perceived as addressing an important need.⁵²⁸

The five papers from Australia included in the literature review related to school breakfast programs, including the program provided by Foodbank WA. Foodbank WA's School Breakfast Program (SBP) has sought annual feedback from participating schools. Foodbank WA says that results consistently demonstrate the effectiveness of the program in addressing food insecurity, encouraging school attendance, improving readiness for learning and supporting a positive social and learning environment.⁵²⁹

Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute also conducted a detailed evaluation of the program from 2015 to 2017. The researchers asked respondents whether there had been an improvement in the nutrition and wellbeing of vulnerable children. The study was not seeking to measure the actual nutritional intake of children participating in the program (which is a complex undertaking); rather, the respondents were being asked their opinions and perceptions. The evaluation found that the program was successful in assisting WA schools with 'the hunger needs of vulnerable youth and students at educational risk'.⁵³⁰

Surveyed stakeholder consistently agreed that the SBP also had a positive influence on capacity for learning, including readiness for learning, on-task concentration, attendance, punctuality, productivity in class, behaviour and social skills. The report said it was clear that schools saw strong benefits for individual students.⁵³¹

Schools also reported that the SBP could be a catalyst for improving school community relationships, since parents who might be otherwise uninvolved in the school assisted with breakfast. The informal setting was also perceived to contribute to the development of positive relationships between students and staff and encourage broader friendships.⁵³²

A 2021 evaluation of the Eat Up sandwich program reported the top three benefits as alleviation of hunger, improved learning/concentration and improved mental wellbeing. As with the Foodbank WA evaluation, this was based on the perceptions and observations of the 167 school staff surveyed. The evaluation did not include any WA schools.⁵³³

An evaluation of the NT School Nutrition Projects program in 2017 looked at various aspects of program delivery as well as whether dietary requirements were being met. It found that it had a positive impact on school attendance and performance and was regarded as likely to have an impact on health outcomes, although inconsistent collection of health data across communities made this difficult to quantify. The program was seen as modelling healthy

528 B McGill, L Cranney, L Corbet and M Thomas, *School meal provision: a rapid evidence review*, prepared for the NSW Ministry of Health, Physical Activity Nutrition Obesity Research Group, The University of Sydney, November 2020, p. 21.

529 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 6.

530 Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Program*, February 2018, p. 119; Submission 10 – Supplementary Submissions, Foodbank WA.

531 Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Program*, February 2018, p. 120.

532 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, pp. 22-23.

533 Eat Up Australia, *Eat Up 2022 Evaluation Report*, Eat Up Australia, Melbourne, 2022.

eating behaviours and was highly valued by stakeholders and parents. If it ceased, respondents believed there would be a negative impact on classroom behaviour, academic performance, nutritional status and health.⁵³⁴

What contributors to the inquiry have said

Comments from people who have observed or been involved with school food provision are consistent with the published findings. Benefits mentioned repeatedly were better school attendance, increased engagement and concentration, improved nutrition and health, improvement in social behaviours, and greater social connectedness. It was also clear that, at the very least, food provided at school helped deliver food security for those most in need.

School lunches can alleviate food insecurity

The overriding sentiment from the few schools in WA providing lunch on an informal basis and those in the school lunch pilot program in Tasmania was that schools would not see children go hungry. CEWA said children and families in its remote schools see the school as the safety net. One school said food insecurity was a community issue and the school supported children 'as a matter of need and priority'.⁵³⁵

At Burringurrah Remote Community School, principal Jasmine Harris said ensuring children are provided with breakfast and lunch and fruit at recess helps to reduce the trauma caused by lack of food at home. They know 'they'll get something nutritious every day'.⁵³⁶

In Tasmania, in addition to students receiving a hot meal on some days of the week, schools in the pilot program also send left-over food home for families of children they know are food insecure, rotating among the families most in need.⁵³⁷

Most WA schools have not had the experience of providing a school lunch, but some teachers could imagine the benefits. One teacher said a school lunch would, first and foremost, benefit children from the poorest and most disadvantaged homes.⁵³⁸

Figure 4.3: Lasagne and salad ready to deliver to the pre-primary class at Rokeby Primary School, left, and students serve up at Gagebrook Primary School, Tasmania, centre and right.



534 Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, Darwin, December 2017, p. 2.

535 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7.

536 Jasmine Harris, Burringurrah Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

537 Carla Brown, Assistant Principal, Rokeby Primary School, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

538 Submission 13, Sol Hanna, p. 1.

Attendance is higher when lunch is part of the school day

Australian National University public policy professor Sharon Bessell, who is also director of the Poverty and Inequality Research Centre, told the Committee that parents will often not send their children to school because there is nothing to put in the lunchbox.

This often intersects with parents' concerns about child protection reporting and reporting around neglect if they are not providing food for their children at school.⁵³⁹

Community representatives at briefings in Katanning told an identical story: there was shame in sending kids to school without lunch and it was less embarrassing if they just stayed home. Parents did not want others wondering why their children had no lunch, and did not want child protection to know.⁵⁴⁰ The Salvation Army in Albany also said that children who should have been at school came to the drop-in café on a weekday with their parents. They were not at school because they had nothing to take for lunch.⁵⁴¹

The flipside is that in the few schools in WA where food is provided, this is often the reason children come to school.⁵⁴² In Tasmania, schools involved in the school lunch pilot program will often schedule lunch for days when they know attendance is low.⁵⁴³ A high school that had problems keeping students at school in the afternoon has found they stay beyond 12 o'clock 'because they've got something in them'. The school was now able to schedule two periods after lunch instead of one.⁵⁴⁴ Rokeby Primary School had heard anecdotally that students were coming to school for hot lunch,⁵⁴⁵ and at Gagebrook Primary School, we were told the students make sure they are at school on Wednesday because it is hot lunch day.⁵⁴⁶

Food helps students concentrate so that they can learn

While getting children and young people to school is the first step, their ability to focus on schoolwork while they are there is also impacted by how much they have eaten. We heard many accounts of students being more engaged and able to concentrate better because they had been fed.

We hear from schools and we see it in our own research that children would arrive so hungry that they are unable to concentrate ... there is a cumulative effect of that in terms of children's learning outcomes.⁵⁴⁷

539 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 4.

540 Sharon Bielby, Anglicare WA, Katanning, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022; Julie Hayden, Badgebup Aboriginal Corporation, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

541 Colette Albino, The Salvation Army, Albany, *Briefing*, 22 August 2022.

542 Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 4; Jigalong Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022; Submission 15, OzHarvest, p. 5.

543 Julie Dunbabin, Project Manager, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

544 Riki Ohia, Social Worker, New Norfolk High School, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

545 Ben Richardson, Principal, Rokeby Primary School, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

546 Helen Bennett, School Business Manager, Gagebrook Primary School, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

547 Prof Sharon Bessell, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 4.

Figures 4.4: Spaghetti bolognese and salad being served at New Norfolk High School, Tasmania.



Tasmania’s Rokeby Primary School principal said that while it was hard to attribute academic improvement to food or to different teaching methods, if kids were hungry they would not learn well. As CEWA pointed out, the child and adolescent brain uses about 50% of calorie intake per day and needs to be fed to function properly.⁵⁴⁸

A small proportion of students who responded to the Committee’s easy English version of the terms of reference said that having no lunch made them feel sleepy or sick and meant they were unable to focus or concentrate in class. (See Appendix 9 for summary of results.)

The principal of Burringurrah Remote Community School, Jasmine Harris, noticed that when children returned to school after a break and were receiving better nutrition again, their ability to concentrate in class would gradually improve and they were happier.⁵⁴⁹ It was a similar experience at Leonora District High School for the short period the school was receiving meals.⁵⁵⁰

At the Warburton campus of Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, students have the additional strain of translating their lessons from their native language into English, which deputy principal Scott Fatnowna told us was very fatiguing. He said good nutrition could help minimise the impact of fatigue, but ‘if their belly’s got no food in it, you cannot apply any effort’. Kids would ‘have a go’ but would not last.⁵⁵¹

Students eat healthier food and learn about it at the same time

In cases where children had been severely deprived, either from not enough food or not enough nutritional balance, improvements in physical health were apparent once they started receiving food at school, according to Burringurrah Remote Community School principal Ms Harris. She noticed fewer skin sores and boils and the children started ‘to look all shiny and healthy’.⁵⁵²

Even when students are bringing lunch, it is often not of high nutritional value. As Tasmanian Department of Health nutritionist Monique Reardon noted, research into kids’ lunchboxes

548 Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 4.

549 Jasmine Harris, Burringurrah Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

550 Naomi Sprigg dos Santos, WA Country Health Service, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

551 Scott Fatnowna, Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton Campus, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

552 Jasmine Harris, Burringurrah Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

across Australia had shown that 40% was discretionary food, with generally no vegetables and a limited amount of fruit. Tasmania's pilot program lunches contained a greater volume of vegetables and fruit than most packed lunches.⁵⁵³

Many contributors also noted the opportunity a school lunch provided to teach students about nutrition while modelling healthy eating. At Jigalong Community School, which has an EON Foundation edible garden, teacher Karina Ferrada said students had started to realise that produce from the garden was appearing in their food. They were trying food they may not have come across before and it opened up their tastebuds.⁵⁵⁴

Kids were saying 'we didn't have bread at home so I've got 5 packet of chips instead'. But now we're honestly knowing that they're getting a sustaining lunch

- Taylor Assmann, teacher, Rokeby Primary School

The interim evaluation of the Tasmanian pilot also found that children receiving a school lunch were more willing to try new foods at school and at home.⁵⁵⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, reinforcement of healthy eating messages and exposure to healthy food choices via a school food program had the potential to impact children's health in the long term, according to education professor Pasi Sahlberg. He says school meal programs should not be just about feeding, but about understanding and respecting nutrition, good cooking and good food.

That is much harder to learn in theory, and this is what we try to do. We have all these charts and pictures about the healthy pyramids and things, and say, "Remember this when you go out", and the kids kind of ignore this thing. But when ... you can kind of practice that ... it is a different thing.⁵⁵⁶

Lunches provide opportunities to develop social skills and check on student wellbeing

We heard repeatedly about the ability of school meal programs to build students' social skills, connect with the school community and provide staff with a better understanding of what is going on in students' lives.

Schools participating in Tasmania's pilot program have to dedicate 20 minutes to sitting and eating instead of 5. Even though this meant sacrificing some time from the lesson before lunch, teachers were amenable because they realised students were learning skills such as sharing, how to have a conversation and using cutlery properly.

In some schools students are rostered to serve the other students. At a high school in Tasmania's pilot program, there had been a 'huge improvement' in a student who was regularly involved in lunch preparation and serving.

553 Monique Reardon, Department of Health, Tasmania, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

554 Karina Ferrada, Jigalong Remote Community School, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

555 K Jose, KJ Smith, F Proudfoot, B Fraser and V Cleland, *School Lunch Project Evaluation: Interim Report 2022: Interim findings from the 2022-23 School Lunch Project*, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 2023, pp. 24-25.

556 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 7.

He was totally disengaged. Now he's engaged in school, he loves being involved. Put him behind a cabbage to cut it up for coleslaw and it's [sliced] so fine! It's amazing. It's about providing those opportunities for wellbeing for him.⁵⁵⁷

Assisting student wellbeing was viewed as a core part of school meal programs by some contributors. This was achieved in part by the connections students and teachers made outside the classroom environment.

One of the huge things we've found is that the staff line up with students and you start to get that bond and the conversation going. Different staff connect with different students in different ways. We see the food as a physical health aspect but it's the total wellbeing of the student that we're meeting the needs of.⁵⁵⁸

The researcher that conducted the evaluation of the initial three-school lunch pilot in Tasmania said that it was the forging of social connections that stood out – both between teachers and students and between students of different age groups.⁵⁵⁹

Food is more than just nutrition: food is care, food is having a connection

- Monique Reardon, Department of Health, Tasmania.

This was highlighted again in the interim evaluation report of the expanded pilot.⁵⁶⁰

Tasmania's Minister for Community Services and Development, Nic Street, said that the point of commonality across the four schools in the pilot program that he had visited was that teachers felt they had a better relationship with their students because they could socialise with them outside the classroom and were eating the same food.⁵⁶¹

Lunches are fresh and parents are relieved of the burden of packing a lunchbox

When students are unable to keep food cool in summer or to heat something to eat, it limits the lunchbox options available to parents. Edith Cowan University submitted that lack of food storage facilities for lunches at school 'reportedly increased consumption of non-perishable foods for lunch'.⁵⁶² It is perhaps not surprising that lunchboxes are often filled with packets of processed foods when it is difficult to keep fresh food at a safe or palatable temperature.

This seemed to be a particular problem for parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who were less familiar with Western lunchbox options. A parent at a forum held at the Ishar Neighbourhood Mother's Group said if she made a boiled egg for her daughter's lunch she would bring it back home: 'I say "why" and she says "mum, it's cold"'. In Albany we heard from Karen students who like to take rice and noodles from home. But

557 Chris Woolley, Support Teacher, New Norfolk High School, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

558 *ibid.*

559 Dr Kylie Smith, Senior Research Fellow, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

560 K Jose, KJ Smith, F Proudfoot, B Fraser and V Cleland, *School Lunch Project Evaluation: Interim Report 2022: Interim findings from the 2022-23 School Lunch Project*, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania. Hobart, 2023, p. 20.

561 Nic Street, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

562 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 17.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

while upper school students have access to a microwave and hot water, other students had to eat it cold.

Figure 4.5: Students in classes 1-2 and 4-5 enjoy lunch together with school staff, and scrape and rinse plates ready for the dishwasher, at Rokeby Primary School, Tasmania.



A United States study found that over 90% of lunch items were at unsafe temperatures shortly before being eaten, even when ice packs were used.⁵⁶³ A lunch provided by the school enables students to eat a hot meal in winter and to safely consume items such as cheese, cold meats and salads in summer without the risk of eating unsafe food.

The deputy principal of a school with multiple cultural backgrounds – including Australian – said that all parents are struggling with lunchboxes.⁵⁶⁴ Knowing what to pack was complicated by the number of different food allergies among students. It was difficult for parents to keep track of which foods their children could take to school, especially if they had children in different classrooms with different lists of banned foods.⁵⁶⁵

Having come to Australia from Finland where a hot school lunch is provided, Dr Sahlberg and his family have found it hard to adjust to packed lunches:

I see my wife every morning scratching her head saying, ‘What should I put in there?’ Every afternoon, probably the same with you, it is the same thing. Those two things that my boys should eat come back untouched—carrot and apple ... When I have the conversation with them they say, ‘But this is what everyone does.’ That is the power of school meals. When everybody has the meal and everybody learns to eat salad and vegetables and fruit, these boys would do it as well, but they do not do it when I try to use my declining authority on them.... This is a completely unnecessary part of parenthood. That is one reason why Finland is the happiest country in the world. You will never read about this, but if you have a conversation this is what people say: ‘I don’t need to worry about my kid’s meals because they learn to eat and respect and understand healthy eating in school.’ It is a huge relief.⁵⁶⁶

Finding 22

Anecdotal evidence and observations demonstrated the ability of a school lunch program to address food insecurity for individual students and to improve attendance, concentration, nutrition and social skills. It also relieved parents of the burden of packing a lunch and addressed the problem of lunchbox food safety.

Food delivery, stigma and attitudes to responsibility are key challenges

Since Australia has limited experience of providing lunch programs, there is little published evidence about the challenges involved. This is one of the reasons the Committee valued seeing and hearing about the pilot program underway in Tasmania. Some Catholic schools which provide lunches in remote areas and to boarders in Perth have provided their perspectives in evidence to the Committee, and the evaluation of the NT’s School Nutrition Projects also provides an insight into challenges in remote areas. In addition, contributors have also been able to apply the challenges of running the School Breakfast Program (SBP)

563 AC Manson, BJ Johnson, K Smith, J Dunbabin, D Leahy, A Graham, D Gallegos, RK Golley, *Do we need school meals in Australia? A discussion paper*, Flinders University, 2022, p. 2.

564 Glenys Cunningham, Koondoola Primary School, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

565 Parent participants, Mt Lockyer Child and Parent Centre, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

566 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 4.

to a potential lunch program. Experiences from other countries are also of interest, although conditions particular to Australia limit their usefulness.

Long distances and lack of infrastructure present difficulties

WA's vastness, lack of food preparation facilities at schools and unreliable access to fresh food supplies were commonly cited challenges to providing food to schools. The SBP evaluation study said that gaining access to good quality fresh produce 'was challenging for metropolitan and regional schools alike, albeit for different logistical reasons'.⁵⁶⁷ SBP schools need to collect the fresh products from a Foodbank WA branch, limiting access to those schools that are close enough and can spare staff to collect the goods. Schools that are further away can pay for refrigerated transport if they have the funds, but the donated perishable products can be of variable quality.⁵⁶⁸

As CEWA noted in its submission, some of its schools have stopped using Foodbank as it was 'often unreliable in terms of variety and continuity of supply'. Remote schools often relied on the local shop – but receipt of the order was unreliable and costs very high.⁵⁶⁹

Limited access to fresh food supplies in remote locations may mean tailoring a menu to what is available. Supplies in remote areas are often disrupted due to natural disasters.

With the floods recently, we had one school that had one tomato and one apple in the school. That is all they had to feed anyone in the school community.⁵⁷⁰

The evaluation of NT's SNP noted that long distance travel could reduce the quality of fresh produce, and said some providers found it challenging to source healthy food to comply with departmental nutrition guidelines. It also identified seasonal disruptions to the supply route as impacting on food deliveries and support visits; however, providers often dealt with this by stocking up ahead of time or buying in bulk from the store.⁵⁷¹

Canteen infrastructure would need upgrading in many schools if meals were to be prepared on-site, and more trained staff (including cooks) would be needed.⁵⁷²

providing nutritious food requires commercial equipment, staff with appropriate training and access to food. Most of the over 1,100 schools in Western Australia do not have these and are 'tuckshops' rather than food services.⁵⁷³

567 Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program Final Report*, 28 February 2018, p. 43.

568 *ibid*, pp. 43-44.

569 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 8.

570 Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 3.

571 Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, Darwin, December 2017, p. 10.

572 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 7; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 36; Participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

573 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 17.

The Tasmanian school lunch pilot evaluation also noted insufficient infrastructure in schools as a challenge. Many needed to have commercial dishwashers, commercial ovens and fridges and freezers installed.⁵⁷⁴

Finding 23

Access to fresh produce is not guaranteed in a state as vast as Western Australia, and some schools are not equipped to prepare food.

Students worry about being seen receiving food from the school

Schools are aware that attending breakfast club can be stigmatising for some children; hence, students who did not necessarily need to go were encouraged to attend.

on days that the popular kids did not go to breakfast club, the ones who needed it did not go either.⁵⁷⁵

The SBP evaluation noted that increasingly over the course of the study, schools had made SBP available to all students to discourage the perception that the program was only targeting children experiencing poverty or neglect.⁵⁷⁶

Schools and parents were also aware that students were often shy about asking for food other than breakfast. Being seen obtaining emergency food could lead to bullying.⁵⁷⁷ Senior school students were the least likely to ask for help since they were more likely to feel ashamed, according to CEWA.⁵⁷⁸

Consideration of how to implement a program to avoid stigmatising children in need is explored further in Chapter 5.

Finding 24

Students who are seen to be relying on free food supplied by the school can be stigmatised and bullied.

Perceptions and attitudes affect support

As with all countries, Australia has long-established cultural attitudes to food and parental responsibility that underpin how food is provided in schools. In Canada, this has influenced support for a government-funded lunch program, according to a 2020 paper. Canada feeds children at school via ‘an ad hoc patchwork of charitable and for-profit organisations’, much like Australia. Attempts to garner support for a state-funded school lunch program (in the 1940s and again more recently) have been rejected as expensive and ideologically fraught. Ideological views about social security programs and a widespread belief that a child’s nutrition was purely a parental responsibility were difficult to overcome. A family allowance income supplement which individual families would manage themselves was regarded as an easier option, politically, for addressing hunger and malnutrition. The authors argue that

574 Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

575 Rebecca Bampton, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2023, p. 4.

576 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 25.

577 Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mt Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

578 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 6.

The potential for a school lunch program to address food insecurity

current campaigns for a school lunch program face the same hurdles as in the past, given strong views about the role of welfare and individual responsibility endure.⁵⁷⁹

Here, as in Canada, people from a range of backgrounds (parents, scholars, health experts) regard school meals as creating a culture of dependence and enabling parents to avoid their responsibility. Providing parents with the means and capacity to provide healthy food was seen by some as preferable, as it helped build independence.⁵⁸⁰

WA's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, recognised there was a view that meal programs might allow parents to 'abrogate their responsibility to feed their children'. But she added:

Right now, with the cost-of-living crisis that families are suffering, I do not believe that is a valid issue. I think we need to do everything we can and not blame the child but make sure a child is cared for, and deal with the parent issues separately if that is needed. Meal programs do encourage kids to come to school – I have seen it myself.⁵⁸¹

Concerns about the NT's SNP diminishing parental responsibility were also raised by stakeholders in the program evaluation, but in nearly all cases were reconciled when stakeholders understood the benefits. Some were not aware that parent/caregivers were paying for the cost of the meals and were proud to be using their 'kids money' (social security payments) for a program that was of benefit to them. They also acknowledged that parent/caregivers still had to provide for their children outside of school hours.⁵⁸²

The priority attached to lunch by students, parents and teachers is also a challenge. In Tasmania, children were used to spending a few minutes eating before running off to play. Embedding a 20-minute period for eating together during the day required reprogramming the way students think about food. Ms Dunbabin said that sitting down to eat a meal together and appreciate local produce is not given the same significance in Australia as in countries such as France and Italy.⁵⁸³

Lunch and nutrition is also not seen as integral to the education system in the same way as in some European countries. Even the basic role of education was viewed differently, according to Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg. A fundamental difference was that in Finland education was considered a public good; it not only provided individuals with what they needed, but benefitted the nation in multiple ways. By contrast, he said in Australia it

579 S Carbone, E Power and MR Holland, 'Canada's missed opportunity to implement publicly funded school meal programs in the 1940s', *Critical Public Health*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2020, pp. 191-203.

580 B McGill, L Cranney, L Corbet and M Thomas, *School meal provision: a rapid evidence review*, prepared for the NSW Ministry of Health, Physical Activity Nutrition Obesity Research Group, The University of Sydney, November 2020, p. 20; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 25; Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 5.

581 Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 October 2022, p. 3.

582 Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, Darwin, December 2017, p. 15.

583 Julie Dunbabin, *Factors that enable school lunch programs to impact positively on student health and wellbeing*, report for Elvie Munday Churchill Fellowship, Winston Churchill Trust, 2020, pp. 28, 36-37.

was considered a private good, and parents felt comfortable with the responsibility of finding their own solution to their children's education.⁵⁸⁴

Finding 25

Australian cultural attitudes to education, parental responsibility and freedom of choice could create resistance to establishing a school lunch program.

Having witnessed a school lunch program in operation as well as seeing the dire food security situation in some parts of the state, the Committee is convinced of the benefits a school lunch program could deliver. But we are also mindful of the many challenges such a program would face, and therefore support an investigation of how a school lunch program might operate in WA. This is the topic of the next chapter.

Finding 26

A school lunch program would be of great benefit to children in Western Australia and ways to address the challenges of implementation are worth exploring.

584 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 7.

Chapter 5

Key considerations for a school lunch model

[Embracing] these recommendations will need to be underpinned by optimism, forward thinking and the ability to acknowledge the short- and long-term costs and benefits ... from an educational, health, economic and cultural perspective.

Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters

What should a school lunch model take into account?

The key consideration for a school lunch model is whether to make it universal or targeted to those students most in need. Other considerations are which part or parts of government should fund and manage the program, who should prepare/deliver the food (on-site, off-site provider), infrastructure and staff resources required in schools, what to serve, whether there should be any provision during school holidays, and who should pay. Many of these factors are interrelated.

Universal is desirable but targeted is more economical

Cost almost always drives the debate as to whether a lunch program should be universal or targeted, although ideological arguments about whether wealthy people should benefit from a free program they could easily afford also feature.

There are multiple ways to address eligibility and to implement a program that is seen to be equitable, with some countries employing more than one type simultaneously:

- Universal and mandatory⁵⁸⁵ for all students in all schools (no cost to parents) e.g. Finland, Sweden, Estonia
- Offered to all students for free, not mandatory e.g. Brazil
- Provided to all students and mandatory, but some/most students pay e.g. Italy, Japan
- Provided at different cost levels (free or reduced-price) for students who qualify, not mandatory e.g. United States
- Provided to all students at specific schools e.g. United States and New Zealand
- Provided to all students in particular years e.g. England, Scotland, Lithuania, or on specific days e.g. Tasmania

The main – or perhaps only – benefit of a targeted program is that it is purportedly more cost-efficient. However, the cost of administering such a scheme can offset the savings of only providing it to children in need. Parents who find the application process too complex may also opt out of the program, meaning it may not reach the intended recipients. There is also the risk of stigmatising eligible students. This can be avoided if children pay using a tap card system with the appropriate amount automatically deducted. However, this is only

⁵⁸⁵ Mandatory means students are not permitted to bring their own lunch to school.

likely to be a useful solution if all students are required to participate in the program or if the meal is sufficiently appealing that all students want to participate. Otherwise, the risk (as occurs in parts of the United States) is that only those on low incomes will sign up to the free or reduced-price school meal, with others regarding it as a second-rate option.

Dr Sahlberg cautioned against implementing a compulsory system in Australia, given the entrenched culture of packed lunches and individual responsibility. For maximum buy-in, it was important that parents saw it as an option, rather than something they were forced to do.⁵⁸⁶ Parents and students would need time to adjust to the new food being offered. Ms Dunbabin said that feedback from schools in Tasmania's pilot program was that there was some initial hesitancy, but when children saw what other children were eating more joined. Most schools were operating at around 80% participation.⁵⁸⁷

The other approach to targeting is to select specific schools based on the level of disadvantage across the whole school. This is the basis on which schools in Foodbank's School Breakfast Program are funded. All students at the school, regardless of means, are eligible. This is the model being trialled in New Zealand. The main drawback of this model is that it misses deprived children in schools that do not qualify.⁵⁸⁸ We heard that even in wealthier WA suburbs such as Applecross, there are children in need who would benefit from a free lunch. In fact, less advantaged students at schools in these more affluent areas 'go to ground' and are hard to identify: 'They are very, very aware of being different, so they are very difficult to find.'⁵⁸⁹

Whether governments choose to implement a targeted or universal system also depends on what they regard as the main purpose of a lunch program. If it is to address food insecurity, individual or school targeting may be an effective and cost-efficient way of reaching the most vulnerable children (notwithstanding the cost of administration). But many proponents of school lunch programs argue that school meals are about more than just alleviating hunger. Learning about food systems, receiving nutritious food and developing social skills by eating together have all been identified as integral to a lunch program. Dr Sahlberg said school meal plans were a central part of the Finnish curriculum, and it was not just about 'the system will give my children something to eat'. Schools understood that it was helping them to teach the children what they needed to learn.⁵⁹⁰

This is also the view of Tasmania's Commissioner for Children and Young People, who said a school lunch can have a significant impact on the child's and the child's family's understanding of food and nutrition, which had a community-wide benefit. 'That to me is real food security – above and beyond food relief.'⁵⁹¹

586 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 8.

587 Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

588 Anne-Catherine Guio, 'Free school meals for all poor children in Europe: An important and affordable target?', *Children & Society*, early view, January 2023, p. 8.

589 Cre Millar, Canteen Manager, Applecross Senior High School, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 3.

590 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 6.

591 Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

Almost without exception, contributors to the inquiry favoured a universal approach which would mean students were not singled out.⁵⁹² This mirrors campaigns in other parts of the world to make targeted programs available to all children.

While targeting a program only at children in need could create stigma it could also be perceived as inequitable, creating divisions within school communities. For example, an Albany parent said at one school, needy non-Aboriginal students saw Aboriginal students being provided with breakfast and a wholesome lunch and felt it was unfair.⁵⁹³ As Ms McGowan-Jones said: 'We do not want to make it one thing for Aboriginal kids and another for others.'⁵⁹⁴

Tasmania's CCYP Leanne McLean believes the Tasmanian pilot should be extended to all schools.

If we really want to get serious about food security, we will provide lunch as a leveller to Tasmanian children in all government schools: that is, universal.⁵⁹⁵

In 2017 a United States research team investigated the impact of extending the means-tested school lunch program to all students in New York City schools, measuring increases in academic performance against the cost of providing universal free meals (UFM). It concluded that it would cost approximately an extra \$50 per student per year – described as 'a bargain' in view of the statistically significant increases in maths and English test scores. 'Bottom line, the evidence from NYC suggests UFM is an inexpensive and effective way to improve academic achievement among urban school children.'⁵⁹⁶

As researcher Anne-Catherine Guio concludes, universal programs ensure high participation, prevent stigmatisation of low-income children and avoid the complexities and administrative burden required for targeted schemes. However, she acknowledges that the establishment of universal programs 'appears to take substantial time, and requires broad political and public support.'⁵⁹⁷

Finding 27

A universal lunch program would embrace the concept of nutrition as an integral part of school education and avoid stigmatising children and young people from low income households, but would cost the government more than a targeted program.

592 For example: Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 6; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA Branch, p. 7; Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre Mount Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Naomi Sprigg dos Santos and Cheryl Cotterill, WA Country Health Service Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022; Geraldine Ennis and Amber Giblett, WA Country Health Service Great Southern, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022; Leanne McLean, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

593 Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre Mount Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August 2022.

594 Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, Commissioner for Children and young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 October 2023, p. 7.

595 Leanne McLean, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

596 AE Schwartz and MW Rothbart, 'Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance', *Maxwell School Center for Policy Research*, paper no. 203, 2019, p. 35.

597 A Guio, 'Free school meals for all poor children in Europe: An important and affordable target?', *Children & Society*, early view, January 2023, p. 9.

Finding 28

A targeted lunch program would help address food insecurity specifically for children and young people most in need and is more economical, but risks excluding some students who should qualify.

Finding 29

A targeted program can avoid stigmatising children and young people from low income households if all students participate and pay according to means, and by ensuring that students who do not pay (or pay less) cannot be identified by other students.

The cost of providing a lunch for all students could be shared

In WA the only schools currently funding a school lunch (as distinct from a canteen) are a handful of public and private schools in areas where children experience food insecurity. As discussed earlier, there is no specific funding for this.

Burringurrah community member Ray Lockyer saw a risk in schools providing lunch to students from their own funds, in that government departments might conclude that further support was unnecessary.⁵⁹⁸

CEWA said providing nutritious food to students could be very expensive, especially in remote areas. In addition to the cost of food, schools paid for refrigeration, cooking, labour and packaging costs. Factoring in all costs, the cost for most metropolitan schools was around \$6 to \$8 per student per day, and more for Kimberley schools. One school, a boarding school for Aboriginal students in Perth, provides full meals to around 100 boarders and day students using a commercial caterer. The cost is \$9 per student per day.⁵⁹⁹

The deputy principal at the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School in Warburton estimated that the school's nutrition program cost around \$20,000 a year, but it is unclear what this included. This amount is likely an under-estimation, since there are 110 students on the roll (with typical attendance around 70), which would equate to less than \$2 per student per day.⁶⁰⁰

Dr Sahlberg told the Committee that there was an idea in Australia that school meals were expensive. He said an Australian delegation visiting Finland last year was surprised by the quality of the three-course school meal being provided and expected it to cost more. Finland feeds about 800,000 students in 3,000 schools at a cost of about €2.4 per student per day – the equivalent of around \$A4. This varied between smaller cities and larger cities like Helsinki, where it was less due to economies of scale.⁶⁰¹

However, in Australia the cost is estimated to be higher. Commenting on the Victorian Opposition's proposal for a lunch program prior to the 2022 Victorian state election, Dr Sahlberg estimated the cost at between \$5 and \$8 per student per day.

598 Raymond Lockyer, Burringurrah Aboriginal Community, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

599 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 9.

600 Scott Fatnowna, Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton Campus, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

601 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, pp. 2-3.

Ms Dunbabin estimated the cost of an ongoing program in Tasmania to be between \$7 and \$10 per meal, which included staff costs.⁶⁰² There were also set-up costs: School Food Matters allocated \$8,000 for equipment for each of the 15 schools in the first year of the pilot, and \$12,000 for each of the 15 schools which joined in the second year. The median cost for the six schools that were evaluated was around \$13,700.

Using the more conservative figure of \$7-\$10 per student per day, the cost of providing a lunch to all WA government school students (approximately 300,000) each day for 190 days of the year (excluding infrastructure and set-up costs) would be between \$400 million and \$600 million, not taking into account a parental co-payment. This represents around 8% of the WA education budget for 2023-24 (\$6.4 billion).

Finding 30

With no parental co-payment, the cost of providing a free school lunch for all government school students on all school days is estimated at \$400 million to \$600 million per year.

Parents may be able – and willing – to contribute

Tasmania's Minister for Community Services and Development said there had been discussions between departments about which bucket of money would fund an ongoing lunch program, and whether a program would be means tested. He and the Minister for Education agreed that, while the pilot did not request a contribution from parents, there may be an opportunity for some families to pay for meals if the program is rolled out. If half of the families were able to pay, that would double the effective reach of the budget.

The interim evaluation found that most parents were willing to pay. The median amount they were willing to pay was \$3. Some made the point that they would only feel good about paying if they knew their child was going to eat the meal and it meant they did not need to pack a lunch. Around half of the parents who participated in the survey were still packing a lunch on school lunch days in case their child did not like what was provided.⁶⁰³ This indicates that a co-contribution might actually result in more children eating a school lunch, since parents would not provide an alternative. Perversely, when parents are not paying for the meal, it seems it does not matter to them if it is wasted.

The NT's SNP program encourages parents to contribute, but it is not compulsory. All children are provided with lunch irrespective of whether a contribution has been made. As at 2017, parental contributions were capped (on average) at a maximum rate of \$40 per child per week, with many schools requesting \$25 per student (\$5 per day). This is to cover food costs. Federal Government funding covers operational expenses. It provided around

602 The interim evaluation has calculated the cost at \$11.55 per lunch, made up of \$3.09 for Loaves and Fishes to produce the lunch, \$3.55 for School Food Matters to manage the project, \$3.71 for schools to deliver the lunch (including staff costs, which varied considerably), and \$1.20 for Department of Health menu advice etc. These figures are likely to change in the final evaluation with administration costs decreasing. See: K Jose, KJ Smith, F Proudfoot, B Fraser and V Cleland, *School Lunch Project Evaluation: Interim Report 2022: Interim findings from the 2022-23 School Lunch Project*, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania. Hobart, 2023, pp. 38-40.

603 K Jose, KJ Smith, F Proudfoot, B Fraser and V Cleland, *School Lunch Project Evaluation: Interim Report 2022: Interim findings from the 2022-23 School Lunch Project*, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania. Hobart, 2023, pp. 4, 24-25.

\$24 million over the three years from 2015-2018 to 42 providers to deliver the program in 72 schools. The program is now delivered in 76 schools.⁶⁰⁴

Providers can collect parental contributions in various ways, including automatic deductions via Centrelink. The 2017 evaluation found that some parents/caregivers, particularly those with multiple children, found it difficult to meet the cost of meals and some resisted signing up to the program. However, most were happy to participate in the program and assumed all parents were contributing. It was the perceived inequity of some parents contributing while others (who could afford to) were not that could cause dissatisfaction. There was also a degree of misunderstanding about how the program operated, and how payments were made.⁶⁰⁵

CEWA also said that some schools are able to negotiate with parents and Centrelink to have a small daily payment directed to the school to help with food provision. However, this was difficult in practice with so many transient families, since payment arrangements could take time to put in place and dismantle.⁶⁰⁶

Finding 31

A parental co-payment is considered necessary and reasonable in many places, although it can be difficult to collect.

There are several mechanisms available to leverage a Federal Government contribution

Tasmania's School Food Matters told the committee they had met with federal government representatives to pitch the idea of a national school lunch program, but it was 'not on their radar'. But this does not mean that there is no role for federal government in providing a state lunch program. Tasmania's Department of Premier and Cabinet suggested school lunch funding could be built into bilateral education agreements.⁶⁰⁷

The bilateral National School Reform Agreement (NSRA), a joint agreement between the Commonwealth, states and territories to lift student outcomes across Australian schools, sets out 8 national policy initiatives against 3 reform directions that all parties agree to implement. Each state and territory has an individual agreement setting out state-specific actions to improve student outcomes. The NSRA was due for renewal in December 2023 but was extended by 12 months to allow time for education ministers to consider a review of the agreement by a panel of experts (Pasi Sahlberg among them). The review is due in October 2023.

The review's first two terms of reference address what should be included in the next reform agreement to drive improvements in: 1. outcomes for disadvantaged students and 2.

604 Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, Darwin, December 2017, p. 23; Hon Linda Burney MP, Minister for Indigenous Australians, *Continued investment in early years and education for first nations children*, media release, 6 December 2022.

605 Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, Darwin, December 2017, p. 97.

606 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 7.

607 Mellissa Gray, Deputy Secretary, Community Partnerships and Priorities Division Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

student mental health and wellbeing. Given the potential for a school lunch program to improve wellbeing for disadvantaged students in particular, WA could lobby for its inclusion in the national agreement and/or include it as an action in WA's bilateral agreement. This could be in the form of undertaking to investigate the feasibility of a lunch program, potentially via a pilot program.

University of Melbourne education professor Glenn Savage wrote in March that while the NSRA does not directly determine the model used by the federal government to decide how it funds schools (i.e. the Schooling Resource Standard), it is 'intimately related' to school funding. The NSRA determines what is in each bilateral agreement, and the bilateral agreement also sets out individual state and territory contributions that are a condition of receiving Commonwealth school funding. He describes the NSRA as 'a central pillar of the policy architecture shaping how schooling works in our nation' and says what is included in the agreement 'makes a powerful statement about what our governments value in education and deem necessary to pursue at the national level'.⁶⁰⁸ The renewal of the NSRA seems like a timely opportunity to put the idea of a school lunch on the reform agenda.

Recommendation 5

The Minister for Education uses the renewal of the National School Reform Agreement to put a school lunch program on the national reform agenda.

Recommendation 6

Provision of a school lunch – particularly for disadvantaged students – be included as an action in Western Australia's bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth on quality schools reform.

There may also be an opportunity for the Federal Government to contribute to a school lunch pilot program (and ongoing program) in specific areas of the state through funding for Indigenous programs. The National Indigenous Australians Agency (the federal agency responsible for coordinating policy development, programs and services for Indigenous people) funds projects through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (among other mechanisms). There are six programs under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to which grants can be attached, including Children and Schooling and Remote Australia Strategies.

In December 2022, the Federal Government announced an investment of \$334 million for early years and education activities for Aboriginal children. It included continued funding for a breakfast, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea program for Aboriginal students in 76 Northern Territory schools.⁶⁰⁹ This is the School Nutrition Projects (SNP) program, discussed above, which began in 2007. The December 2022 funding announcement included funding for 68 activities in WA, but the SNP does not appear to be something WA schools can apply

608 Glenn C Savage, 'What is the National School Reform Agreement and what does it have to do with school funding?', *The Conversation* (web-based), 30 March 2023, accessed 4 May 2023, <<https://theconversation.com>>

609 Hon Linda Burney MP, Minister for Indigenous Australians, *Continued investment in early years and education for first nations children*, media release, 6 December 2022.

for. DoE confirmed that no WA schools were grant recipients and is 'not aware of any further opportunities available to apply for funding to run similar programs in Western Australia'.⁶¹⁰

While the SNP is historically tied to a NT-specific program, there should be nothing to prevent a similar scheme being established in remote areas of WA, given the needs are similar. There are communities being provided with a lunch program in the NT that are relatively close to communities across the border in WA. One could argue that, given WA's communities are further from the state capital than the NT's communities, the need is even greater. As a federal program, there may also be an argument for managing a program for WA remote communities from the NT, given the closer proximity to major centres there.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Education investigates the potential for grant funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency to provide a lunch program for schools in Western Australia's remote communities, similar to the School Nutrition Projects the agency provides in the Northern Territory.

Corporate contributions are welcome but not reliable

WA has a long record of corporate sponsorship of social programs by companies – particularly mining companies – seeking a social license to operate. Elements of food programs are often funded by these companies or they may provide in-kind or logistical support. For example, Foodbank's school breakfast program in the Pilbara is funded by BHP (at least until the end of the year) and the WA School Canteens Association works with a food distributor willing to deliver supplies to schools on its route as a philanthropic gesture.

While there is often a community expectation or recommendation that big corporations contribute to community programs,⁶¹¹ contributors to the inquiry found that this type of funding is not reliable and is often conditional or poorly targeted.⁶¹²

Foodbank WA said that its board had approved funding for one year for the organisation to deliver food relief (as distinct from the school breakfast program) in the Pilbara town of Newman for the first time, but they would need to secure funding from elsewhere to operate beyond that. They were in discussions with BHP and 'hopeful' that they would provide support but nothing was signed at the time of the hearing. 'We are living with a lot of risks at the moment'.⁶¹³

The unequal access to corporate funds was a concern for Associate Professor Mitrou, head of population health at Telethon Kids Institute, who said big companies could not serve every community:

It is great if they can be generous and help out—I would not stand in the way of that; that would be fantastic—but I am also conscious of inequity being created if some communities miss out and others are able to access that due to whether

610 Jim Bell, Department of Education, Letter, 28 April 2023, p. 2.

611 See Submission 493, Katherine Washington, p. 3.

612 Anthony Middleton, Rosie Davidson-Tuck, Shire of East Pilbara, *Briefing*, 31 October 2023.

613 Kate O'Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, pp. 5-6.

there is proximity, whether they have signed agreements with the mining companies or whatever.⁶¹⁴

While money from corporations is obviously welcome, unless it is a guaranteed source of ongoing funding it would be best directed to discrete or short term projects. Ways it could be used to support an ongoing school lunch program or assist students to participate in a program could be explored.

Finding 32

Corporate funding is not reliable enough to sustain school lunch programs in the long term, but could be used to support a program or assist students to participate.

Which state government agencies should be responsible for the program?

Responsibility for the Tasmanian school lunch pilot program sits with the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC). Given its origins in food relief policy, responsibility originally sat with the Department of Communities. In December 2022 when the department was dissolved and its portfolios distributed to other departments, DPAC took on responsibility for Community and Disability Services and Wellbeing, Strategy and Engagement. The Minister for Community Services and Development was retained.

The school lunch pilot came into being thanks to the release in rapid succession of several reports and strategies, some prompted by the pandemic, which all pointed to the need to address access to food in the interests of children's health and wellbeing. The first of these in 2020 was Julie Dunbabin's *Food for Thought* report of her Churchill Fellowship tour of school meal programs around the world.

Following some successful lobbying by Ms Dunbabin, School Food Matters⁶¹⁵ received a small amount of funding from Healthy Tasmania (the government's preventive health body that sits within the Department of Health) for 3 schools to pilot a program providing cooked lunches for 20 days across term 4 of 2020. An evaluation by the Menzies Institute for Medical Research provided evidence to support expanding the pilot.

Around the same time, the Tasmanian Government established the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) in response to the pandemic. Its interim report stated that the percentage of Tasmanians experiencing food insecurity had risen from 6% pre-pandemic to 26%. Continual emergency relief was considered unsustainable and community-based and school-based food security models were recommended. Work on the Tasmanian Food Security Strategy 2021-2024, *Food Relief to Food Resilience*, began in response to this, acknowledging that food insecurity was becoming more of a long-term and sometimes intergenerational problem.

The final PESRAC report in July 2021 identified that access to affordable, nutritious food is a key to good health, and again recommended community and school-based food security models. It also recommended that school lunch provision trials be expanded as part of the

614 Associate Prof Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 8.

615 Formerly the Tasmanian School Canteen Association of which Julie Dunbabin was CEO.

food security strategy. Picking up the PESRAC recommendation, the Tasmanian Food Security Strategy 3-year action plan included funding for an expanded school lunch pilot in 2022 and 2023.

In August 2021 the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, *It Takes a Tasmanian Village*, was released. One of its key aims is that all children have material basics, including access to nutritious food and clean water. The extension of the School Lunch Pilot Program was identified as an action under this goal.

DPAC staff told us that the government went to the May 2021 state election presenting the expanded pilot as a program to support vulnerable families, linked to its emergency food relief program. Food would be provided by emergency food distributors (Loaves and Fishes and Foodbank Tasmania) and be delivered in schools through School Food Matters. This was an extension of what had been happening during the pandemic, when many schools acted as the distribution point for food into communities.⁶¹⁶

While funding for the expanded pilot program, now in its second year, is provided by DPAC through the Communities portfolio, the Department of Health provides nutrition expertise and the Department of Education and Children and Youth provides operational support. Given that the pilot is an action under the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, which cuts across multiple portfolios, it is easy to bring relevant ministers together through a steering committee and Cabinet sub-committee, according to DPAC.

Although funding has come from one department, it is clear that the pilot program has had buy-in from multiple agencies, as well as the Commissioner for Children and Young People. The agriculture industry is also on board since the program has a focus on supporting local growers. The pilot program pays growers for the produce they supply to Loaves and Fishes, the charity group which has been contracted to provide the meals/ingredients to schools. This arrangement is in place partly because donations are unreliable and do not reflect the true cost of running the program (an important consideration for the pilot). But an additional benefit was that farmers were more willing to donate produce to other food relief programs run by Loaves and Fishes if they were being paid for lunch program produce.⁶¹⁷

School Food Matters and DPAC are unsure which department will take ownership of the school lunch program if it becomes permanent. Ms Dunbabin says it is currently verging on a whole-of-government approach and does not need to sit in one department.⁶¹⁸ However, there was a view that Education was a critical partner for ensuring school engagement, since it holds the intelligence about the readiness of schools to run a program and the composition of school communities. This was information that would have strengthened and enhanced the program at the design phase, according to DPAC.⁶¹⁹

616 Courtney Hurworth, Director, Community Policy and Engagement, Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

617 Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023; Aaron Krope, Loaves and Fishes, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

618 Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

619 Courtney Hurworth, Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

DPAC's view was that for an ongoing program to have any long-term impact, it must be funded, managed and 'fully embraced' by Education, with support from other departments. Tasmania's Minister for Education, Children and Youth, Roger Jaensch, said that all departments valued the pilot project and were committed to the process, but would not be drawn on whether his department would fund and manage an ongoing program.⁶²⁰

In WA, while the Department of Communities is responsible for community emergency food relief, it does not see a role for itself in school food delivery.⁶²¹ However, Tasmania's experience of implementing a school-based program originating in food relief had enabled the government to think 'more creatively and broadly' about food security in the rest of community, according to DPAC. Increasing numbers of middle class families were experiencing mortgage stress but would refuse traditional food relief because of the stigma attached to it.⁶²² However, they may be comfortable accessing support through their school if their child was already receiving food support from the school.

Leonora District High School teacher Margaret Butterwood envisaged a similar model for food relief, where the school (through its Food Ladder hydroponic garden) would become the community hub, with parents and grandparents encouraged to work in the garden and take the produce to cook at home.⁶²³ This type of hybrid school-community provision might then attract funding from the departments of Education and Communities and even local governments, which have a history of shared use facilities at schools.

The Department of Health (DoH) said that food relief does not sit within its remit, but acknowledged it had had a longstanding involvement with the school breakfast program (SBP). It saw its role in a potential school lunch pilot program as similar to Tasmania's health department, in that it could provide advice on whether food being provided was meeting dietary needs (a role it also played in delivery of the SBP). DoH said it would also be able to provide expertise around how best to evaluate a pilot program to inform any decisions about whether it could be rolled out on an ongoing basis.⁶²⁴ Department staff had already had discussions with Tasmania's health department 'to get a sense of their experience of the pilot thus far and if there are any issues or concerns that would be helpful for us to be aware of'.⁶²⁵

However, if a school lunch program is viewed not simply a food relief program but as contributing to health education and preventative health goals, DoH would surely have a bigger role to play through its FreshSNAP program (the whole-of-school education program discussed in Chapter 3) and the Sustainable Health Implementation Program. Recommendations from the 2019 Sustainable Health Review are gradually being implemented and include increasing the amount spent on preventative health and reducing inequity in health outcomes for Aboriginal people, culturally and linguistically diverse

620 Roger Jaensch, Minister for Education, Children and Youth, Tasmania, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

621 Mike Rowe, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, pp. 2, 4.

622 Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

623 Margaret Butterworth, Leonora District High School, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

624 Dr Denise Sullivan, Director, Chronic Disease Prevention, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 3.

625 Dr Andrew Robertson, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 1.

communities and people living in low socioeconomic conditions. A school lunch program could help to address the long term health impacts of poor nutrition in childhood, affecting the cohorts just mentioned in particular. Another recommendation of the review is that the DoH ‘actively partner in a whole-of government approach to supporting children and families in getting the best start in life to become physically and mentally healthy adults’.⁶²⁶ Again, a school lunch program could contribute to this.

WA’s education department said that ‘a nutritious diet and optimum health is really fundamental to us setting the preconditions for student learning’.

I think it is important to say that this whole area is really key to what we do, but we are not the only player in this space. We want to acknowledge that we have a really key role to play.⁶²⁷

The DoE said that it had only recently started considering how to address the problem of how to service school communities in view of many school canteens being unsustainable and children not being fed. The proposal for a school lunch pilot by the WA School Canteens Association and the Telethon Kids Institute was an option the department was ‘really interested in engaging in and seeing what potential it has’.⁶²⁸

Finding 33

The Department of Health envisages its role in a school lunch program or pilot program to be supportive rather than central, providing nutrition advice and evaluation expertise.

Finding 34

A school lunch program would be relevant to other Department of Health activities, such as implementation of the Sustainable Health Review recommendations and its whole-of-school healthy eating program.

Finding 35

The Department of Education regards itself as having a key role in ensuring good nutrition to help students learn, which includes addressing what children eat at school.

The government agency responsible for agriculture in WA (the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD)) did not foresee a formal role in connecting primary producers with a school lunch initiative. If this occurred, it was more likely to be a negotiation at the local level, in the same way as primary producers assist the SBP (and similar to what occurs in Tasmania). DPIRD said that it did not have a record of which producers partnered with local schools, and it was Foodbank that had the strongest network of primary producer relationships across the state.⁶²⁹

626 Sustainable Health Review, *Sustainable Health Review: Final report to the Western Australian Government*, Department of Health, Western Australia, 2019, pp. 10-13.

627 Jim Bell, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 2.

628 Martin Clery, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 13.

629 Cecilia McConnell, A/Director General, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Letter, 6 April 2023, p. 1.

It is unclear whether DPIRD sees a partnership between a future school lunch program and primary producers in the same terms as School Food Matters in Tasmania, which regards it as a business model for agriculture and an opportunity to link seasonal produce to school food.⁶³⁰ Tasmania is not alone in fostering a mutually beneficial arrangement with producers. As mentioned earlier, countries such as Brazil and France place a strong emphasis on supporting local agriculture. In Brazil, family farmers and cooperatives had seen incomes rise due to the school lunch program, which guarantees them a local market. And in the United States, it is still the department of agriculture (USDA) that reimburses schools participating in school lunch and breakfast programs, due to the historical link between children's nutrition and the welfare of commercial farmers.

We are not suggesting that DPIRD take responsibility for funding a lunch program in the same way as the United States; however, if a school food policy were to include a direction to source local and seasonal produce where possible, or a specified proportion, DPIRD may be able to assist by promoting this to producers and developing a procurement policy.

Finding 36

Primary producers can benefit from school lunch programs which stipulate procurement of local produce.

Food provision models should be tailored to suit the location conditions

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of different lunch provision models, including preparation entirely on the school site in a school kitchen (either by the canteen or a contractor); cooked off-site at a central kitchen (or another school) with reheating and salad preparation on site; or delivery of ready-to-go meals (already heated or not requiring heating). The most suitable model will depend on the lunch menu and how it will be served, how far the school is from other schools and/or major towns, school infrastructure, and the availability of staff and volunteers.

Dr Sahlberg said that in Finland large city-based schools usually received food from a central kitchen while the smaller schools had their own ways of cooking and preparing food.⁶³¹ Ms Dunbabin visited schools in Italy where the lunch had been prepared at a central school commercial kitchen (catering for around 10 schools in the area) and delivered in insulated boxes which kept the food at the correct temperature for food safety.⁶³²

In a state as vast and varied as WA, a flexible delivery model is considered important.⁶³³ Dr Sahlberg said in establishing a program here it would be important to 'invite people to be creative and think about different ways to do the same thing'. Tasmania's CCYP had a

630 Kirsty Grierson, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.; Julie Dunbabin, *Factors that enable school lunch programs to impact positively on student health and wellbeing*, report for Elvie Munday Churchill Fellowship, Winston Churchill Trust, 2020, p. 36.

631 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Professor, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 6.

632 Julie Dunbabin, *Factors that enable school lunch programs to impact positively on student health and wellbeing*, report for Elvie Munday Churchill Fellowship, Winston Churchill Trust, 2020, p. 43.

633 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Professor, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 5; Submission 14, WA School Canteen Association, p. 4; Roger Jaensch, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023; Dr Kim Jose, Senior Research Fellow, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

similar view, saying that communities, including children, would have ideas better suited for their community than anything governments might deliver in a top-down way.⁶³⁴

Schools in the more remote areas might be best-served by preparing food in their own kitchens, given the costs and complexities involved in delivery over large distances. This was the approach we witnessed at Burringurrah, Warburton and Jigalong, where meals were prepared daily from scratch in the home economics room.

In Tasmania, schools in the initial 3-school pilot were provided with funds to buy food to prepare lunches. However, one of the schools was in an area where it was more difficult – and consequently more expensive – to access food supplies. School Food Matters decided that for the larger pilot program, a central purchasing model was needed. Food relief organisation Loaves and Fishes was contracted to source the food and prepare meals in its commercial kitchens. It was then distributed to the schools as ingredients or pre-made components of a meal. Schools making the meals using the supplied ingredients were provided with the same School Food Matters recipes as Loaves and Fishes used.

In considering whether WA could adopt a similar model, Loaves and Fishes conceded the distances were much greater than they faced in Tasmania, but noted they still had to navigate geographically challenging areas such as Queenstown, which was regularly cut off by snow in winter.⁶³⁵ Dr Sahlberg made a similar point: for about half of the year, a big part of Finland is frozen and nothing grows in the soil. He said the distances to the most remote parts of the country were long, and when the program started more than 70 years ago, most people lived in the countryside.

I think that probably similar questions were asked in the Finnish Parliament at that time: how do we do this in a place where there is no food and poor conditions? Still, the politicians and the government pushed through and said that we can do it if we want to do it.⁶³⁶

Loaves and Fishes CEO Andrew Hillier was confident that a similar program to theirs could operate in WA if it was regionalised. The equivalent organisation in terms of food relief delivery is Foodbank WA, which regularly tackles the logistics of long-distance delivery. Foodbank WA also has a kitchen where it prepares frozen meals for community food relief purposes and has built relationships with producers, suppliers, transport companies and schools. WA School Canteens Association chief executive officer Megan Sauzier said her organisation had considered partnering with Foodbank for a school lunch pilot program.

They already have an amazing set-up and the processes in place to create meals. They have packaging that vacuum-seals it, so the shelf life on the product is then at least five days. We can then incorporate a regional school into our pilot.⁶³⁷

634 Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

635 Andrew Hillier, Chief Executive Officer, and Aaron Kroke, General Manager, Loaves and Fishes, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

636 Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Southern Cross University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2022, p. 5.

637 Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p 13.

Whether preparing food from scratch or storing and reheating, many schools in Tasmania required equipment upgrades. Ms Dunbabin regarded a commercial dishwasher and commercial oven as essential, but some schools also required fridges and freezers, trolleys, crockery, cutlery, crockpots and trays. Similar upgrades would be required here.

Finding 37

Whether schools choose to have lunches prepared in a central kitchen or on-site depends on factors such as location and existing facilities.

Staffing is another factor to be considered. Despite the fact that some teachers and school staff were happy to manage a meal program even if it was not part of their official duties, School Food Matters was adamant that schools should not be expected to run a program with existing staff resources. There was no money allocated to provide staff for the school lunch pilot, so principals had shifted existing staff around to make it work. That needed to change for it to be sustainable, Ms Dunbabin said.⁶³⁸

Policy expert Professor Bessell agreed that school lunches needed to be resourced in a way that did not place additional burden on schools and on teachers in particular. There was already substantial pressure on schools to deal with a range of issues.⁶³⁹ Tasmania's Department of Premier and Cabinet also said schools needed to be resourced with appropriate ancillary staff to ease pressure on teachers.⁶⁴⁰ Ms Dunbabin said training was needed to ensure school staff could do more than just heat up traditional canteen fare.⁶⁴¹

Volunteers may be called upon to serve and supervise, but volunteers can be hard to come by. At Rokeby Primary School there are no parent volunteers so a local mother is employed for a couple of hours on lunch days to help clean up. While voluntary labour might save money, a lunch program could provide a valuable employment opportunity for parents seeking part-time work to fit within school hours. Local employment is an important component of the NT School Nutrition Projects, providing capacity-building opportunities for local staff who were seen as role-models in their communities. Employing local people increased program acceptability by parents and caregivers.⁶⁴²

In most French schools, members of the community (some paid) supervise the children while they eat. The teachers do not eat with the children, but they do in some other countries (e.g. Japan).⁶⁴³ At the schools we visited in Tasmania, teachers supervised the children and ate with them, helping them to learn about food and the social etiquette of eating together. Ms Dunbabin said teachers already had a responsibility to perform lunch duty so sitting with

638 Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

639 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2023, p. 2.

640 Mellissa Gray and Courtney Hurworth, Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

641 Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

642 Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, Darwin, December 2017, p. 2.

643 Julie Dunbabin, *Factors that enable school lunch programs to impact positively on student health and wellbeing*, report for Elvie Munday Churchill Fellowship, Winston Churchill Trust, 2020, pp. 79, 84.

children at lunch was only a small expansion of that. The teachers also saw the benefits of the program so were willing to be involved in this way.⁶⁴⁴

Finding 38

Employing appropriately trained staff was considered the best option for schools providing a lunch program, although volunteers and teaching staff may be called on to supervise.

In some countries, such as Finland, schools are managed at the municipal level, and that includes management of school food. In countries such as England, France and Italy, local authorities are responsible for managing and providing school meals, using funds from government and in some cases parental contributions.

Local governments have no a role in providing school food programs in Australia. However, they do register school canteens/food services as a food business, provide advice on what level of food preparation is permitted and conduct an annual inspection. Some councils may also provide FoodSafe Food Handler training, which is compulsory for canteen staff.⁶⁴⁵ If a government-funded school lunch program was implemented, local governments would likely retain this function. Given that canteens are not currently operating in all schools, any resulting extra workload would need to be taken into account.

Local governments may be able to play a greater role in supporting other initiatives benefitting the food security of children and young people, such as community gardens (discussed in Chapter 7) and restricting advertising of unhealthy food and drinks on council assets (discussed in Chapter 8).

Finding 39

A school lunch program might increase the number of school food business registrations and inspections local government authorities are required to manage.

What is served and how it is served is critical for uptake

Decisions about what is on the school lunch menu are always made with reference to nutrition guidelines provided by the department administering the program. Provided they meet the guidelines, the way meals are served may take many different forms: they may be buffet/cafeteria style, a single set meal, or a paper-bag lunch, each of which can affect the amount of food wasted. Food waste is thought to be less in countries where lunch is served buffet style and students make their own selections from a range of dishes (sometimes with guidance).⁶⁴⁶ However, WA schools may not have the capacity to provide a choice of meals.

644 Julie Dunbabin and Kate Carlin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

645 Federation of Canteens in Schools, *Guide to starting a school canteen*, 2019, accessed 4 May 2023, <www.focis.com.au>; WA School Canteen Association, *Food Safety and Hygiene*, accessed 4 May 2023, <www.waschoolcanteens.org.au>

646 Y Liu, S Cheng, X Liu, X Cao, L Xue, G Liu, 'Plate Waste in School Lunch Programs in Beijing, China', *Sustainability*, Vol. 8, no. 12: 1288, 2016; Julie Dunbabin, *Factors that enable school lunch programs to impact positively on student health and wellbeing*, report for Elvie Munday Churchill Fellowship, Winston Churchill Trust, 2020, p. 40.

There is a risk that where only one option is provided, students may choose not to eat the lunch. In Tasmania only one main option per day was provided (e.g. lasagne, cottage pie, butter chicken) with accompaniments such as rice, salad and fruit salad. The lunch menu was generally provided to parents in advance so that they could pack a lunch on the days their child did not like what was on offer. At some schools, even if children had brought lunch from home they were encouraged to sit and try the cooked lunch before being allowed to eat their packed lunch.

Figure 5.1 (clockwise from top left): School lunch menu for term 1 at New Norfolk High School (Tas); loaded lunch trolley at Gagebrook Primary School (Tas); menu on school notice board at Rokeby Primary School (Tas); and salad to accompany the lasagne at Rokeby Primary School (Tas).



In the Tasmanian pilot the only dietary preference catered for was vegetarian. A vegetarian version of every meal was offered, and once a fortnight all schools in the program served a vegetarian meal for all children. Apart from increasing vegetable intake, it sends a message that you do not have to 'be vegetarian' to have a vegetarian meal.⁶⁴⁷ This is similar to France, where a vegetarian-only meal for is served to all students one day a week. Food intolerances (e.g. gluten or dairy intolerance) were not catered for but would hopefully be tackled as part of a wider rollout. The interim evaluation showed that 55 out of the 1,678 students involved had an allergy or intolerance. The implementation team was surprised by

647 Julie Dunbabin (School Food Matters) and Monique Reardon (Department of Health Tasmania), *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

the number and kinds of allergies and intolerances and the complexity of managing them in a school setting, leading to an Allergen Management Working Group being established.⁶⁴⁸

As mentioned previously, poor quality may be one reason for non-acceptance of the school lunch:

The other thing that we learn out of the UK is that school lunches can be fairly ineffective if they are not nutritious and high quality. The nature of the food that is being provided to children is also incredibly important.⁶⁴⁹

But with a new program, it might take time for students to become accustomed to eating unfamiliar foods. This is why Tasmania's students were encouraged to try the food. Teachers also made a point of discussing what would be served beforehand, explaining and demystifying less familiar foods.

Unfamiliarity with different foods may have been responsible for an allegedly high amount of food waste in the early stages of New Zealand's program. One principal said many parents

We talked about 'what is lasagne?' It's pasta pie! and cous cous – it's so good, you have to say it twice! Bringing that really positive food culture.

- Taylor Assman, teacher, Rokeby Primary School

were sceptical about the school lunches, but after one term there was 100% uptake. Each term students were asked what they would like but if the school noticed an increase in food waste they amended the menu. Food waste went to the local pigs and chickens or into the school's composting and worm farms.⁶⁵⁰ New Zealand's Ministry of Education regards half-eaten lunches as waste, while untouched meals are regarded as surplus. In some places surplus meals were taken home by students or given to community centres for members of the

public to collect.⁶⁵¹ Poor quality also appears to have been a factor in the level of food waste, with food cooked on-site generally regarded as better than meals from external providers.⁶⁵²

Schwartz and Rothbart found that students in the United States might choose to opt out of the lunch program because poor preparation or stringent nutritional standards made it unappealing, especially compared to foods which did not have to meet the same requirements (i.e. canteen food or packed lunch).⁶⁵³

648 K Jose, KJ Smith, F Proudfoot, B Fraser and V Cleland, *School Lunch Project Evaluation: Interim Report 2022: Interim findings from the 2022-23 School Lunch Project*, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania. Hobart, 2023, pp. 34-35.

649 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2023, p. 4.

650 "Large amounts of food waste' thanks to lunches in schools programme', *The Northland Age* (web-based), 7 September 2022, accessed 12 May 2023, <www.nzherald.co.nz>

651 Ellen O'Dwyer, 'Thousands of taxpayer-funded school lunches left uneaten by students', *Stuff*, 12 May 2021 (web-based), accessed 12 May 2023, <<https://www.stuff.co.nz>>

652 "Large amounts of food waste' thanks to lunches in schools programme', *The Northland Age* (web-based), 7 September 2022, accessed 12 May 2023, <www.nzherald.co.nz>

653 AE Schwartz and MW Rothbart, 'Let Them Eat Lunch: The impact of universal free meals on student performance', The Maxwell School, *Centre for Policy Research: Working Paper Series*, no. 203, July 2019.

Hence, above all else, meals must be tasty and appealing to students. This may be challenging to achieve when it must also meet nutritional guidelines and compete with the less healthy but highly palatable foods to which many children and young people are accustomed.

Finding 40

The experiences of other school food programs show that the type of food served and the way it is served needs careful consideration to maximise uptake and minimise waste.

Cultural preferences need to be taken into account

How to cater for the cultural food requirements of schools with culturally diverse populations will also require consideration. Some school canteens are already dealing with this challenge. At Highgate Primary School for example, there are 67 nationalities. Canteen manager Naomi Putland said the canteen had done a lot of work around offering ‘things that are not only culturally appropriate, but [cater to] different dietary restrictions as well’.⁶⁵⁴

Another canteen manager said that students’ tastes at her school were increasingly sophisticated and diverse and the canteen would not survive if it served pies, sausage rolls and toasted sandwiches every day: ‘They really are looking for a proper meal. Something they are familiar with, and they are familiar with so many different cuisines.’⁶⁵⁵

In Katanning, we were told that the town’s culturally and linguistically diverse communities liked to send their children to school with a hot lunch. A lack of access to reheating facilities or ways to keep the food warm made this difficult. They also realised that this was not what other students had for lunch and they had asked to be taught how to make sandwiches.⁶⁵⁶

The deputy principal of Koondoola Primary School said parents of children from refugee or migrant backgrounds (there are 40 or 50 different backgrounds represented at the school) had a strong compulsion to feed their children and did not see it as the school’s role. The lunches they sent were generally better than the typical Australian lunchboxes which contained a lot of packets of processed foods. The Refugee Health Service (RHS) said refugee families often did not have the disposable income to fill lunchboxes with discretionary foods, and felt ashamed that they could not provide the same as other children. But the RHS said this should not be considered ‘a normal lunch’ and their cultural foods should be empowered.⁶⁵⁷

The RHS said that food from different cultures should be embraced, particularly given that 30% of WA’s population is from a multicultural background.

We know that people are empowered when their cultural identities are embraced.
We know that they seek connectivity through food. It is also a very good way of

654 Naomi Putland, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 7.

655 Cre Millar, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 8.

656 Participants, Katanning roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

657 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 7.

providing health education and literacy, because those children can then bring those messages home to their parents.⁶⁵⁸

Given that parents from multicultural communities like to prepare food from their own culture, participants in a forum at Edmund Rice Centre suggested that parents be paid to come to the school to prepare lunch for the students. Alternatively, migrant families could run a catering business from home with the meals delivered to the school. A program employing migrants to cook and to provide culturally appropriate food according to the population at the school was seen as providing benefits on many fronts.

Finding 41

Parents from other cultures often like to provide food from their own culture for school lunches, but it is often difficult to package and heat. Their children also feel pressured to have lunchbox contents that look the same as other students.

Children may be fed on school days but go hungry during the holidays

It has been noted that since children attend school on around 190 days of the year, a lunch program would feed children for a little over half the days of the year. That is, children are guaranteed on these days at least one nutritious meal a day that they may not otherwise have. If the lunches were free or subsidised, parents could put the money saved on school lunches towards providing meals on weekends and holidays. However, it is well documented that, for various reasons, some children do go hungry on weekends and school holidays.

One Catholic school reported that ‘for many children, their school meal on Friday will be their last until breakfast on Monday morning at school’,⁶⁵⁹ and we heard the same thing in Warburton.⁶⁶⁰ In years past, some non-school organisations were able to run the Foodbank WA SBP during school holidays to try and correct the ‘feast and famine’ cycles of food availability and help students be ready for learning when school returns. Schools tell Foodbank WA that students worry about how they will eat in the holidays, and that if they are not well-fed during holidays it takes 2 weeks of being fed at school to get to the point where they can learn.⁶⁶¹

In Warburton, kids were at the point of breaking in for food during the school holidays. Youth workers have developed a breakfast and lunch program to support them until school returns, using the school’s kitchen and buying food from the local store with funds from the shire when available.⁶⁶²

The evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects found that there was concern in NT communities about the quality of food that many children would access during the holidays, such as unhealthy take-away foods and less healthy foods in the community store. However, some families took their children out bush and accessed traditional food during school

658 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 7.

659 Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 3.

660 Angelica McLean and Oriwa McKay, Shire of Ngaanyatjaraku, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

661 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 21; Kate O’Hara and Miranda Chester, Foodbank WA, pers. comm., 13 February 2023.

662 Angelica McLean and Oriwa McKay, Shire of Ngaanyatjaraku, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

holidays. Others may be able to access food (although not a full meal) from recreation and vacation care programs.⁶⁶³

In the United States, a Summer Food Service Program is available in areas with a high concentration of low income families, but participation is low compared to the in-school meal service. This is partly because families do not have transport to get to the feeding site, and in some rural locations the feeding site is several towns away. Suggestions for increasing participation included transportation grants and funding food trucks to bring meals to where children are located.⁶⁶⁴

In England, a targeted program to provide lunches and activities during the holidays was established in 2019, and in 2021 was expanded to cover eligible families right across England. The Holiday Activities and Food Programme for 2022-23 was expected to enable local authorities to provide the equivalent of 6 weeks of holiday food and activities to eligible children – mainly those receiving benefits-related free school meals.⁶⁶⁵

Finding 42

Children in the poorest parts of the state are fed on school days but often go without meals over weekends and school holidays.

Finding 43

Some countries address school holiday hunger by providing a means-tested meal program.

The purpose of a pilot program needs careful consideration

Some lunch programs have evolved from pilot programs while others have been implemented without prior testing. While evaluation is a key part of a pilot study and should be considered in the initial stages of a trial, there are limits to the outcomes that can be meaningfully measured in a short timeframe; hence, expectations about what can be accurately assessed need to be realistic.⁶⁶⁶

Tasmania's experience has been valuable in flagging the factors to consider in designing a pilot and evaluation. School Food Matters engaged the Menzies Institute for Medical Research at the University of Tasmania to conduct the evaluation of its 2-year pilot. Limited funding has dictated that only 12 of the 30 schools will be part of the evaluation – 6 in the first year and 6 in the second. When schools completed their expression of interest in participating in the pilot it was made clear that they would be expected to participate in the

663 Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, Darwin, December 2017, p. 119.

664 Joel Berg and Philip Mathew, *From Well-Fed to Well-Read: How the Federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill Can Slash Child Hunger, Reduce Poverty, and Boost Education*, Hunger Free America, 2019, p. 30.

665 R Long, S Danechi and N Roberts, *School meals and nutritional standards in England*, House of Commons Library, p. 30.

666 Julie Dunbabin, School Food Matters, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023; Monique Reardon, Department of Health Tasmania, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

evaluation, which consists of surveys, focus groups and interviews with principals, staff, parents, students and the implementation team.

They expect to measure impacts on school attendance, concentration (maybe via reports from teachers, or observation), student engagement with the program, changing eating patterns and social connection. Measuring the impact on food security will not be possible since they did not collect data about how many children come to school without lunch – and there were ethical complications around doing so. They also did not know which children were going without food at home.

Determining whether the lunch led to better immediate health outcomes was also not possible, unless they conducted a full dietary analysis of participants before, during and after the program. There was also the unknown factor of what children were eating at home. The Menzies Institute researchers said that the quality and quantity of evaluation that could be achieved was dependent on a good lead time, qualified university researchers and funding.

An important factor to consider in designing a pilot – which impacts on the strength and ease of evaluation – is the degree of flexibility schools are allowed in running the program. In Tasmania the number of days per week schools were offering lunch varied, and some schools were offering it to only one class. Some schools made the meals on-site, others had them delivered. This made comparisons more difficult, but that degree of flexibility was considered necessary to accommodate differing levels of infrastructure and resources. The Menzies Institute researchers suggested that restricting the models to one or two would be preferable, unless there were enough of the multiple different types to make comparison meaningful. Working with other jurisdictions on a joint evaluation was also suggested.

The Menzies Institute's Kim Jose said WA should learn from Tasmania but also adapt. A program might operate one way in the metropolitan area and a different way in remote areas. She recommended spending the first 12 to 18 months co-designing a program with the communities involved and creating something flexible enough to meet cultural needs and expectations.

The WA School Canteens Association, which is in the process of developing a funding proposal to investigate food provision to school aged children (including investigating the role of school canteens, a potential school lunch program and building the capacity of canteens) had a similar idea. They proposed engaging a broad range of schools and parents to understand their lived experience and how they are currently providing food to their kids.⁶⁶⁷

Acting executive director of Environmental Health at DoH, Matthew Lester, suggested mapping the experiences of schools that were already providing breakfast and lunch.⁶⁶⁸ The NT's remote schools lunch program would also provide some useful intelligence on the practicalities of providing a program in WA's remote schools.

667 Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 14.

668 Matthew Lester, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

Ms Sauzier said determining the cost of transport was a difficult part of their planning. 'It is very easy to deliver food in the metro area, and it is very hard to deliver food to our regional areas.'⁶⁶⁹ This was one reason other witnesses suggested including remote and regional areas in a pilot study.⁶⁷⁰ It would help to provide an understanding of the complexities across WA. As Foodbank WA noted:

Development of a school lunch program requires consideration of the unique local WA context, both in terms of school need and provider experience and capacity. At a provider level, this involves resourcing, logistics, appropriate foods and transport. On the school level, considerations include staffing and responsibility, resourcing, storage and food preparation.

The method of recruiting schools/students for a pilot may be more targeted than the way schools/students are selected for an eventual program. Tasmania called for expressions of interest from schools in lower income areas. WA could take a similar approach, while also ensuring representation of the different regions of the state.

Executive director of Statewide Services at DoE, Martin Clery, said:

We might target particular communities or areas, but, ultimately, I think particularly in a pilot, we would want to engage with people who had that demonstrated need. It is probably a bit of a combination; we would want to invite schools to participate, but we would want to be confident that they were schools that were going to give us good information to inform any future decision-making from the pilot.⁶⁷¹

DoH said a number of agencies would need to be brought together to evaluate what might be feasible for the north-west of the state, particularly when looking at a program that would be servicing the needs of Aboriginal communities.⁶⁷²

Conducting a pilot study with schools in different regions could test the practical and logistical components of delivering a lunch program and finding out what is feasible. There is no consensus, however, on whether a pilot study assessing impacts on students is needed before making a long-term commitment. The Menzies Institute researchers told us that in other places a lunch program had been rolled out without a trial or evaluation because, from a values perspective, it was seen as a worthwhile project. And Tasmania's Education Minister saw it in terms of a trade-off 'between how many lunches and how much counting you do'. Money directed to an evaluation could mean fewer lunches are provided.⁶⁷³

A school lunch pilot program could determine the best model

The case for a school lunch program is compelling. If not universal – that is, free for all children in all schools – principles for guiding the selection of students or schools to participate would need to be established. Selection could be based on the ICSEA value of a

669 Megan Sauzier, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 13.

670 For example: Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 8.

671 Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 13.

672 Dr Denise Sullivan, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 4.

673 Roger Jaensch, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

school, the same way as School Breakfast Program eligibility is determined (and similar to the United States Community Eligibility Provision model and the New Zealand model). This would mean that all students in schools that qualify are eligible, but could also mean that individual low-income students in more highly advantaged schools miss out. The SBP system of also allowing schools to apply based on need if they do not qualify according to ICSEA may help to reach pockets of needy students in higher income areas.⁶⁷⁴

Alternatively, if a lunch was provided to all students with some students required to pay, a policy for determining appropriate levels of parental contributions and a system of means-testing would need to be established. This model is potentially more equitable in that it reaches all students, but it could also create an administrative burden for schools and parents. Parents of children who need it and would qualify may not have the knowledge and emotional fortitude to apply.

While no model is perfect, applying the same eligibility criteria as the SBP may be the simplest in the first instance and would enable targeting of schools in the most disadvantaged areas. Conducting a pilot on this basis with a selection of metropolitan, regional and remote schools would be a reasonable first step. The number of schools included would depend on funding.

While Tasmania's program is initially for government schools, School Food Matters and ministers Street and Jaensch are keen to see non-government schools included. WA's education department is also supportive of including non-government schools in a future program, saying the department had 'a strong sense of compulsion and responsibility to engage with the non-government sector'.

I think it is a really important point, particularly in some communities where there are vulnerable and disadvantaged cohorts attending both public and private schools and they are nearby.⁶⁷⁵ The partnership opportunities need to be at the forefront of how we think about how we might do some more work in that area.⁶⁷⁶

CEWA also mentioned working in partnership and co-designing programs. CEWA psychologist Dr Allison said that CEWA worked closely with the Association of Independent Schools WA and the DoE. CEWA submitted that schools in the Catholic system which meet a threshold of 50% of students impacted by food insecurity should receive a per capita grant of \$1000 per student per year – the equivalent of \$5 per day. They estimated that this would encompass 15% to 18% of its schools (some of which had a very small number of students). They suggested an additional loading for remote locations, where costs are much greater and the problem is more extreme. A school lunch program for all schools or low-ICSEA schools would provide this level of support and the government should consider including the non-government schools – even if not in the initial pilot. As Dr Allison and the DoE noted,

674 Edith Cowan University and Telethon Kids Institute, *Evaluation of the Foodbank WA School Breakfast and Nutrition Education Program Final Report*, 28 February 2018, p. 117.

675 Note, in some remote areas Catholic Education WA schools are the only school.

676 Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 13.

there is precedent for the state government funding services and programs in non-government schools (e.g. psychologists).⁶⁷⁷

DoE seems to be the most appropriate agency to lead a trial, with support in design, implementation and evaluation provided by DoH, the WA School Canteen Association, the Telethon Kids Institute, Foodbank WA, local governments where the schools are located and primary producers.

Recommendation 8

The Department of Education takes the lead in establishing a pilot school lunch program targeting a selection of low socio-economic metropolitan, regional and remote schools.

Beyond the pilot, the government should consider the value of an ongoing school lunch program in terms of the long term educational and health benefits it can provide, including cost benefits. In designing a program, it should take into account the factors discussed in previous sections of this chapter.

If conducting a cost-benefit analysis is beyond the government's scope, providing a school lunch program could be viewed simply as fulfilling a duty to protect and enhance child health and wellbeing.⁶⁷⁸ As CEWA has said, the impact of food insecurity on children is so significant that governments cannot afford not to provide support.⁶⁷⁹ Government leadership and children's rights will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Recommendation 9

The State Government should apply a whole-of-government approach in considering a school lunch program model and take into account:

- How a model based on means-testing would identify eligibility and avoid stigmatising eligible students in government and non-government schools
- How corporate funds could supplement state funding
- The need for flexible delivery models according to location
- The need for appropriately trained paid staff
- Ways to ensure food quality is maintained
- Strategies to encourage student uptake
- Cultural preferences and dietary needs
- A direction to school food providers to procure a proportion of fresh food from local primary producers
- The potential for schools to act as a hub for community food relief and food security programs.

677 See: Dr Laura Allison, Catholic Education WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 7; Martin Clery, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 4.

678 Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association WA Branch, p. 7; Dr Kim Jose, Menzies Institute of Medical Research, *Briefing*, 1 March 2023.

679 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, pp. 7-8.

Chapter 6

Food and nutrition in early childhood

Overarching systems do not seem to recognise the ECEC sector’s potential to improve food security in children

Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University

Regulations governing child care food provision are not prescriptive

The years before a child attends compulsory schooling are critical for determining their future health (see Box 6.1). Since many children attend formal child care in these years, it is important that they receive sufficient food of good nutritional quality.

Formal care is usually delivered in long day care settings but also includes family day care and out-of-school-hours care. The percentage of children using formal child care in WA according to age group in 2017 (the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data) was:

- 23% of children under 2
- 45% of 2 to 3-year-olds
- 23% of 4 to 5-year-olds⁶⁸⁰

This was around 64,000 children. More recent figures collected by the Australian Government show there were 124,880 children using childcare in WA in the September 2022 quarter, but this incorporates children up to the age of 12. There were 75,000 children in formal centre-based day care, of which 3180 were Indigenous children.⁶⁸¹ Children under 5 are the main group using centre-based day care. There has been a continual growth in enrolments in the past 10 years.⁶⁸²

Box 6.1: First 1000 days

The first 1000 days theory refers to the time in a child’s life from conception to their 2nd birthday. It is understood that children’s experiences during this time can have long-term health impacts. A person whose mother experienced poor nutrition when she was pregnant, for example, can have physical or cognitive development delays, or develop obesity, heart disease and stroke later in life.

First hypothesised by physician and epidemiologist David Barker from Southampton University, multiple studies – including some within Australia – have since confirmed the connection between babies’ environments and health outcomes.

Source: Dr Roslyn Giglia, Dietitian and Nutrition and Food Security Manager, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, pp. 1–2; Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 2; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 10.

680 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4402.0 Childhood Education and Care Data Collection*, June 2017.

681 Australian Government, *Child Care Package – September quarter 2022 data tables*, Department of Education, 12 May 2023, accessed 16 May 2023, <<https://www.education.gov.au>>

682 R Cassells, M Dockery, A Duncan, D Kiely, M Kirkness, T Nguyen, R Seymour and C Twomey, *The Early Years: Investing in Our Future – Focus on Western Australia Report Series*, No. 13, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, August 2020, pp. 74-76.

According to Edith Cowan University (ECU)'s submission, parents who use more than 10 hours of care a week for children under 2 are likely to choose formal care over informal care arrangements. This was the same but less pronounced for 3 to 5-year-olds.⁶⁸³ Hence, it is even more important that food in formal care settings is of good quality, since the children that attend are likely to be there for a significant amount of time. Children across Australia spent on average 31.8 hours per week in centre-based care in 2022.⁶⁸⁴

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) researcher Ros Sambell told the Committee there was an assumption that children attending long day care services were being provided with enough quality food to meet their dietary needs. But her audit of the cost of food in 30 long day care services in Perth found that this was not the case.

My research found that none of the long day care services in my sample in Perth actually provided enough food from all food groups, rendering those children who attend these services actually insecure.⁶⁸⁵

A 2020 paper she co-authored said that the type of foods offered to children, how they are offered and how and when they are consumed is a significant public health issue due to its impact on future food decisions.

This is especially true for children attending LDC [long day care], primarily because attendance rates are increasing the LDC environment is ideally positioned to support the establishment of healthy food preferences and habits because it takes place in such a critical period of influence in the child's life, influencing food (and nutrient) intake as well as shaping future preferences.⁶⁸⁶

The average amount spent on food was \$2 per child per day. This is consistent with a United Workers Union survey of early childhood educators that found that the average food budget at Australian centres was \$2.15 per day per child, but ranged from 65c to \$5. Almost 40% of educators and 60% of cooks at the centres said they had bought food for children out of their own pocket.⁶⁸⁷ Ms Sambell had anecdotal evidence that supported this:

we have actually seen cooks who are growing food at home to try and supplement the food that is being offered in childcare services when there is a lack of money that has been allocated to it.⁶⁸⁸

683 Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Indicators of wellbeing, Age group 0 to 5 years – Participation in formal and informal child care*, August 2020, accessed 19 May 2023, <www.cyp.wa.gov.au>

684 Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2023 – Early childhood education and care*, 7 February 2023, accessed 16 May 2023, <www.pc.gov.au>

685 Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 2.

686 R Sambell, R Wallace, J Lo, L Costello and A Devine, 'Increasing Food Expenditure in Long Day-Care by an Extra \$0.50 Per Child/Day Would Improve Core Food Group Provision', *Nutrients*, 12, 968, 2020, p. 8.

687 United Workers Union, *Children going hungry: Urgent action needed in early education*, Victoria, March 2022, <<https://unitedworkers.org.au>>

688 Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 7.

Modelling in Ms Sambell's study suggested that spending an extra 50¢ (a total of \$2.50 per child per day)⁶⁸⁹ increased the odds of a service meeting the volume of food intake (50% daily) across the 4 core food groups recommended by the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

The *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012* sets the framework for care and services of children in ECEC services. It incorporates the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012*, which provide administrative detail for ensuring healthy food (by way of regulations 78 and 79). They stipulate that children must be 'offered food and beverages appropriate to the needs of each child on a regular basis throughout the day'; and that what is provided is 'nutritious and adequate in quantity' and has 'regard to the dietary requirements of individual children, taking into account each child's growth and development needs and any specific cultural, religious or health requirements'.⁶⁹⁰ However, the regulations do not specify a minimum expenditure on food or provide guidance on what food should be offered.

Ms Sambell says this leaves them open to interpretation which can lead to non-compliance. She suggested amending the requirements to make them more prescriptive in regard to food provision, rather than leaving it to the provider's discretion.⁶⁹¹

Since the National Law and National Regulations are nationally agreed, amendments involve consultation with all state and territory governments, the Australian Government and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), which is the national body guiding the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF). The NQF was introduced in 2012 as a national outcomes-focused system of regulation for the education and care sector. It aligned regulatory requirements for ECEC providers across the country and introduced a system of quality ratings and minimum standards.⁶⁹²

A review of the NQF in 2014 led to amendments to the National Law which commenced in October 2017 in other states and territories and October 2018 in WA.⁶⁹³ There was another review in 2019 which recommended changes, with some amendments to the National Regulations put in place in the past year. Most were expected to commence this year.⁶⁹⁴ However, none of the recommended changes relate to food and nutrition. The State could raise the lack of specificity concerning food provision in future reviews of the NQF.

While the Commonwealth is largely responsible for funding ECEC services, the states are responsible for the approval, monitoring and quality assessment of services. In WA this is performed by the Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ECRU) within the Department of

689 Ms Sambell noted that these figures are based on 2018 information and would need to be reviewed given recent spikes in the cost of food.

690 *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012*, Ch. 4, Part 4.2, r. 78 and r. 79, as at 1 March 2023.

691 Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 6.

692 Education Services Australia, *NQF Review; Decision Regulation Impact Statement*, May 2022, p. 15.

693 This is because WA has its own legislation. The NQF operates under an applied law system, which means the same law is applied in each state and territory, but with some varied provisions according to the needs of each state or territory. Victoria passed the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the other jurisdictions adopted that law through an Application Act. WA adopted it through corresponding legislation. See <www.acecqa.gov.au>

694 Education Services Australia, *NQF Review: Decision Regulation Impact Statement*, May 2022, p. 95.

Communities (DoC). Services are assessed against the National Quality Standard, which is part of the National Regulations. The standard consists of 7 quality areas that each contain standards. The standards are broken down into elements which contain more detail of what should be provided. Services are assessed and given a rating for each of the 7 quality areas. The only reference to nutrition is in Quality Area 2 – Children’s health and safety:

Standard 2.1 Health: Each child’s health and physical activity is supported and promoted.

Element 2.1.1 – Wellbeing and comfort: Each child’s wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child’s need for sleep, rest and relaxation.

Element 2.1.2 – Health practices and procedures: Effective illness and injury management and hygiene practices are promoted and implemented.

Element 2.1.3 – Healthy lifestyle: **Healthy eating** and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child.⁶⁹⁵

As Ms Sambell points out, healthy eating is referenced in only one element (2.1.3) and even then it is only part of this element, ‘despite nutrition being a critical contributor to growth and development’. She said embedding other relevant indicators – such as how children access food while they attend services – in either the assessment and rating documents or childcare registration documents would provide valuable insights into the sector.⁶⁹⁶

DoC said that 99.7% of services visited by ECRU since 2017 had been found to meet the recommended requirements for delivery or provision of food and water. They did not identify an issue in terms of the ECEC sector meeting the current recommended standards; whether the standards were appropriate was not something they could comment on.⁶⁹⁷

DoC said that while their officers ensured that services delivered food according to the national standards – such as making sure the four-week recommended menu cycle included variety, volume, exposure and training children to understand about nutrition – ‘we do not capture and record what is actually delivered and the nutritional factors or facts around what is actually delivered’.⁶⁹⁸ According to Ms Sambell, there is often ‘quite a lot of variation from what is promoted to what is actually provided’.⁶⁹⁹

Ms Sambell said there was evidence to suggest that the current assessment and rating process was not reflecting food provision adequately. It was difficult for authorised officers to assess services, particularly if they did not have nutritional expertise, when the standard

695 Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority, *National Quality Framework – National Quality Standards, Quality Area 2*, accessed 25 May 2023, <<https://www.acecqa.gov.au>>, (author’s emphasis).

696 Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, pp. 5, 6.

697 Mike Rowe and Phil Payne, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, pp. 2, 5.

698 Phil Payne, Executive Director, Regulation and Quality, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 5.

699 Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 7.

was so broad. ECU was working with ECRU to train authorised officers in assessment of ECEC food environments. But Ms Sambell said if services were required to observe a menu (provided online with access to planning tools and a dietitian) in order to meet regulations and standards, ECRU would have a better way of monitoring and ensuring that the advertised menu had actually been provided. Nutritional expertise would be less important.⁷⁰⁰

The quality areas, standards and elements of the National Quality Standard were not part of the 2019 NQF Review.⁷⁰¹ A review of these could be suggested at the meeting of ministers responsible for reviewing the standard and the rating system.⁷⁰²

Finding 44

The regulations and standards within the *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012* are not prescriptive enough regarding food provision, with no minimum expenditure or food types specified.

Recommendation 10

The Minister for Early Childhood Education recommends that the next review of the National Quality Framework includes a review of the National Quality Standard, with particular regard to the adequacy of the elements related to food provision.

Access to food in childcare depends on where you live

A range of factors influence whether children can access good food through early childhood care, such as whether there is child care available nearby, the affordability of the service, and whether food is provided by the service or by parents.

A paper released in 2022 by the Australia Institute Nordic Policy Centre notes that there are ‘gaping childcare deserts’ in which more than a third of Australian families live. More than half of all child-care services are run to make a profit, which means childcare is often not accessible or affordable for lower income families. The paper notes that NSW is planning to pay private operators to make their services more affordable, and Victoria plans to establish 50 new government-owned and operated centres. The net childcare costs for a couple on an average wage in Australia amount to 20% of household income, compared to just 5% of household income in Iceland and Sweden, 8% in Norway and 10% in Denmark.⁷⁰³

700 Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, pp. 6-7.

701 Education Services Australia, *NQF Review: Decision Regulation Impact Statement*, May 2022, p. 29.

702 This body has been called the Ministerial Council, Education Council and Education Ministers Meeting. It consists of Australian, state and territory ministers responsible for ECEC matters. Their responsibilities include: approving changes to the National Law and National Regulations; reviewing and approving the NQS, quality rating system, and learning frameworks; and appointing members to the ACECQA Board.

703 Andrew Scott, *Securing children’s future – Nordic-style investment needed in early years learning*, prepared for the Australia Institute Nordic Policy Centre, July 2022, p. 6.

The Refugee Health Service operated by the Child and Adolescent Health Service (CAHS) confirmed that the families they see cannot afford childcare. 'That is disposable income that our families do not have.'⁷⁰⁴

ECE services are accessed by the majority of children in the years prior to school and, therefore, present significant opportunity for public health intervention to support children's health and development. This role is particularly important in the context of disadvantaged communities where families experience a complex array of stressors and have less resource to support optimal child development

- Thorpe et al., 2020 (see footnote 706)

According to ECU's submission, there is limited evidence of how many ECEC services in Australia provide food, but it is estimated to be around 30%. ECU explains that there is no actionable policy framework that requires ECEC services to provide food. ECEC services in low socioeconomic status areas are less likely to provide food, requiring parents to bring food from home. This places an additional financial burden on parents and means services have less control over what food is offered to children.⁷⁰⁵

A Queensland study which examined associations between meal provision in ECEC services, socioeconomic disadvantage and market competition found that children living in disadvantaged communities, where food insecurity was inevitably higher, were least likely to have meals provided by their service. The study found

that in metropolitan locations, market competition placed pressure on services to provide food, but in disadvantaged communities there was also pressure to constrain fees. This had implications for the quality of food provided. The study noted that ECEC services operate in a competitive market, which can be in conflict with the ideal of ECEC services as places of public health promotion and support.⁷⁰⁶

DoC confirmed that day care centres in regional areas were less likely to provide food because they are unable to attract and retain cooks.⁷⁰⁷ In Leonora and Katanning, where day care services do not provide food, we were told parents/carers were often made to feel ashamed of what they had packed, so chose not to send their children. Having to find something to pack was a barrier that some parents could not overcome. A childcare service can apply for the Additional Child Care Subsidy Child Wellbeing on behalf of a family, but this requires the parent to declare that their child is vulnerable, which again could be shaming.⁷⁰⁸

According to Ms Sambell:

704 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, p. 4.

705 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 41.

706 K Thorpe, B Searle and O Van Halen, N Lakeman, C Oakes, H Harris, S Staton, *A market in mealtimes: Social and economic factors associated with meal provision in early care and education (ECE) services*, Life Course Centre Working Paper Series, 2020-25. Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland, 2020, p. 12.

707 Phil Payne, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 6.

708 Naomi Sprigg dos Santos and Cheryl Cotterill, WA Country Health Service, Leonora, *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

Evidence from other states is suggesting that the lowest quantity and quality of food is where families are actually asked to provide food, and it is going to be likely in those areas which have the greatest disadvantage, so then they are actually further disadvantaged, unfortunately.⁷⁰⁹

Leonora WA Country Health Service (WACHS) child safety project officer Naomi Sprigg dos Santos suggested that if a meal program was being offered in the local school it could incorporate free meals for the childcare centre.⁷¹⁰

DoC told the Committee that there was recognition that in regional areas in particular there was limited capacity to provide childcare places. The states and the Commonwealth were working on strategies to better support the sector to provide more spaces, which would then contribute to their access to food, education and care.⁷¹¹

When childcare food provision is done well, it assists busy parents who can feel assured that even if they do not provide a full meal in the evening, their children have been well fed. Parents who were accustomed to this were then unprepared when their child started school and they were required to pack a lunch every day.⁷¹²

Finding 45

Parents experiencing food insecurity are less likely to send their children to childcare if they are required to provide food, which is more likely to be the case in regional and disadvantaged areas of the state.

Nutrition support services for children in the pre-school years are lacking

A number of contributors to the inquiry have mentioned the lack of nutritional support for children under 5, who are particularly vulnerable once they cease breastfeeding at 1 to 2 years. Given the high cost of ECEC, it is likely that many vulnerable children will not be accessing childcare. But, according to ECU, there are also no ECEC-specific programs for 0–3-year-old children, apart from health checks performed by the Child and Adolescent Health Service, WA Country Health Service or Aboriginal Medical Services.⁷¹³

Playgroups may contribute to food availability through supply of fruit for morning tea, for example, but they do not operate daily (often only once a week).⁷¹⁴ We heard that in Warburton the shire provides breakfast every morning at playgroup, because it is needed. But there is nothing to compel playgroups to provide food. DoC told us that playgroups are not captured under the legislation that governs and oversees childcare services. They generally operate as a localised business or service delivery.⁷¹⁵

In Burringurrah the WACHS nurse was concerned that once a baby stopped being breastfed or having formula they would not get enough food. Mothers would come to the school and

709 Ros Sambell, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 4.

710 *Briefing*, 1 November 2022.

711 Phil Payne, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 6.

712 Jennifer Hanna, WA School Canteen Association, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 8.

713 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 42.

714 *ibid.*

715 Phil Payne, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 3.

ask for food to support those children. Children who were not at school were not getting anything.⁷¹⁶

DoC said that while they did not provide specific services or programs to address food insecurity for young children, they had entered into a partnership with the Minderoo Foundation to look at ways to improve child wellbeing and school readiness in 4 WA communities. The Early Years Partnership (EYP) also involves the departments of Health and Education, and Telethon Kids Institute is providing the evidence and evaluation component. The 4 communities – Armadale West, Central Great Southern (including Katanning), Derby and Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community – are being supported to co-design evidence-based community plans to identify the key priorities and actions to improve the wellbeing and school readiness of 0 to 4-year-olds.

Food security has been identified as a key priority for all EYP communities, and this partnership provides a unique opportunity to test, trial and learn from across government innovations, including supporting the nutritional needs of vulnerable children. Plans for each of the four locations are well underway.⁷¹⁷

The Committee encourages the State Government to apply any positive outcomes in the four EYP communities more broadly, so that nutrition in these critical early years is not overlooked.

Finding 46

Children who do not attend formal childcare have little or no opportunity to access health and nutrition programs in the pre-school years.

Recommendation 11

The State Government monitors the outcomes from the Early Years Partnership and ensures that understanding of the nutritional needs of the 0 to 4 years age group benefits communities beyond those in the partnership program.

Nutrition of women during pregnancy needs more attention

As explained in Box 6.1, the first 1000 days in a child’s life starts from conception. This means that nutrition during pregnancy should also be a focus of the health sector. Malnourished women are more likely to have low birthweight babies, which makes their children more susceptible to undernutrition and poor cognitive development.⁷¹⁸

In 2019, the proportion of Aboriginal babies with a low birthweight (less than 2500g) was almost double the rate for non-Aboriginal babies. The rate has not changed significantly since 2006, according to the Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA). The proportion of Aboriginal babies born with a healthy birthweight is also lower in WA than Australia as a

716 Marilyn Hake, WA Country Health Service, Burringurrah, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

717 Mike Rowe, Department of Communities, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 2.

718 M Chilton and D Rose, 'A Rights-Based Approach to Food Insecurity in the United States', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 99, no. 7, 2009, p. 1203.

whole (87.7% compared to 89.5%).⁷¹⁹ More broadly, statistics show that babies born in lower socio-economic status areas have a higher share of low birthweight babies.⁷²⁰

The AHCWA contends that to achieve the Closing the Gap target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight, there needs to be a greater focus on programs and services that improve Aboriginal maternal and antenatal health, including nutrition.⁷²¹

WACHS Great Southern regional director Geraldine Ennis said the country health service provided health promotion services for pregnant women, but it was their choice whether or not to attend. Research shows that in WA in 2019, only 63% of women attended their first antenatal care visit within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy.⁷²² Women from lower socio-economic areas, those living in very remote areas, Aboriginal mothers and women born in non-English speaking countries were less likely to attend antenatal care in the first trimester. The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre *Early Years* report said that given the increase in women from CaLD backgrounds in areas of Perth, more should be done to provide access to culturally appropriate services in the early stages of pregnancy to increase awareness of the importance of early check-ups.⁷²³

In Tasmania we were told that the Royal Hobart Hospital now asks pregnant women a food security question. Women were hesitant to talk about food scarcity. They would often receive nutrition information to follow but this became irrelevant if they were unable to access the recommended foods or perhaps had nowhere to cook. Questions needed to go beyond inquiries about whether they were getting enough calcium or iron; health practitioners needed to find out about their level of food insecurity and link them to services to help them become more food secure.⁷²⁴

In the United States, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has existed since 1975. It provides a monthly food package, nutrition education, and access to health care to pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children up to the of age 5 living in low-income households. Food packages include foods (and infant formula) that are high in nutrients determined to be lacking in the WIC target population.⁷²⁵ WIC has been described as very effective in terms of nutrition assistance. Despite apparently being unable to meet the needs of all who need it,⁷²⁶ a program which at least recognises

719 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, p. 2.

720 R Cassells, M Dockery, A Duncan, D Kiely, M Kirkness, T Nguyen, R Seymour, and C Twomey, *The Early Years: Investing in Our Future*, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, August 2020, p. 44.

721 Submission 27, Aboriginal health Council of Western Australia, pp. 2-3.

722 R Cassells, M Dockery, A Duncan, D Kiely, M Kirkness, T Nguyen, R Seymour, and C Twomey, *The Early Years: Investing in Our Future*, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, August 2020, p. 11.

723 *ibid.*, p. 34.

724 Monique Reardon, Department of Health, Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

725 USDA, *Economic Research Service – WIC Program*, 10 August 2022, accessed 22 May 2023, <www.ers.usda.gov>

726 Hunger Free America, *From Well-Fed to Well-Read: How the Federal Child Nutrition Authorization Bill can slash child hunger, reduce poverty, and boost education*, 2019, p. 36. See also Submission 26, Curtin University, p. 18.

the importance of nutrition in pregnancy by supplementing the diets of low income pregnant women is laudable.

Finding 47

Babies born to women with poor nutrition are more likely to be below optimal birthweight, which negatively impacts their development.

Recommendation 12

The Department of Health should support food insecure pregnant women to receive the nutritional support they require to deliver a healthy birthweight baby.

Chapter 7

Other initiatives to address food insecurity

Complex issues, such as food security, will be more effectively addressed through a place-based focus.

Edith Cowan University submission

Some of the food security initiatives discussed in this chapter involve the broader community, and not necessarily just children. However, children would be beneficiaries in all of the examples. Several of the initiatives relate to place-based solutions. The others – social supermarkets and peer education models – are ideas that exist in other parts of the world and have been recently piloted or embraced here in WA.

Place-based solutions are key to addressing food insecurity

Place-based solutions have been mentioned in relation to establishing the best school food program for a particular location. But place-based solutions for improving food security more generally – such as community gardens, food hubs and policy councils – were also suggested throughout the inquiry. Place-based solutions are particularly applicable to regional and remote communities where food deliveries are unreliable and produce is expensive.

For Aboriginal communities, access to bush foods is considered an important way to bolster food security and food sovereignty. AHCWA said in its submission:

Members discussed the importance of being able to hunt and utilise traditional food (when possible), and said how vital it is to protect local environments that support bush tucker.⁷²⁷

An AHCWA member said that food sovereignty was about people having the ability to control their food supply, rather than depending on trucks to bring in food from outside.

Bush harvest needs to be recognised to complement issues around store food such as choice, availability, quality, and budgeting.⁷²⁸

Community gardens can be an important way for children to access food

AHCWA saw community gardens as having ‘the dual benefit of providing employment and upskilling opportunities for Aboriginal community members, while also improving access to nutritious food’.⁷²⁹

727 Submission 27, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, p. 10.

728 *ibid.*

729 *ibid.*

Associate Professor Mitrou from Telethon Kids Institute said some remote Aboriginal communities had fantastic community gardens and vegetable gardens, but not all communities had them.

That supplements and kind of protects against some of the fluctuations in prices at the community store that they do not have control over, and neither does the store owner, necessarily, because that is determined by external forces, if I can put it that way.... You do notice the difference when you go from one community to another where they have a fantastic, well-maintained, productive garden and others who do not.⁷³⁰

He saw gardens as something that could be promoted, supported and funded by government. The Salvation Army also encouraged the government to work with rural and remote communities to establish locally led community gardens to improve local food production.⁷³¹

Children's policy expert Sharon Bessell said community gardens and forage streets could be really important parts of community planning processes to ensure that children and others have direct access to food.

We did some research in a space where there was a community garden, and the children, as soon as they arrived, were taking the lettuces and eating them, because they were really hungry. It was really interesting to see what happened when they had that direct access; they were accessing it themselves.⁷³²

According to WALGA, many local governments support community gardens by providing land or other support, and some have associated policies. For example, the City of Stirling supports 7 community gardens that produce food and also assists food gardens at a handful of local schools. It is unclear whether children are able to access the food grown in the community-based gardens. The City of Fremantle allows community garden groups to apply to use city-held land for a community garden, and has a policy governing how this is done. There are three community gardens listed on the city's website. City of Fremantle has also produced a community gardens booklet which outlines how to establish and manage the garden. One suggestion is to liaise with schools and youth groups to develop activities in the garden that children and young people will enjoy. Again, it does not talk about how the garden might address food insecurity or whether children should be able to access the food at any time.⁷³³

EON Foundation and Food Ladder are two organisations that are assisting communities to establish community gardens. EON Foundation noted that the Federal Government inquiry into food security in remote Aboriginal communities recommended the Australian government support local food production driven by First Nations people. EON Foundation

730 Associate Prof Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 11.

731 Submission 18, The Salvation Army, p. 11.

732 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 6.

733 WALGA, Letter, 3 April 2023, p. 3; City of Stirling, *Community gardens*, accessed 29 May 2023, <<https://www.stirling.wa.gov.au>>; City of Fremantle, *Community gardens*, 2023, accessed 29 May 2023, <<https://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au>>

said this was the bedrock of its invitation-only model. The program provides nutritious meals and take-home vegetable packs for families to share and children are able to help themselves to fresh produce straight from the garden if they are hungry. EON said there were also mental health benefits associated with the garden, since it could be used as a place of respite.⁷³⁴

The most recent round of monitoring and evaluation in 2021, surveying students and stakeholders across three communities in the Mid-West region, found a greater proportion of students had taken produce home, had grown produce at home and knew how to cook something healthy with fruit and vegetables than at the start of the program.

The most effective way to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty in remote communities is with a practical, local solution that is delivered in partnership with the community.

- EON Foundation submission

EON Foundation recommended that their Thriving Communities Program, which comprises the edible gardens and a nutrition education and training component, be offered to all disadvantaged remote schools/communities across WA. At present it is delivered to 20 remote schools and communities across WA and the Northern Territory, and there is a waiting list to join the program.⁷³⁵ EON Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation receiving primary funding from the Federal Department of Health, WA's Department of Communities (DoC) and Lotterywest, as well as host of charity groups and corporate and private donors.⁷³⁶ EON says that if the government took responsibility for delivery of the program, it would ensure it was tailored to the needs of each community and school.⁷³⁷

Food Ladder is also a not-for-profit organisation which focuses on tackling food insecurity in remote Aboriginal communities and regional communities throughout Australia. Its aim is also to educate so that future generations will be able to grow food and improve nutrition in

Figure 7.1: EON Foundation garden at Jigalong Remote Community School



734 Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 7.

735 *ibid.*, p. 1.

736 EON Foundation, *Our Partners*, 2020, accessed 21 May 2023, < <https://eon.org.au> >

737 Submission 6, EON Foundation, p. 9.

Figure 7.2: Leonora District High School’s hydroponic greenhouse provided by Food Ladder, left, and students checking seedlings in the greenhouse, right



their communities. Where Food Ladder’s approach differs is that the food is grown hydroponically in a climate-controlled greenhouse. Food Ladder says that for a small financial investment for the greenhouse infrastructure, school students can be harvesting and consuming their first crop of nutritious produce within about 12 weeks of signing up to the program.⁷³⁸ Leonora District High School and Broome Senior High School are the only schools in WA where Food Ladder currently operates.

Dr Godrich said there had been limited comprehensive evaluation and research on the impact of community gardens on food security. The typical quantity of food produced by a community garden was unlikely to be a sufficient sole reliable source of food.⁷³⁹ The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) had a similar view:

At best, community gardens can make only a small contribution to addressing food insecurity; their primary value is in supporting community inclusion, creating a sense of place, and promoting health and wellbeing.⁷⁴⁰

We were told this was why support was provided through the DoC and its Community Gardens Grants Program, rather than DPIRD.⁷⁴¹

Finding 48

Community gardens can be a useful source of free food for children and are well-supported by many local government authorities.

Market gardens and food hubs would reduce dependence on food transport

Upscaling of community gardens could mean DPIRD has a role to play. Food security researcher Dr Stephanie Godrich is leading the Food Community Project, a Healthway-funded venture to help people in different regions of the state identify and design projects to maximise local food security. In brainstorming sessions with participants about their vision for a food secure region, community gardens were a common feature – but they wanted to see them scaled up to market garden size.

⁷³⁸ Submission 16, Food Ladder, pp. 2, 12.

⁷³⁹ Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 7.

⁷⁴⁰ Cecilia McConnell, A/Director General, Letter, 6 April 2023, p. 2.

⁷⁴¹ *ibid.*

People really want sufficient quantities of produce to be able to sell through their local outlets or have freely available for community members. I think people are acknowledging that through scale and enough produce they want more from community gardens. They very much value them as part of the community, but they want to see them sustainably run.⁷⁴²

This was partly to address the ‘frequently mentioned issue’ of food grown in a regional area being distributed through Perth central markets and then back to that regional area at a higher cost, and, according to Dr Godrich, most likely poorer quality. ‘That centralisation of food supply chains is quite ineffective and people were quite passionate about seeing that change to focus more on local food supply options,’ Dr Godrich said.⁷⁴³

people really do want access to regional or local food systems. They want to make sure that their region is sustainable in that sense and that they do not have to rely on produce – I am talking about fresh produce or healthy food – they do not want to rely on really long distance food freight, and that has consistently come up.⁷⁴⁴

Dr Godrich also noted that people wanted something more resilient to shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, cyclones or flooding. But she said a critical part of decentralising food systems was to equip regions with the ability to transform, process, pack and distribute food in their areas.⁷⁴⁵

One strategy that could support the building of local and regional food systems is a food hub – a central warehouse infrastructure that manages contracts for local food producers. Dr Godrich said food hubs aimed to retain economic value within the community, with locally produced food distributed through food outlets and also procured by hospitals, aged care facilities, prisons, childcare centres and schools.

Often in those warehouses there is a commercial kitchen where they can do nutrition education and cooking classes. Often there will be seconds or a food waste mitigation strategy as well, in terms of reusing seconds or giving it to farmers for their animals and so on.⁷⁴⁶

In Katherine in the Northern Territory, Food Ladder has constructed a greenhouse that is much bigger than those constructed at schools (around 350m² compared to 20m²). It is part of a regional food hub, producing fresh fruit and vegetables for Aboriginal community stores as well as local cafes, restaurants and charities. The greenhouse is able to produce a consistent amount of fresh vegetables with the average weekly harvest including 100 heads of bok choy, 2kg of mixed salad leaf, at least 15kg of tomatoes and 1kg of dried native herbs. This is supplemented by other annual and perennial produce grown in the gardens surrounding the greenhouse. Food Ladder has partnered with Foodbank NT to act as the

742 Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 8.

743 *ibid.*

744 *ibid.*, p. 8.

745 *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

746 *ibid.*, p. 8.

Katherine hub for the distribution of food relief to local charity and aid organisations, with the long term goal to have a Foodbank store located on site.⁷⁴⁷

This is the type of model which could be mutually beneficial to producers and schools running lunch programs, as suggested in Chapter 4. However, DPIRD said that without ‘fundamental changes in supermarket supply chains, consumer preferences and consumer willingness to pay higher prices for fresh produce’, regional food hubs would be unlikely to improve access to local produce. The economics, supply chain logistics and compliance requirements for food production made such self-reliance difficult in regional and remote areas.⁷⁴⁸

Small populations, long distances, specialisation driven by competitive advantage, often harsh climatic conditions, variable water access and soil conditions, seasonality, land use competition, pest management and the cost of processing, packaging and distribution infrastructure all challenge the notion of profitable, at-scale, wide ranging local production.⁷⁴⁹

The Food Community Project has a more optimistic outlook, and is looking at innovative ways to build equitable local and regional food systems to end reliance on fragile long-distance food freight.⁷⁵⁰ The same issues were canvassed in the Federal inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities. The inquiry report said that many contributors to the inquiry believed that with the right assistance, there were avenues by which local food production could grow and help resolve some of the challenges facing remote communities.⁷⁵¹

The Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs said it would like to see an increasing role for local food production, but success was dependent on the involvement of community leadership and it being at sufficient scale to provide a reliable source of produce for whole communities. It recommended no new government investments in market garden programs or other similar initiatives unless they were locally led. (We note this is consistent with the community-driven approach espoused by the Food Community Project.⁷⁵²) It also recommended that support be given to local food production initiatives to help them negotiate the food safety and other regulations that can make it difficult for them to grow their enterprises and enter the supply chain of store operators.⁷⁵³

747 Submission 16, Food Ladder, p. 2; Food Ladder, *Projects – Katherine, NT*, accessed 21 May 2023, <www.foodladder.org>

748 Cecilia McConnell, A/Director General, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Letter, 6 April 2023, p. 2.

749 *ibid.*

750 Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 5.

751 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, November 2020, p. 77.

752 Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 6.

753 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, November 2020, p. 86.

In response to Recommendation 10 of the inquiry report, the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) is developing a National Food Security Strategy for Remote First Nations Communities in partnership with state and territory governments and First Nations peoples. WA's representative, Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) assistant director of remote Aboriginal communities Peter Facey, said there was no draft strategy to discuss yet but the key elements were supply issues, food production, nutrition and how stores in remote communities operate.⁷⁵⁴

I know that quite often there is a focus on exports of produce, but what can be done practically to support the retaining of produce in regional areas to ... support availability and access of fresh, nutritious, healthy, good quality and affordable food for communities?

- Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University

State and territory governments are also represented on the NIAA Remote Food Security Working Group, set up during the pandemic to work with retailers, major wholesalers and distributors to help remote communities access essential items. This relates to Recommendation 4 of the inquiry report: that the Australian Government encourage the establishment of more local distribution centres by wholesalers in major regional centres close to remote communities. The report said consideration needed to be given to bolstering the infrastructure for food supply networks in the northern parts of the country to reduce delivery times and wastage. Additional distribution centres were also needed in major regional centres to strengthen the food supply networks into remote First Nations communities.⁷⁵⁵

Mr Facey is also WA's representative on the working group. He said that WA was 'first class' at getting food into communities in emergency situations. The challenge now was how to deal with the day-to-day supply issues: 'that is something that the government will have to address once this national strategy has been developed.'⁷⁵⁶

In contrast to DPIRD's discouraging perspective, DPC has acknowledged the need to address aspects of food supply and distribution in remote areas, and the Food Community Project is seeking to work on solutions to food security with communities in all of WA's regions.

DPC's head of Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy Fiona Hunt said the department was starting to understand the impact of place-based approaches and working with people on the ground, including local Aboriginal leaders, to understand what works for a particular community. She said the early years would be a strong focus of a new place-based partnership being trialled in the East Kimberley.⁷⁵⁷ It is not clear how food security and child nutrition will feature.

754 Peter Facey, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 5.

755 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, November 2020, pp. 35-36.

756 Peter Facey, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 6.

757 Fiona Hunt, Deputy Director General, Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, pp. 3, 9.

Finding 49

Edith Cowan University's Food Community Project is conducting important work to understand the particular food security needs of regional communities.

Recommendation 13

Relevant State Government agencies and representatives support the investigation of food hubs as a way to address food supply and distribution issues in remote and regional areas, in accordance with Food Community Project research and recommendations of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*.

Food Policy Councils can help communities plan local food systems

Food Policy Councils are increasingly being used to facilitate participation in food system decision-making in Europe and North America, where they were having some 'amazing impacts' on building local food systems and increasing food system resilience.⁷⁵⁸

Membership usually includes government and non-government actors from agriculture, social justice, education and nutrition who try to get local food systems on the agenda and actioned by government, according to Dr Godrich.⁷⁵⁹

Forming a Food Policy Council was recommended by participants of the South West Food Community project in 2018, but there are currently no such councils in WA. Dr Godrich said the Food Community team's work over the next two years would include travelling around WA to understand whether communities would like to see these groups functioning here, who should be involved and which activities from other countries could be applied. The councils would provide a food governance mechanism to support the building of local and regional food systems.⁷⁶⁰

Recommendation 14

Local government authorities and State Government departments ensure that they are represented on any Food Policy Councils that are initiated in regional areas.

Social supermarkets provide food relief without shame

The Committee took evidence on a model of social enterprise food assistance known as social supermarkets (SSMs). Though SSMs vary in their operations, the usual model is that providers supply the supermarket with discounted or free surplus goods that are still consumable but considered unfit for sale, and would otherwise be wasted (for example, misshapen food or items with damaged packaging). SSMs sell these items at bargain prices to disadvantaged customers in a way that reduces shame and stigma around receiving charity.⁷⁶¹

758 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 39; Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 9.

759 Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023, p. 8.

760 *ibid.*, p. 9.

761 C Holweg, E Lienbacher and W Zinn, 'Social Supermarkets – a New Challenge in Supply Chain Management and Sustainability', *Supply Chain Forum*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2010, p. 51.

The social supermarket model is not without practical issues. Research in Austria raised logistical and supply-chain management challenges, and noted initial resistance to the introduction of SSMS in areas reluctant to acknowledge local poverty.⁷⁶² However, social supermarkets now have a wide presence in parts of Europe, including in France, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland.⁷⁶³

Research conducted in Australia also suggests the model has intuitive appeal. A 2018 study investigated how recipients of food assistance in South Australia perceived various attempts to address food insecurity. Researchers sought input on, among other things, the emotional costs and levels of empowerment and stigma associated with different models. They found that

Services which are more strongly aligned with typical features of social enterprise models were generally favoured over traditional models. Services which are recipient-centred, strive to empower recipients and provide opportunities for active involvement, social connection and broader support were preferred.⁷⁶⁴

Several benefits of SSMS were raised, including that the supermarket format allows individuals to be empowered by exercising free choice. SSMS were also perceived to reduce the emotional cost of getting food relief by being members of a store rather than recipients of charity. Further, they acted as 'one-stop shops' to access affordable practical items besides food, and, crucially, they provided opportunities for socialisation and connection to their communities.⁷⁶⁵

Of the three social enterprise service food models included in the South Australia study, participants ranked social supermarkets highest overall.⁷⁶⁶ The only noted downside was that available food might be expired or be close to the use-by date.⁷⁶⁷ However, the researchers also acknowledged a lack of literature evaluating the effectiveness of social supermarkets.⁷⁶⁸

While social supermarkets are widespread elsewhere, they are rare in Australia. However, the Pilbara town of Roebourne currently has one following a successful pilot led by the social enterprise arm of the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd, Garlbagu.⁷⁶⁹ Foundation Food – otherwise known as the Ieramugadu store – opened as a pilot project in February 2022. It

762 C Holweg, E Lienbacher and W Zinn, 'Social Supermarkets – a New Challenge in Supply Chain Management and Sustainability', *Supply Chain Forum*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2010, pp. 50-58.

763 Paula Coccozza, 'If I shop here I've got money for gas!': inside the UK's first social supermarket', *The Guardian* (web-based), 10 December 2013, accessed 11 May 2023, <<https://www.theguardian.com>>

764 S Booth, C Pollard, J Coveney and I Goodwin-Smith, "'Sustainable" Rather Than "Subsistence" Food Assistance Solutions to Food Insecurity: South Australian Recipients' Perspectives on Traditional and Social Enterprise Models', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 15, no. 10, 2018, abstract, p. 1.

765 *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

766 *ibid.*, p. 7.

767 *ibid.*

768 *ibid.*, p. 14.

769 Garlbagu no longer exists as part of Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd, but the store is still operating as a social supermarket.

was launched partly in response to disproportionate rates of food insecurity in Roebourne, with locals facing poor access to goods and much higher prices than in metropolitan areas.⁷⁷⁰

The store offers discounted or free items to its membership of local people and their families. As the former Foundation Food project lead explained, membership is free:

[w]e just get their name, phone number and email, which is about sending them the specials every week. People do not have to tell us how tough they are doing it. You do not have to demonstrate your poverty to get in the door. You do not have to show a Health Care Card or anything like that.⁷⁷¹

The Ieramugadu store, based on the SSM model and on co-operative arrangements, offers members affordable goods while undertaking 'a normal shopping experience.'⁷⁷² This means the shop is open to anyone, but the discreet nature of the membership system allows members to receive discounts while visitors would pay more: 'Our member prices are matched to Coles and Woolies in Karratha and Wickham. Then, the tourist traffic or non-members pay what you would expect of a small shop in a town that size in that area of remoteness.'⁷⁷³

Aside from discounted prices for all goods for members, some free items are also available in-store, supplied through a partnership with SecondBite. However, free items are dispersed throughout the store to further provide an ordinary shopping experience for anyone that enters.⁷⁷⁴

While Woodside Ltd provided foundational funding for the pilot program, the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation owns the building in which the store is located and relies on industry partnerships to continue sustainably. They hoped their model would be replicable elsewhere. However, they said 'the defining difference between success and failure will be logistic partnerships and our ability to source donated or affordable items that we can on-sell cheaply.'⁷⁷⁵

Finding 50

The social supermarket operating in Roebourne is providing local residents in need with a dignified means of accessing low cost or free food.

Community role models can support health behaviour change

A model whereby community ambassadors are trained to deliver and promote key nutrition messages to others in their community is particularly useful in regional and remote areas where resources are limited and visits from specialist educators are infrequent. It is also suited to communities where cultural differences mean a local champion will be able to

770 Cameron Carr, 'Not-for-profit supermarket slashes grocery costs in the Pilbara', *ABC News* (web-based), 30 June 2022, accessed 12 May 2023, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news>>

771 Abby Phillis, Director, Social Impact, Garlbagu, Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd, *Transcript of Evidence*, 19 October 2022, p. 3.

772 *ibid.*, p. 4.

773 *ibid.*

774 *ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.

775 *ibid.*, pp. 2, 4, 8.

communicate more easily and build greater acceptance of the message. Known as the Care Group Model, it was developed to improve maternal, neonatal and child health in Mozambique in 1995.

The strength of the Care Group model is to achieve greater reach and impact in a cost-effective manner that will translate into a long-term sustainable program that communities will take ownership of. This model can empower communities to take charge of their own health outcomes and be less reliant on external stakeholders.⁷⁷⁶

A version of the model was piloted by Foodbank WA in Jigalong in WA's Pilbara region. Local, positive role models – women who were participants in Foodbank WA's Food Sensations for Parents program – were recruited to assist in supporting behaviour change in the community. The women would also be able to educate and apply positive health practices to their children.⁷⁷⁷

Over the course of 6 months, 30 ambassador program meetings were held with 29 local women, the Jigalong Community board, Jigalong elders and regional stakeholders. However, Foodbank WA has put the program on hold because of uncertainty about future funding. It was being funded as part of BHP's sponsorship of Foodbank's education programs, but this was due to end in June 2023.⁷⁷⁸

Providing nutrition education for women before they had babies was a suggestion of the Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service (PAMS) in Jigalong, and the ambassador approach may be a good way to do this. PAMS also said conveying concepts in local Aboriginal languages was important.⁷⁷⁹ This also applies to multicultural communities. The Refugee Health Service (RHS) spoke of some of the challenges in communicating health messages to migrant and refugee families from more than 50 ethnic backgrounds who may not be literate in their own language. A Care Group approach may be an appropriate solution, particularly given that resources for paediatric dietitians and translating services are limited, according to RHS clinical lead Dr Sarah Cherian.⁷⁸⁰ She encouraged:

other organisations and programs to not also just consider whether things are culturally appropriate or tailored from an Aboriginal perspective, but to go more broadly and to have consultation with our other ethnic groups in our community ... We had some of our community leaders nuance some of our pictorial resources because, if you are not getting the voice of the community themselves, we are also making judgement as to what is common and what is appropriate.⁷⁸¹

Dr Cherian said a dietitian was embedded in the RHS to help clients 'navigate what healthy eating is', but was only available one day a week. After a couple of years, clients also transition from their specialised service to mainstream health services, where dietitians 'may

776 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 14.

777 *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

778 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 5.

779 Stephen Farrington, Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service, *Briefing*, 31 October 2022.

780 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, pp. 5, 8.

781 *ibid.*, p. 8.

not have the cultural lens, may not have the time and may not be resourced' to provide the assistance required.⁷⁸² DoH also noted a lack of dietitians within the department.⁷⁸³

In Tasmania, Department of Health nutritionist Monique Reardon said peer educators who have undertaken training to spread the message about healthy eating and physical activity to children and families within their local community are ideally placed to do this 'because they don't want to listen to us, they want to listen to their friends'.⁷⁸⁴ The peer educators are part of Family Food Patch, a program started in 2001 by Families Tasmania and the Department of Health to help families and communities build and mobilise their skills in children's nutrition. In an approach similar to the Care Group model, the volunteers are trained and provided with resources and information and then encouraged and supported to spread the message about healthy eating in their local area. Since 2001, training has been provided to over 400 volunteers in more than 30 locations throughout Tasmania.⁷⁸⁵

Finding 51

A Care Group model which uses community ambassadors or peer educators could have a two-fold benefit of addressing a) cultural barriers to healthy eating messages and b) the shortage of dietitians and nutritionists available to undertake this work.

Recommendation 15

The Department of Health investigates funding a program to train community peer educators to deliver healthy eating and nutrition messages in their own communities.

782 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022, pp. 7-8.

783 Dr Denise Sullivan, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 3.

784 Monique Reardon, Department of Health, Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

785 Families Tasmania, *Family Food Patch*, accessed 22 May 2023, <www.familiestasmania.org.au>

Chapter 8

What else is needed to support food security for kids

Ultimately, there is no single solution that the Western Australian Government can implement to address food insecurity in young people. The complexity of factors which leave families, children and young people hungry requires a considered, cooperative, and sustained effort from Commonwealth, State and even local governments to address.

The Salvation Army submission

Any food security programs or initiatives implemented for children and young people would benefit from a range of underlying supports, including attention to children's rights, a child and wellbeing strategy, and robust measurement of food insecurity. Amendments to urban planning regulations could also be an important way to support children's health and wellbeing. These are discussed in this chapter.

The chapter concludes with consideration of the connection between child poverty and food insecurity and the level of coordination and leadership required to help bring about change.

A rights-based approach shifts the focus from individual blame to collective responsibility

As detailed in Chapter 1, WA has significant obligations under international human rights agreements to address the needs of children in relation to food insecurity and poverty. Yet as this report has outlined, food insecurity and poverty remain significant problems. As expressed in the Centrecare submission, 'despite Western Australia's growing prosperity we continue to see increasing numbers of children and adults in our state experience food insecurity.'⁷⁸⁶

Several contributors to the inquiry argued for a change in how the issue of child food insecurity and poverty is approached, towards a greater focus on a human rights-based approach. Australian National University professor Sharon Bessell identified the importance of transforming –

the current narratives that have been in place, particularly at the federal level for ... a couple of decades – so that we ... shift the focus away from individual blame to understanding the structural factors and the systems that may lead to or exacerbate child poverty.⁷⁸⁷

Too much emphasis on individual responsibility is particularly harmful in relation to children's situations, because the child has no control over their circumstances, or those of their family. This overemphasis on individual blame was also mentioned by Adjunct Professor Pietropiccolo, who stated:

⁷⁸⁶ Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 3.

⁷⁸⁷ Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2023, p. 2.

The question is: why do we not take this [poverty] more seriously? My conclusion is that partly it is because the poor have been demonised, really; the poor are no longer worthy of compassion or care. There is this sort of idea created around the poor—that they are either lazy or not looking after themselves; it is sort of their individual inadequacy that has created their poverty. We hardly ever talk about the fact that a lot of the poverty is created by mental health issues, disability, a lack of opportunity in terms of background and educational possibilities. All of those things are sort of put to the side and we focus on the fact that someone, somewhere spent money on the pokies.⁷⁸⁸

Centrecare highlighted the impact that such a position has on the individual, and on the child.

A consequence of not viewing food through a human rights lens is that our society frequently considers food security to be the individual's sole responsibility. Therefore, food insecure individuals often experience stigma and shame associated with their situation. This can have devastating consequences for children, who of course have no control over their family's access to food.⁷⁸⁹

Moving to a rights-based approach would remove much of the blame and shame around the issue, as explained by Professor Bessell.

A rights-based approach is particularly helpful because it gives children entitlements to a life without hunger and to adequate nutrition. It shifts these things away from being a matter of charity, where it may be up to others to determine who it is that is deserving and the nature of the charity that is provided and the length of time over which it is provided. When rights are a charity-based approach, it puts the emphasis on the benevolence of those who are providing. A rights-based approach puts the focus on the entitlements of children ... [and] a more collective responsibility for ensuring that children have an adequate standard of living.⁷⁹⁰

This is particularly important given how much the inquiry has heard about the destructive impact of stigma and shame around poverty and food insecurity for children.

We hear from children the shame that they feel, particularly around food and food insecurity and hunger, of going to school with no lunch or with very little in their lunchboxes. They talk about the strategies they try to use to protect themselves so others do not know they have not got food.⁷⁹¹

A further facet of a rights-based approach would be a greater focus on the child's best interests and on children's views and experiences:

788 Adjunct Professor Tony Pietropiccolo, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 March 2022, p. 2.

789 Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 3.

790 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2023, p. 2.

791 *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

A child rights-based approach means that we are listening to children and we are taking their experiences seriously ... otherwise we might assume that children are okay because their parents will look after them. What we hear is that often parents cannot look after their children, despite their best efforts, so children use their own strategies to try to protect their parents.⁷⁹²

Finding 52

A children's rights-based approach would shift the blame from the individual and broaden the understanding of a child's experience of poverty and food insecurity.

Recommendation 16

The WA Government places children's rights at the core of policies and strategies to address poverty and food insecurity.

One way to formalise the inclusion of a children's rights-based approach to the development of government policy would be to require child impact assessments. This was recommended by several witnesses, and the CCYP has advocated for it since at least 2020.

A child impact assessment 'provides a mechanism to determine the direct or indirect impact that proposed policies, services and legislation will have on the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people.'⁷⁹³ Such assessments are important because children are affected by government laws, policies and decisions, yet their needs may be overlooked by decision-makers.

As one witness explained, it is important to ensure a level of policy coherence across government. 'You may have some agencies and some government policies that are pushing in one way, and it is important to ensure that that does not then cut across [child wellbeing].'⁷⁹⁴

While WA has enshrined the importance of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by requiring the Commissioner for Children and Young People to have regard to it in the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, other government agencies and departments may not be so aware of their responsibilities.⁷⁹⁵

According to the Commissioner's Child Impact Assessment Guidelines, all government departments, service providers and private sector organisations should 'assess the impact of proposed laws, policies, projects and their programs on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people.'⁷⁹⁶ The guidelines, published in 2020, suggest that such assessments should include consideration of how decision-making may:

792 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2023, p. 3.

793 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Child Impact Assessment Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth, 2020, p. 4.

794 Adjunct Professor John Southalan, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 2.

795 *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, (WA), s. 20.

796 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Child Impact Assessment Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth, 2020, p. 4.

- directly and indirectly impact children and young people
- have long-term social impacts on children and young people, their families, carers, service providers and communities
- have long-term financial impacts on children and young people, their families, service providers and governments
- need to include strategies to mitigate against negative impacts and unintended consequences
- take into account the best interests of children and young people.⁷⁹⁷

Contributors to the inquiry suggested that child impact assessments should be required across all areas of government decision making, and not just the obvious portfolios of education and child protection.

one of the sectors that impacts most powerfully on children is employment and labour market policy. Yet when we are talking about those issues, we never think about children. We also see a direct impact in terms of children’s material wellbeing, but also their time with parents and their relationships with parents.⁷⁹⁸

The Committee was advised that other critical portfolios are urban planning, infrastructure and transport, because of their indirect impact upon making communities supportive and accessible to children.⁷⁹⁹ This will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Finding 53

Child impact assessments are an important tool for ensuring children’s rights and wellbeing are protected, and for ensuring coherence across government policy areas.

Recommendation 17

The WA Government requires all government departments to conduct child impact assessments of legislative and policy developments and changes.

One witness suggested that WA should consider adopting a human rights charter, as has occurred in Victoria, Queensland and the ACT. This would help to ensure policy coherence and a more effective recognition of human rights. This would be of particular relevance for government departments and agencies:

Agencies have to respect [human rights] and ensure that their own officers and procedures are not impacting a right, but also go further to: Are we promoting this right? Are we ensuring that it is not being impacted or inappropriately impeded by other agencies? Sometimes then it is not just a matter of law, it is also whether we are putting in place measures and polices and things to do that.⁸⁰⁰

797 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Child Impact Assessment Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth, 2020, p. 4.

798 Professor Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2023, pp. 8-9.

799 *ibid.*, p. 9.

800 Adjunct Professor John Southalan, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 2.

Such a charter would assist in ensuring that government entities, in addition to the CCYP, better respect children's rights as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recommendation 18

The WA Government considers adopting a human rights charter to help ensure better respect for children's rights.

A child and youth wellbeing strategy would ensure children's needs are being met

There have been calls for a child and youth wellbeing strategy in WA for many years, including from previous CCYP Colin Pettit, the current Commissioner Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, the Valuing Children Initiative, and Centrecare, among others. Many of the contributors to this inquiry repeated these calls.⁸⁰¹

A whole-of-government strategy for child and youth wellbeing would set out a shared understanding of what is important for child and youth wellbeing, reinforce other efforts to ensure policy coherence, and clarify the role of government and non-government actors in this space. Mr Pettit said in the *Missing Out Matters* report of 2021:

My key recommendation [to address child poverty] is to establish a state-wide Child Wellbeing Strategy that requires government to set meaningful targets and measure and report on how they are improving the wellbeing of children and young people. We need to reassess which of the many policies and services we have in place across our state are reaching the children in most need, at the right time and making meaningful changes in their life.⁸⁰²

The Western Australian Council for Social Services (WACOSS) has also been advocating for such a strategy since at least 2018, and described the benefits of a strategy as follows:

The intent of a WA Child Wellbeing Strategy is to enable a more coordinated and effective approach across portfolios to policy, programs, services and support provided to children and families in WA. The use of evidence-based wellbeing measurement frameworks allows us to collectively understand the impact of programs and services to drive a more effective approach to investing in systems that deliver the best outcomes through the life-course. This supports effective investment in child development activities, prevention and early intervention to reduce harm and the cost of tertiary systems for those with developmental delay or at risk of poverty, child protection and juvenile justice systems.⁸⁰³

A number of contributors to the inquiry highlighted the importance of a Child Wellbeing Strategy specifically for improving food security and nutrition. Primarily:

801 Submissions 5, 9, 10, 12, 17, 20 and 494 called for a child wellbeing strategy. Submissions 7, 8, 14, and 18 called for a whole-of-government approach. Full details of submissions are at Appendix 3.

802 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Missing Out Matters: Child Poverty in WA*, Perth, October 2021, p. 23.

803 Chris Twomey, Leader Policy and Research, WACOSS, Letter, 5 April 2023, pp. 1-2.

- it would ensure child nutrition was monitored and reported on as a key performance indicator of wellbeing
- it would bring together relevant departments to work on the common goal of improving food security for children.

In 2019, the then CCYP Colin Pettit published the report *Improving the Odds for WA's Vulnerable Children*. The first recommendation of the report was addressed to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) as follows:

Recommendation 1: Establish a whole-of-government Child Wellbeing Strategy for WA

The Department of Premier and Cabinet, on behalf of the government, should lead the development of this strategy to set whole-of-government targets to improve wellbeing outcomes among children and young people. Targets should be long term, extend beyond election cycles and span individual agency responsibilities.

Development of the strategy should be a widely consultative process and draw on the ideas raised by stakeholders who participated in the Vulnerability Speaker Series roundtable discussions and Aboriginal forum, as presented in this report.

The strategy should include a resourced, implementation framework with clear outcomes and timelines. Progress on the outcomes should be measured through robust data and regularly reported on.

The strategy should prioritise and strengthen investment in targeted, early intervention for children, young people and families who are vulnerable. This will require models of engagement that identify children and families who experience multiple forms of adversity and are at highest risk of poor outcomes, and provision of support that builds family and local community capacity to provide a nurturing environment for children and young people.⁸⁰⁴

This recommendation was accepted in principle by DPC in 2019. DPC advised the Committee that leading the development of the strategy had been passed to the Department of Communities.⁸⁰⁵

According to DPC, the strategy became a priority for the Supporting Communities Forum (SCF), a partnership between government and the community sector supporting the implementation of the Supporting Communities policy and its commitments to increase the effectiveness of funding to West Australians in need.⁸⁰⁶ The membership of the SCF includes

804 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Improving the Odds for WA's Vulnerable Children*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth, recommendation 1, p. 28.

805 Fiona Hunt, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 2.

806 Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *The Supporting Communities Forum 2021 – 30 June 2023*, 17 April 2023, accessed 9 May 2023, <<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-the-premier-and-cabinet>>

the directors-general of many government departments and 11 community sector members, but does not include the CCYP.⁸⁰⁷

DPC advised that the SCF and its work was part of the suite of activities that was paused due to the pandemic.

in 2021, SCF reconvened, and the child wellbeing strategy did not appear as a priority for the Supporting Communities Form, so we understand that, to date, there has been no further work from that forum on that.⁸⁰⁸

However, WACOSS provided a different perspective of the progress made on the strategy, advising that SCF members 'were told that a wellbeing strategy was no longer a Ministerial priority, there was concern that there were already too many other strategies in progress, and we may return to the issue in due time.'⁸⁰⁹

In late 2022, Ms McGowan-Jones emphasised the importance of this initiative to the Committee, advising that

the child and family wellbeing strategy has been developed – well, a proposal has been developed and there is more work to be done on it as a strategy, rather than just a think-tank paper, by the children's policy advisory committee at WACOSS. It makes enormous sense and there is in-principle agreement in DPC that this makes enormous sense whilst we do have a surplus. This is about a parallel funding regime for 10 to 15 years – one generation.⁸¹⁰

There appears to be some confusion regarding which government agency is responsible for developing the child wellbeing strategy and what its future is likely to be. Certainly, work on the strategy appears to have stalled.

Committee members heard about and were impressed by Tasmania's child wellbeing strategy *It Takes a Tasmanian Village: Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*, launched by the Tasmanian premier in August 2021. The strategy was developed with the overarching vision that 'Children and young people in Tasmania have what they need to grow and thrive.'⁸¹¹ The strategy's foundation is that investing in strong families is the best way to achieve child and youth wellbeing.⁸¹² It is backed by an investment of \$100 million over 4 years, and was developed with extensive community consultation, including with children.

807 The Department of Communities; the Department of Education; the Department of Health; the Department of Justice; the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries; the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; Lotterywest; the Mental Health Commission; and the Public Sector Commission. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *The Supporting Communities Forum 2021 – 30 June 2023*, 17 April 2023, accessed 9 May 2023, <<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-the-premier-and-cabinet>>

808 Fiona Hunt, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2023, p. 2.

809 Chris Twomey, Leader, Policy and Research, WACOSS, letter, 5 April 2023, p. 2.

810 Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 October 2022, p. 6.

811 Tasmanian Government, *Launched – 'It Takes a Tasmanian Village', Tasmania's first Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*, media release, 22 August 2021.

812 Government of Tasmania, *It Takes a Tasmanian Village; Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy*, Hobart, August 2021, p. 4.

The Committee discussed the strategy with Tasmanian CCYP Leanne McLean, who said it would be a great monitoring tool that ‘would be wonderful for any [children’s] commissioner’.

it gives a framework, sort of like a wardrobe, from which to hang all of the elements of action, and advocacy towards that action, for children’s wellbeing. So that is where it is very important. But we still have a long way to go.⁸¹³

The point was also made that having a strategy and policy for action enables measurement of whether that policy is being achieved. As WACOSS emphasised, evidence-based wellbeing measurement frameworks allow a better understanding of the impact of programs and services, which leads to more effective intervention and better outcomes.⁸¹⁴

The Tasmanian Commissioner acknowledged that given the broad remit of a child and family wellbeing strategy, the strategy needs to be based upon ‘the principles of universality, where services can also be proportionate to need.’⁸¹⁵ She stated that:

My recommendation to government for a [Tasmanian] wellbeing strategy was underpinned by the need to be place-based, universal, proportionate to need and with a large focus on the first thousand days which is tailored to the needs of individual communities. The way the strategy goes about implementing that is very much at a community-based level.⁸¹⁶

Given the need for policy coherence across a broad range of government agencies and initiatives when it comes to children’s policy, and the difficulties of measuring effectiveness in these sorts of social policy areas, the Committee sees significant advantages in a child wellbeing strategy for WA. Reinvigorating efforts to develop such a strategy would significantly benefit all entities active in this area, as well as WA’s children and young people.

Finding 54

A child wellbeing strategy would be a valuable tool for improving the implementation of government policy aimed at the wellbeing of children and young people in WA.

Recommendation 19

The WA Government prioritises the development and implementation of a child wellbeing strategy in Western Australia.

813 Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

814 Chris Twomey, Leader Policy and Research, WACOSS, Letter, 5 April 2023, pp. 1-2.

815 Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

816 *ibid.*

Measurement and monitoring is essential

There is no measurement of children's experiences of food insecurity

As noted in Chapter 2, ascertaining an accurate indication of food insecurity experienced by children is impossible because of a lack of measurement. Child poverty, for which there is no agreed national definition, is also not measured on a regular basis by any state or federal government department.⁸¹⁷ Numerous contributors to the inquiry identified this problem and called for better data collection.⁸¹⁸ Associate

Professor Mitrou, currently with Telethon Kids Institute and formerly employed at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, said the best vehicle for collecting useful food security data was a population representative survey conducted at regular intervals.⁸¹⁹ The Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts a National Health Survey every 3 to 4 years, most recently in 2020-21.⁸²⁰ The National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey was last conducted in 2011-2013 as part of the Australian Health Survey (which also incorporated the National Health Survey).⁸²¹

The proportion of Western Australian children experiencing food insecurity is likely much greater than is ever reported because we do not measure it.

- Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University

Associate Professor Mitrou said these surveys had 'some reasonable questions' but could contain more appropriate questions related to food security and should be more frequent.

It is very difficult to come to a committee on food security in Australia or Western Australia and be rolling out data from 2011 or 2012 or what have you because that is the latest that you have got. It is interesting data, but how is it relevant to 2022? The world is different now. We need this data collected, just more frequently.⁸²²

These sentiments were echoed by Curtin University's Public Health Advocacy Institute, which said widely used estimates of the prevalence of food insecurity in Australia relied on

817 Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Age group 6 to 11 years – Material basics*, August 2020, accessed 25 May 2023, <www.cryp.wa.gov.au>

818 See: Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University; Kate O'Hara and Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022; Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022; Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2022; Dr Stephanie Godrich, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 February 2023; Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative; Submission 7, Catholic Education WA; Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute; Submission 10, Foodbank WA; Submission 9, Australian Health Promotion Association, WA Branch; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University; Submission 24, Fair Food WA.

819 Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 2.

820 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *National Health Survey: First results methodology*, 21 March 2022, accessed 24 May 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>

821 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Health Survey: Nutrition First Results – Foods and Nutrients*, 2014, accessed 24 May 2023, <<https://www.abs.gov.au>>

822 Associate Professor Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 2.

measures that incorporated only one or two questions – typically ‘In the last 12 months was there any time you have run out of food and not been able to purchase more?’ The WA Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System (HWSS) had used this measure since 2002, but it had ‘serious limitations’ since it did not measure the severity of food insecurity or food insecurity among children.⁸²³

However, DoH said it had included the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 18-item Food Security Survey Module (FSSM) – considered the gold standard by many contributors to the inquiry – in the HWSS since 2018, but these questions were directed at adults. It had also only been used in metropolitan areas and had ‘limited utility’ beyond that.⁸²⁴ Dr Andy Robertson said general population surveys such as the HWSS, which were conducted online or by telephone, did not necessarily capture the experience of at-risk populations who may not have access to the technology required to complete them. The department acknowledged that the HWSS was not a suitable tool to collect information about children’s food security.

Foodbank had found it difficult to collect robust representative data on Aboriginal people and people living remotely in Australia for its Hunger Report.⁸²⁵ People from refugee-like backgrounds were also not represented in data on food security, according to Dr Sarah Cherian from the Refugee Health Service. These families were not part of WA Health data collection systems. She said teams such as hers needed support and funding to collect baselines data:

... if I do not have embedded in our proformas across medical, social work and dietetics, questions about food insecurity, food safety and adverse childhood experiences, we cannot address this wicked problem and we cannot raise visibility.⁸²⁶

Associate Professor Mitrou agreed that funding was needed if the government wanted to ‘capture the key and important pieces of information around food security’.

If this is a priority, then collection has to be funded and then people like us can analyse the data and tell you what it all means. But unless there is funding to collect things like this, then we cannot report on it because the data does not exist and people are left speculating as to what is actually going on.⁸²⁷

Telethon Kids Institute supported using the USDA food security module in the next national nutrition survey, and said it should include questions about when and how the food was acquired, prepared and consumed. This would help inform researchers, public health professionals and policy makers on the complexities of food choices. Questions about the

823 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 11.

824 Dr Andy Robertson, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 12.

825 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 2.

826 Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 30 November 2023, p. 3.

827 Associate Prof Francis Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 2.

quality of and access to drinking water in remote areas should be included since this was a high priority data need.⁸²⁸

However, the USDA survey module is designed to be answered by adults. A number of contributors acknowledged that while surveying children was complex, it was necessary because measurement at the household level may not reflect how children conceptualise or experience food insecurity.⁸²⁹

One of the things that I would say is we do need to collect the data from children, or we need to do the research with children, because parents, even with the best intent, sometimes do not know exactly what is going on in children's lives, even around things like hunger.⁸³⁰

Edith Cowan University recommended using a version of the USDA module designed for children over 12 – the Self-Administered Food Security Survey Module for Youth Ages 12 and Older. They said it had been shown to be valid and reliable when used with children as young as 9 across regional and remote WA.⁸³¹ However, DoH said the survey had not been validated outside of the United States. Testing in the United States had found that it needed to be undertaken in a confidential setting due to sensitive questions about running out of money or being hungry. Studies had found that the responses for younger children were less consistent than responses for older children.⁸³²

The Public Health Advocacy Institute said younger children might not be able to speculate on the cause of food insecurity in their households, but older children and adolescents may be able to report their experiences. A system to include older children's experiences through semi-structured surveys could provide an overall picture of child food insecurity. It should be 'grounded in a core conceptualisation of child food insecurity that derives from children's experiences' and be constructed to include experiences across cultures, living situations and languages.⁸³³

Foodbank WA's CEO said there had been a lot of discussion around the ability to capture insights and information from children with their contemporaries at Centrecare, Uniting and Anglicare and colleagues at Curtin University. They acknowledged they could not survey children under 16 with a traditional survey format and were investigating employing a Photovoice project which captures insights with written text and photographic information.⁸³⁴

DoH said it would take considerable resources and collaboration for the department to set up a new alternative survey method for children. Asking questions directly of children raised ethical issues and DoH would need to seek ethics approval for this. Children would need to answer the survey in a safe environment where they felt comfortable, such as a classroom.

828 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 8.

829 For example: Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 7.

830 Prof Sharon Bessell, Australian National University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2022, p. 7.

831 Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 12.

832 Dr Andrew Robertson, Department of Health, Letter, 27 April 2023, p. 3.

833 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 7.

834 Kate O'Hara, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 November 2022, p. 2.

DoH noted that the CCYP's Speaking Out Survey has been conducted in classrooms for children in years 4 to 12 across the state, and may provide a vehicle for these questions to be asked.⁸³⁵

Finding 55

There are no surveys that ask children and young people directly about their experiences of food insecurity, leaving a gap in Western Australia's understanding of its extent and impact.

Recommendation 20

The Department of Health identifies resources to scope a suitable survey methodology for regularly capturing the views and experiences of children and young people in regard to food insecurity. This could be in conjunction with bodies with existing expertise and/or survey instruments, such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Curtin University and the Telethon Kids Institute.

Tools for measuring food stress and access to healthy food need support

The Food Stress Index (FSI) (see Box 8.1) could be used as a proxy measure for childhood food insecurity, according to Fair Food WA. The FSI identifies the likelihood that households, including those with children, in a particular geographic area are in food stress. Fair Food WA cited research showing a higher level of childhood food insecurity where families live in poverty.⁸³⁶ However, the FSI data needs to be regularly updated to be of greatest use. It was last updated in 2020.

The Public Health Advocacy Institute said that given 2021 census data had been released, the FSI should be updated again and made publicly available.

Fair Food WA and Centrecare also called for a 'food basket recommendation' to be incorporated. This is a tool that quantifies the types and amounts of food required to meet dietary recommendations for different family types. Centrecare said the FSI and food basket recommendation made the distribution of food relief more targeted, since it was based on evidence. It had been used effectively by a small number of organisations providing food relief during the pandemic.⁸³⁷ Food relief service providers reported that it had changed their understanding of food insecurity and the way they think about providing food.

Before the Food Stress Index ... I really didn't understand food stress and insecurity ... and I don't think many of the providers did either. Now they understand, they understand what food stress is, they understand it's a pre-step to food insecurity. They understand more clearly that people experiencing food stress and insecurity need an appropriate response.⁸³⁸

The team at Curtin University that developed the FSI would like to see a Child Food Stress Index developed, which would focus on geographically-based child issues and bring together

835 Dr Andrew Robertson, Department of Health, Letter, 27 April 2023, p. 3.

836 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 7.

837 Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 6.

838 *ibid.*, p. 7.

place-based solutions. This would require conducting an updated WA Food Access and Costs Survey (FACS) with a different methodology.⁸³⁹ DoH said that the most recent state-wide FACS in 2013 was resource intensive. DoH provided a \$200,000 grant to Curtin University to complete the work, which paid for a full-time employee for 9 months and data collectors across the state.⁸⁴⁰

Box 8.1: WA Food Stress Index

The WA Food Stress Index (the Index) was developed in 2018 by Curtin University academics as a way of measuring the likelihood of food stress – a precursor to food insecurity. Food stress occurs when a family needs to spend more than 25% of their weekly disposable income to purchase food that meets a basic healthy meal plan.

The index uses several indicators, such as household demographics, income and expenses as well as financial stress indicators, Indigenous status and food affordability, to identify the WA locations where households are at relative risk.

Many inquiry participants regarded the Index as a useful tool for combating food insecurity as it can pinpoint locations most in need of support.

Source: Dr Alexia Bivoltsis, Senior Research Officer, Food and Nutrition Team, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 5; Dr Christina Pollard, Associate Professor, Academic and Public Health Nutritionist, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, pp. 2–3; Submission 5, Centrecare Inc, p. 9; Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 3; Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 8

DoH said it had no role in the development or use of the FSI, which has no official storage location (i.e. website). Updating and maintaining it would require significant resources, including running a new FACS to obtain food affordability data.⁸⁴¹ However, Fair Food WA maintains that the index would be an invaluable tool in identifying the level of household food insecurity in WA and enable a coordinated and strategic approach across government.⁸⁴²

Another tool being developed independently of the FSI – but with the potential for integration – is the WA Food Atlas. This is an interactive web-based tool that maps the location of food outlets. Telethon Kids Institute, which is developing the atlas, says it will be able to produce statistics and metrics such as density of fast-food outlets within a certain local government area.

This can then be compared across all local government areas and it can be compared to the metro area or the whole state. This information can be downloaded and exported and it can produce maps, so this can be used by local governments in their decision-making processes as well. It will help to identify areas where there is perhaps inequitable access to healthy food or perhaps areas where there is an overabundance of unhealthy food.⁸⁴³

Telethon Kids Institute’s Dr Alexia Bivoltsis said that if the FSI was overlaid with the atlas, it would be possible to identify vulnerable areas and populations experiencing food stress

839 Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, p. 7.

840 Dr Andrew Robertson, Department of Health, Letter, 27 April 2023, p. 2.

841 *ibid.*

842 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, p. 7.

843 Dr Alexia Bivoltsis, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 4.

where there is also poor access to healthy food or a high density of unhealthy food. Funding would be required for this.⁸⁴⁴

Dr Bivoltsis said the United States and the United Kingdom already had similar tools up and running and Australia was lagging behind. The atlas needed more data on the physical food environment which required consistent classification of food outlets. At present there is no centralised location or database where information on all food businesses is stored, Dr Bivoltsis said. It would also require future funding support to keep data current.⁸⁴⁵

DoH said it was not familiar with the Food Atlas, but could see how integrating it with the FSI could assist food relief organisations to identify areas in most need of food relief. This work would require further discussion with the Telethon Kids Institute and Curtin University.

Currently, the Department has had no role in the development of either tool and does not have access to information sufficient to assess this proposal, such as the objectives and their relevance to policy, evaluation, or potential limitations of combining these tools.⁸⁴⁶

Finding 56

The Food Stress Index and Food Atlas are tools with the potential to provide valuable information about food insecurity, food relief and planning needs throughout the state, provided they receive support for maintenance.

Recommendation 21

The Department of Health considers how it can provide in-kind, resourcing or financial support for the development and maintenance of the Food Stress Index and Food Atlas.

Data is critical for monitoring wellbeing

Food insecurity data collected by any of the means discussed in this section could contribute to the CCYP's Indicators of Wellbeing, which form part of the Wellbeing Monitoring Framework. The framework consists of the indicators, an annual socio-demographic profile report of WA's children, and policies and recommendations pertinent to the indicators of wellbeing.

The Indicators of Wellbeing rely on data collected from existing sources, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, NAPLAN data, and administrative data from government departments. How often the data is updated depends on the availability of the source data. The indicators were developed by the Commissioner in consultation with CoLab (via Telethon Kids Institute). They include the views of children and young people about wellbeing and what it means to have a good life, captured via the Commissioner's face-to-face consultations and the Speaking Out Survey. According to the CCYP website, 'the Indicators of Wellbeing includes measures that capture

844 Dr Alexia Bivoltsis, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 5.

845 Dr Alexia Bivoltsis, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 5; Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 8.

846 Dr Andrew Robertson, Department of Health, Letter, 27 April 2023, p. 2.

the lived experiences of children and young people which, in many cases, are not currently collected or not collected regularly'.⁸⁴⁷

The 'material basics' wellbeing indicator reports on poverty and food security – although no data on material deprivation is available for WA children aged 0 to 5.⁸⁴⁸ For older age groups, the Speaking Out Survey asks children how often they have enough food to eat at home. But this is just one question and it is not collected every year.

If a child and youth wellbeing strategy was implemented, the wellbeing data already being collected and compiled for the Wellbeing Monitoring Framework would assist government agencies in demonstrating that they are meeting wellbeing targets. Any additional data that could be collected to support that needs consideration.

While the CCYP has taken on the wellbeing monitoring role in WA, Tasmania's CCYP told us that in developing her state's child and wellbeing strategy, she had recommended that it be the government's role to determine whether the action it was investing in was making a difference. Their strategy's first report card had drawn on government administrative data that had not been utilised before.⁸⁴⁹

Planning provisions do not adequately consider children's wellbeing

A number of contributors mentioned the impact of planning provisions and legislation on the ability of children and young people to access healthy food and avoid exposure to unhealthy food advertising. State-based laws and regulations address these issues (although not adequately, according to some), which local governments are required to heed. Still, child wellbeing is not directly considered in planning processes, which adds weight to the case for conducting child impact assessments, mentioned earlier in this chapter. The Planning and Development (Local Planning Schemes) Regulations 2015 (at clause 67 of Schedule 2) require local government decision-makers to have due regard to various factors when considering a development application. Relevant factors to health and wellbeing are:

- the amenity of the location including any social impacts of the development
- the suitability of the land for development taking into account risks to human health or safety.⁸⁵⁰

These are very broad. However, the WA Planning Commission (WAPC) notes that the vast majority of planning proposals are also subject to community consultation, providing opportunity for community input into decision making.

847 Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Overview of the Indicators of Wellbeing*, accessed 25 May 2023, <www.cyp.wa.gov.au>

848 Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Indicators of wellbeing, Age group 0 to 5 years – Material basics*, August 2020, accessed 25 May 2023, <www.cyp.wa.gov.au>

849 Leanne McLean, Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania, *Briefing*, 28 February 2023.

850 David Caddy, Chairman, WA Planning Commission, Letter, 17 May 2023, p. 1.

The WAPC is also currently reviewing its Liveable Neighbourhoods policy which guides the development of new urban areas. It said the review would provide opportunities to ensure

Certainly we have presented the view to the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage about the need to consider community health and wellbeing as part of state planning law. Any decision about making change clearly rests with that agency, that minister, and with the government of the day.

- Dr Denise Sullivan, Department of Health

that improvement of public health is part of the policy development. DoH's Chronic Disease unit is part of the Neighbourhood Design stakeholder reference group. DoH said it was an example of how the department was 'hoping to have a little bit of influence in the space of urban planning legislation'.⁸⁵¹

Local governments will also have increased responsibility to take health and wellbeing into account with the introduction of local government Public

Health Plans (a requirement of the Public Health Act 2016). Urban planning will be a key consideration in designing health plans.

Recommendation 22

The Minister for Planning requests that the WA Planning Commission develops a new (or amends existing) state planning policy that ensures the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Regulation around the location of unhealthy food outlets is still weak

DoH published an evidence brief in late 2022 on food, built environments and obesity. It summarised evidence regarding the location, proximity and density of healthy and unhealthy food retail outlets in Perth and outlined 8 strategies for use across government. It also noted Recommendation 2a of the Sustainable Health Review⁸⁵² – to halt the rise in obesity and increase the number of adults who have a healthy weight. An implementation priority under this recommendation is 'Changes to planning laws to limit unhealthy food outlets and to support access to healthy food options including near schools'.

Supporting this, the Western Australian Health Promotion Strategic Framework 2022-2026 includes a strategic direction to 'Work across government and key sectors to influence urban planning to ensure urban design and infrastructure promotes and supports healthy eating patterns in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, increases local access to healthy food and drink, and reduces children's exposure to unhealthy food outlets.'

Cancer Council WA has been lobbying for better control of fast-food outlet developments, maintaining there are currently insufficient regulatory mechanisms.⁸⁵³ WALGA's position is consistent with this, noting public health outcomes are not a specific purpose of the

851 Dr Gina Ambrosini, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 8.

852 The Sustainable Health Review is a 10-year blueprint for the WA health system that emphasises the importance of prevention.

853 Submission 22, Cancer Council WA, p. 5.

Planning and Development Act 2005, and local governments have limited planning tools to manage the density of fast-food premises.⁸⁵⁴

Cancer Council WA has prepared submissions to oppose proposed fast-food outlets in low SES areas, adjacent to schools or childcare centres or where there are existing outlets. The WA School Canteen Association had also made a submission to the WAPC, and Telethon Kids Institute supported lobbying for changes to zoning requirements 'to prevent the clustering of outlets whose primary business is the retail sale of energy-dense, low-nutrient meals or products, particularly in neighbourhoods in the lowest ICSEA quartiles'.⁸⁵⁵

The WAPC says planning decision-makers, and particularly local governments, are expected to plan for the areas around primary school and childcare centres through the local planning strategy, local planning scheme and structure planning processes, to reflect the local context and objectives of the area. WAPC policies such as Operational Policy 2.4 - Planning for School Sites requires that careful consideration be given to ensure that school sites are located amongst or adjacent to compatible land uses to support education, health and wellbeing outcomes.⁸⁵⁶

However, WAPC said this needed to be balanced with objectives promoted by policies such as State Planning Policy 4.2 - Activity Centres for Perth and Peel, which seeks to ensure that schools and childcare centres are located in or at the periphery of activity centres to ensure the community can access various co-located activities and services. This meant schools may be located relatively close to commercial or mixed areas where there could be fast food outlets, lunch bars, restaurants and cafés.

WAPC also noted that the planning system does not distinguish between food services serving unhealthy food and those serving healthy food.

This is because it is a well-established principle that the planning framework should not interfere in a competitive market. Notwithstanding it is acknowledged that there may be opportunities to refine the way the system balances the need to support health and wellbeing outcomes, with the need to support adequate access to essential goods and services, and economic development.⁸⁵⁷

Associate Professor Mitrou from Telethon Kids Institute noted that in place of fast-food outlets, there would need to be something healthy but affordable.

There is no point making certain foods available if your target audience just cannot afford to buy them. They are not going to buy them. These things are businesses. Businesses are set up and have to be profitable. Those businesses will do their due diligence. They will not set up in those areas if they think that they cannot actually

854 WALGA, Letter, 3 April 2023, p. 4.

855 Submission 8, Telethon Kids Institute, p. 7.

856 David Caddy, WA Planning Commission, Letter, 17 May 2023, p. 2.

857 *ibid.*

survive in that area because the market in that region cannot afford to buy their product.⁸⁵⁸

Local governments need more direction in adopting junk food advertising bans

In the past few years there have been proposals and campaigns to have unhealthy food and beverage advertising removed or banned from state-owned assets and from local government advertising assets. In regard to state-owned assets, DoH told us that a working group co-led by the health department and Healthway, with representation from the Department of Finance and the Public Transport Authority, was convened in 2021 to consider the proposal: 'A policy proposal was presented to the Minister for Health in 2022, and that is now a matter that is sitting with government for consideration.'⁸⁵⁹

WALGA said that many local governments contracted out the rights to provide street furniture (bus shelters, bench seats, rubbish bins), including associated maintenance, to private operators in exchange for exclusive advertising rights. Local governments could apply advertising standards through controls within these contractual arrangements, which could include restricting advertising that promotes smoking, vaping, alcoholic beverages and, more recently, fast foods or the consumption of fast foods. A growing number of local governments were considering the removal of fast food and alcohol signage on council-owned assets, but WALGA reports there are a number of barriers:

- Local governments are at different stages of the planning, policy and contract process
- Local governments experience difficulty ascertaining contract status, value, and process for renewal/tender, and contracts for bus shelter advertising are long (up to 25 years)
- There are often opposing views regarding unhealthy advertising between local government and council
- Industry opposition
- Implementing healthy policies and advertising restrictions can be resource intensive, contributing to existing financial concerns where it is perceived there will be reduced revenue from restrictions on advertising.⁸⁶⁰

Some of these barriers were apparent in the recent attempt by City of Canning to ban junk food advertising on its assets. The council abandoned the plan, proposed by City of Canning staff, after concern from some councillors that the proposed restrictions would have prevented businesses not directly based in the City of Canning from being able to advertise, which would not have provided best value for money. Instead, the contractor will simply be required to comply with state and federal rules with no direct targeting of the fast food, alcohol and smoking industries.⁸⁶¹

858 Associate Professor Franics Mitrou, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 10.

859 Dr Denise Sullivan, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 8.

860 WALGA, Letter, 3 April 2023, p. 4.

861 Matt Zis, 'City of Canning council scraps fast food advertising ban', *PerthNow* (web-based), 23 March 2023, accessed 26 May 2023, <www.perthnow.com.au>

Mayor Patrick Hall told a council meeting that until the state and federal governments took the lead on these matters, he wondered ‘why the small City of Canning would introduce restrictive covenants to businesses that are not performing any illegal activity.’⁸⁶²

WALGA said ‘a more coordinated, cohesive process’ was required before advertising controls could be more widely adopted. Cancer Council WA was developing a toolkit to support local governments, in line with State Government’s approach, WALGA said.⁸⁶³

Finding 57

There are too many barriers and too few guidelines for local councils considering adopting a ban on junk food advertising.

Public Health Plans are an opportunity to cater for children’s needs

Under the Public Health Act 2016, local governments are required to have a Public Health Plan. This requirement is the final stage of the new act and has not yet been implemented. However, around two-thirds of local governments are already preparing or have prepared Public Health Plans.⁸⁶⁴ Local governments will be required to report to the Chief Health Officer on their performance of functions under the Public Health Act, and to advise DoH when the plan has been updated.

Telethon Kids Institute’s Alexia Bivoltsis noted that while local governments were constrained by state-level planning legislation, Public Health Plans give them some control and opportunities to create healthier food environments.⁸⁶⁵

DoH Environmental Health acting executive director Matthew Lester said the department was encouraging local governments to consider access to healthy food when building new suburbs, but it was up to local government to work out how to do that.

Effectively, we are still pushing the boundaries to see what information best informs a local government to incorporate these sorts of components into their planning.⁸⁶⁶

WALGA said local governments had indicated that DoH support and expertise was extremely valuable and had enabled them to undertake public health planning where they otherwise may not have had the capability to do so. However, this support was not consistently available across the state. Local governments were still calling for more assistance.⁸⁶⁷

Consideration of children’s needs in public health plans would likely be driven by the population profile and by consulting the community to determine their priorities or the key issues they would like addressed, according to Mr Lester.

862 Matt Zis, 'City of Canning council scraps fast food advertising ban', *PerthNow* (web-based), 23 March 2023, accessed 26 May 2023, <www.perthnow.com.au>

863 WALGA, Letter, 3 April 2023, p. 4.

864 *ibid.*

865 Dr Alexia Bivoltsis, Telethon Kids Institute, *Transcript of Evidence*, 26 October 2022, p. 3.

866 Matthew Lester, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 9.

867 WALGA, Letter, 3 April 2023, pp. 2-3.

I know that when you do your basic assessment of your population, you are looking at a population age profile. If it balloons out where youth is bigger than the state average, then you would be mad not to consider youth as part of priority issues within your public health planning.

A separate plan for children and youth could potentially be included within the broader plan.

I am not sure anyone has actually done that yet, but the opportunity is there. Then, you are using your health status data to verify that what your community is wanting has legitimacy with regard to health status. Then, you can start to swing your policy modules into place and it packs a lot more punch because you are driving it with an evidence base.⁸⁶⁸

WALGA said Public Health Plans had not had any outcomes specifically aimed at children. If the State Government considered food security for children and young people as a priority, local governments would require a clear framework with support in the form of guidance materials, capacity building and implementation planning.⁸⁶⁹

Recommendation 23

The Minister for Health ensures that state health service providers have sufficient resources to provide information on the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people to local governments, to assist with their Public Health Plans.

Coordination and cooperation is fundamental

This inquiry set out to understand children and young people's experiences of poverty and food insecurity and explore how it should be addressed. We investigated the extent of the problem and learnt that around 17% of children and young people in WA are experiencing food insecurity, but that it is likely under-reported. We found that it is experienced by children and young people across the state, but for those living in regional and remote areas the challenges are greater. Aboriginal children are particularly affected, and children from refugee and migrant families also often have health conditions related to poor nutrition.

The inquiry considered the efficacy of three approaches to addressing food insecurity for children and young people: food relief, food literacy and a school food program. The most promising of these for reaching children directly and having an impact on their ongoing food security is a school lunch program. However, food relief and food literacy also have important roles to play. We also heard of some other initiatives – such as social supermarkets and food hubs – which are worthy of support or investigation; and there are potential legislative or regulatory changes in the early childhood care sector and planning realm that could make an important difference to children's access to healthy food.

Coordinating these multiple aspects requires a whole-of-government approach, including across jurisdictions, as suggested by many contributors to the inquiry.⁸⁷⁰ As CEWA

868 Matthew Lester, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 10.

869 WALGA, Letter, 3 April 2023, p. 3.

870 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, pp. 8-9; Submission 18, The Salvation Army, p. 12; Submission 14, WA School Canteen Association, p. 5; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin

submitted, 'the issue of food insecurity transcends the various systems/sectors of education'.⁸⁷¹ It is also not just the domain of health; as the Department of Health told us, the Sustainable Health Review and Health Promotions Strategic Framework emphasise the important role of the WA health system in promoting good health and wellbeing, but 'quite a few of the levers for change sit with other sectors and other government agencies'.⁸⁷²

Centrecare and Edith Cowan University suggested establishing a food security advisory committee representing metropolitan, regional and remote areas to understand existing services and make policy decision. Centrecare said it should include people with lived experience of food insecurity, including young people.⁸⁷³

A Food Security Strategy developed by all of government and relevant organisations was also suggested. As Dr Christina Pollard noted: 'The value of that is that the problem will get defined, the approaches for specific areas will be looked at and there will be a whole of government discussion around that.'⁸⁷⁴ It could complement National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities, the draft of which is due for completion at the end of 2023.⁸⁷⁵

Tasmania's food security strategy, *Food Relief to Food Resilience*, could be a useful resource. Its priorities include developing place-based solutions that support community food resilience, with the school lunch pilot program included as one of the actions to build resilience.⁸⁷⁶ The pilot is also an action of Tasmania's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, making the link between food security and children's wellbeing.

Assigning responsibility would provide clarity

As outlined earlier in this chapter, a wellbeing strategy would ensure child nutrition was monitored and would bring together relevant departments to work on improving food security for children. However, given the confusion regarding which government agency is responsible for developing the child wellbeing strategy, there is an argument for appointing a minister to take responsibility. This could be the newly created Minister for Early Childhood Education, who, at present, also holds responsibility for Community Services.

Finding 58

There is a lack of clarity around ministerial and departmental responsibility for a Child Wellbeing Strategy.

University, pp. 9, 17; Rebecca Bampton and Amanda Ferguson, WA School Canteen Association, 19 October 2022, pp. 6, 15.

871 Submission 7, Catholic Education WA, p. 9.

872 Dr Denise Sullivan, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2022, p. 8.

873 Submission 5, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, p. 8; Submission 20, Edith Cowan University, p. 7.

874 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 7; Submission 26, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University, pp. 11, 16.

875 Dr Christina Pollard, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 7; Peter Facey, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 15 March 2023, p. 5.

876 Tasmanian Government, *Food Relief to Food Resilience – Tasmanian Food Security Strategy 2021-24*, State of Tasmania, August 2021, p. 19; Food Relief to Food Resilience Action Plan 2023-2025 – Plan on page, accessed 1 June 2023, <www.dpac.tas.gov.au>

Recommendation 24

The Premier allocates a minister to take responsibility for overseeing:

- the development of a Child Wellbeing Strategy
- food security, with the twin aims of achieving food resilience and, in the meantime, better coordination of food relief.

The other area where it would be beneficial to have a specific minister or government department take responsibility is food relief. As Fair Food WA has stated, it is currently unclear which government agencies (aside from Lotterywest) hold the leadership role in mitigating the impact of food insecurity.⁸⁷⁷ They submit that having a government department responsible for addressing food insecurity would assist the efforts of the many not-for-profit organisations working to help children and families suffering from food insecurity. By providing coordination and strategic direction, many of the duplications and gaps in the current arrangements could be resolved.

Despite the best efforts of the CCYP, there appears to be a degree of policy incoherence and invisibility in relation to many of the issues that impact children. Tasmania resolved this problem by merging its department of education with children and youth. It now has one secretariat that oversees the child in a range of different settings and programs with an overarching mission to focus on the child being known, safe, well and learning. The department's minister, Roger Jaensch, said there was now a continuum across the services that bears out the ethos of the child wellbeing strategy, even across the youth justice system. 'It puts the kid at the centre of all of that rather than moving from one service to another at different times of their day, or life. We've got eyes on them all the time.'⁸⁷⁸

An opportunity for leadership

As several contributors to the inquiry have recognised, ensuring that obligations to children's rights are honoured and implementing new initiatives such as a wellbeing strategy and a school lunch program requires strong leadership.

As Valuing Children Initiative co-founder and Centrecare director Tony Pietropiccolo said:

There is little that researchers can do, there is little that social service people like me can do, no matter how much evidence you can provide, unless there is the political will to do something about it because, ultimately, the capacity to actually effect change at these levels lies with leadership. I think that we have not seen enough of that leadership in Australia and I think there is a great opportunity to do something about it.⁸⁷⁹

Adjunct Professor Pietropiccolo pointed to New Zealand as a good example. Former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern had taken the issue of child poverty seriously by becoming the minister responsible for reducing child poverty. The current Minister for Child Poverty

877 Submission 24, Fair Food WA, pp 2-3.

878 Roger Jaensch, *Briefing*, 27 February 2023.

879 Adjunct Professor Tony Pietropiccolo, Centrecare Inc and Valuing Children Initiative, *Transcript of Evidence*, 16 March 2022, p. 2.

Reduction is Jan Tinetti, following Ms Ardern's departure from politics. The ministry is connected to the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy,⁸⁸⁰ which aims to make New Zealand 'the best place in the world for children and young people'.⁸⁸¹

Western Australia might aspire to challenge New Zealand for that title, and begin by implementing the recommendations in this report.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R Clarke', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE, MLA
CHAIR

880 The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy established New Zealand's school lunch program.

881 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Child and Youth Wellbeing – About Us*, 2022, accessed 1 June 2023, <www.childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz>

Appendix One

Committee's functions and powers

The following was agreed by concurrence between the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council on 26 May 2021, establishing the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People:

1. Pursuant to section 51 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006, a Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People be appointed by the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council.
2. The Joint Standing Committee shall comprise 2 members appointed by the Legislative Assembly and 2 members appointed by the Legislative Council.
3. It is the function of the Joint Standing Committee to —
 - i. monitor, review and report to Parliament on the exercise of the functions of the Commissioner for Children and Young People;
 - ii. examine Annual and other Reports of the Commissioner; and
 - iii. consult regularly with the Commissioner.
4. A report of the Joint Standing Committee will be presented to the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council by members of the Joint Standing Committee nominated by it for that purpose.
5. The Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly relating to Standing and Select Committees will be followed as far as they can be applied.

Appendix Two

Inquiry process

To better understand childhood food insecurity, the Committee held three scoping hearings before determining terms of reference for the inquiry. They were with Adjunct Professor Tony Pietropiccolo (director of Centrecare and co-founder of the Valuing Children Initiative), Dr Roslyn Giglia (nutrition and food security manager at Foodbank WA), and Dr Christina Pollard (a public health nutritionist and associate professor at Curtin University).

Following these, the Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty. The inquiry terms of reference were announced on 7 April 2022 by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council.

The inquiry details were published on the Committee's web pages, and published in *The West Australian Newspaper* on 16 April 2022. The Committee also used the Parliament of Western Australia Facebook and LinkedIn accounts and the Legislative Assembly Twitter account to publicise the inquiry and provide information relevant to making a submission. A 30-second radio advertisement for Aboriginal children was recorded by a young voice artist at Noongar Radio and broadcast 64 times by Indigenous stations across the state between August and November 2022.

The Committee wrote to relevant stakeholders inviting submissions. We also had the terms of reference published on the committee website in plain English and in the Arabic, Hazaragi, Karen, Vietnamese, Farsi Persian, Swahili (Kiswahili) and Tigrinya languages. To engage with children, young people, those with low literacy and those from the CaLD community, we also produced the inquiry terms of reference as an easy English resource in three versions: for adults, for children and young people, and screen-reader friendly. The easy English versions were available online and some hard copy booklets were also distributed. The Committee did not receive permission to send the easy English version for children and young people to government schools, but CEWA distributed it to 7 of its schools.

The Committee used its web pages and social media to advertise that we would accept submissions in the form of pictures, emails, voice recordings and videos, and in any language. The Committee committed to translating any submissions received in languages other than English, but did not receive any.

The submission deadline for children and young people was extended from 15 July 2022 to 25 November 2022 to give them adequate time to participate.

The Committee received 494 submissions, including collated responses representing the views of over 500 CEWA students from 7 schools across the state (see Appendix 3 for full list). All information provided by children and young people was made anonymous. Most submissions were in written form, although some CEWA students submitted collages. No video or audio recordings were submitted.

Evidence was also gathered in 15 hearing and 35 briefings. The parties who provided oral evidence are listed in Appendix 4. Two of the briefings were with refugee and migrant community members. The first was facilitated by Ishaar Multicultural Women’s Health Services with the assistance of Arabic and Dari interpreters. This was attended by around 25 women, mainly from Middle Eastern backgrounds. The second included 8 staff from the Edmund Rice Centre, representing management, the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support program team, and the youth programs. The deputy principal and 2 multicultural community workers from Koondoola Primary School also participated, representing the partnership between the school and the Edmund Rice Centre funded by the Department of Health.

Committee members held briefings in the regional towns of Albany, Katanning, Newman and Leonora and the remote Aboriginal communities of Burringurrah, Jigalong and Warburton.

Finally, the Committee visited Tasmania to hear about the state’s School Lunch Pilot Program and see it in action at three different schools, and to hear about Tasmania’s recently implemented Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.

This report is based on the testimony of witnesses and participants in briefings across WA and Australia, as well submissions received from interested individuals and organisations. The Committee extends its sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this inquiry and assisted our investigations.

Figure 8.1: Regional and remote towns the Committee visited in WA



Figure 8.2: Cover of easy English booklets for children and young people, left, and adults, right



Figure 8.3: Sample of Catholic Education WA student collage submissions



Appendix Three

Submissions received

No.	Person/Organisation
1	<i>Name withheld</i>
2	<i>Name withheld</i>
3	Fiona Angelatos
4	Warwick Senior High School
5	Centrecare Inc.; Valuing Children Initiative
6	EON Foundation
7	Catholic Education WA
8	Telethon Kids Institute
9	Australian Health Promotion Association, WA Branch
10	Foodbank WA
11	Department of Education
12	Anglicare WA
13	Sol Hanna
14	Western Australian School Canteen Association Inc.
15	OzHarvest
16	Food Ladder
17	Commissioner for Children and Young People WA
18	The Salvation Army
19	Refugee Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service
20	Edith Cowan University
21	Dr Beth Walker
22	Cancer Council of WA
23	Geoffrey Holt
24	Fair Food WA
25	Department of Communities
26	Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University
27	Aboriginal Health Council of WA
28-34	<i>Closed submissions</i> (Ishar Multicultural Health Services group participants)
35-487	Catholic Education WA students
489-491	<i>Closed submissions</i> (Sudbury Community House children)
492	James Gibson
493	Katherine Washington
494	Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre – Roseworth

Appendix Four

Hearings and briefings

Hearings

Date	Name	Position	Organisation
21 September 2022	Dr Pasi Sahlberg	Professor of Education	Southern Cross University
19 October 2022	Megan Sauzier	Chief Executive Officer, WASCA	WA School Canteen Association (WASCA)
	Rebecca Bampton	President, WASCA	
	Amanda Ferguson	Project Development Officer, WASCA	
	Jennifer Hanna	Executive Committee Member, WASCA	
	Cre Millar	Canteen Manager, Applecross Senior High School	
	Rebecca Jolly	Canteen Manager, Oakwood Primary School	
	Naomi Putland	Canteen, Kitchen and Garden Manager, Highgate Primary School	
19 October 2022	Kevin Guinness	Director, Garlbagu, Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation	Foundation Food
	Abby Phillis	Director, Social Impact, Garlbagu, Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation	
26 October 2022	Associate Professor Francis Mitrou	Program Head, Population Health	Telethon Kids Institute
	Dr Alexia Bivoltsis	Senior Research Officer, Food and Nutrition Team	
26 October 2022	Ros Sambell	Lecturer; Chair, National Nutrition Network – Early Education and Care	School of Medical and Health Sciences, Edith Cowan University
	Prof Amanda Devine	Professor of Public Health and Nutrition	
16 November 2022	Kate O'Hara	Chief Executive Officer	Foodbank WA
	Dr Roslyn Giglia	Dietitian; Nutrition and Food Security Manager	

Appendix Four

23 November 2022	John Southalan	Adjunct Professor; Barrister	
23 November 2022	Prof Sharon Bessell	Professor, Policy and Governance; Director, Children's Policy Centre; Director, Poverty and Inequality Research Centre	Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University
30 November 2022	Clinical Associate Prof Sarah Cherian	General Paediatrician; Clinical Lead, Refugee Health Service	Child and Adolescent Health Service
	Anne-Marie McHugh	Acting Nurse Co-director, Community Nursing Services	
22 February 2023	Dr Stephanie Godrich	Senior Lecturer in Nutrition	Edith Cowan University
15 March 2023	Mike Rowe	Director General	Department of Communities
	Amber Fabry	Chief Practitioner, Specialist Child Protection Unit	
	Peter Byrne	Acting Assistant Director General, Governance, Performance and Insights	
	Phil Payne	Executive Director, Regulation and Quality	
15 March 2023	Dr Laura Allison	Chief Psychologist	Catholic Education WA
	Lisa Fogliani	Principal, Mercy College, Koondoola	
15 March 2023	Fiona Hunt	Deputy Director General, Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy	Department of the Premier and Cabinet
	Peter Facey	Assistant Director, Remote Aboriginal Communities	
	Sarah Charbonneau	Acting Executive Director, Community Policy	
22 March 2023	Dr Andrew Robertson	Chief Health Officer and Assistant Director General, Public & Aboriginal Health	Department of Health
	Dr Denise Sullivan	Director, Chronic Disease Prevention, Public & Aboriginal Health	
	Dr Gina Ambrosini	Principal Policy Officer, Chronic Disease Prevention	

	Matthew Lester	Acting Executive Director, Environmental Health	
22 March 2023	Jim Bell	Deputy Director General, Student Achievement	Department of Education
	Martin Clery	Executive Director, Statewide Services	
	Narelle Ward	Principal	
	Michelle Ostberg	Director, Service Planning and Coordination	
	Mandy Hudson	Assistant Executive Director, Curriculum Assessment and Strategic Policy, School Curriculum and Standards, School Curriculum and Standards Authority	

Briefings

Date	Name	Position	Organisation
17 June 2022	<i>25 members of the Neighbourhood Mothers' Group</i>		Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services, Mirrabooka
	<i>2 interpreters</i>	Dari and Arabic languages	
	<i>4 staff members</i>		
	Sally Bower	Family Support Manager	
22 August 2022	Rod Pfeiffer	Branch Manager	Foodbank WA, Albany
22 August 2022	Peter Watters	Director	Clontarf Foundation, North Albany Academy, North Albany Senior High School
	Graeme Simpson	Project Officer	
	<i>Academy members</i>	Year 9 students	
22 August 2022	Ben Killey	Chief Executive Officer	Worklink, Albany
	Wendy Triplett	Training Manager	
22 August 2022	Colette Albino	Corps Officer	The Salvation Army, Albany
23 August 2022	<i>2 parents</i>		Child and Parent Centre, Mount Lockyer, Albany
	Kym Gardner	Coordinator	
23 August 2022	Ian Clarke	Chief Executive Officer	

Appendix Four

	Chrystie Flint	Outreach Services Manager	Youth Centre, Albany Youth Support Association
	Tosh Wigley	Youth Centre Coordinator	
23 August 2022	Ian Clarke	Chief Executive Officer	Young House, Albany Youth Support Association
	Bradley Ward	Residential Services Manager	
	Kim Thorpe	Refuge Coordinator	
23 August 2022	Geraldine Ennis	Regional Director, Great Southern	WA Country Health Service, Albany
	Paddy Glackin	Regional Medical Director, Great Southern	
	Sylvia Lennon	Director Population Health, Great Southern	
	Amber Giblett	Acting Regional Health Promotion Coordinator, Great Southern	
23 August 2022	<i>6 Karen community members</i>	Year 11-12 students	Albany Migrant Resource Centre
	Julia Valentin	Migrant Resource Coordinator	
	Pah Shaw	Karen Community Assistant	
24 August 2022	Hazel Ealem'Hansen	Project Manager, Early Years Initiative	Katanning Noongar Leadership Group
	Meryl Hansen	Shekinah Black community member	
	Julie Hayden	Chief Executive Officer, Badgebup Aboriginal Corporation and Early Years Initiative	
	Wendy Hayward	Chief Executive Officer/Chairperson, Jeert Mia Aboriginal Corporation	
	Denise Gallanagh Wood	Manager, Community Development, Shire of Katanning	
	Shane Woods	Youth Family Support Worker, Department of Communities	
24 August 2022	Otieno Ndong'a	Staff member	Katanning Migrant Resource Centre

24 August 2022 'Katanning roundtable'	Sharon Bielby	Domestic Violence Advocacy Support Worker	Anglicare WA, Katanning
	Sharon Thomas	Social worker, Katanning hospital	WA Country Health Service, Katanning
	Donna Woithe	Population Health Coordinator	WA Country Health Service, Katanning
	Geraldine Ennis	Regional Director, Great Southern	WA Country Health Service
	Katie Wheeler	Manager	Katanning Community Resource Centre
	Liz Guidera	President	Shire of Katanning
	Michelle Salter	Councillor	Shire of Katanning
	Matt Collis	Councillor	Shire of Katanning
24 August 2022	<i>12 participants</i>	Year 7-12 students	Deadly Sista Girlz, Katanning Senior High School
	Keona Pickett	Coordinator	
	Sonya Woods	Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer	
31 October 2022	Raymond Lockyer	Community member	Burringurrah Aboriginal Community
	Shirleen Riley	Community member	
	Robert Gilbert	Community member	
	Dwayne Mallard	Wajarri facilitator and spokesperson	
	Jasmine Harris	Principal, Burringurrah Remote Community School	
	Glenda Sibson	School officer, Burringurrah Remote Community School	
	Marilyn Hake	Clinical Nurse Specialist, WA Country Health Service	
	Colin Sibson	Officer in Charge, Burringurrah Police	
	Peter Sainsbury	Senior Ranger, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions	
31 October 2022	Stephen Farrington	Remote Clinical Manager	Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service, Jigalong Aboriginal Community

Appendix Four

31 October 2022	Viv Naidu	Manager	Illawarra Store, Jigalong Aboriginal Community
31 October 2022	Karina Ferrada	Teacher	Jigalong Remote Community School
31 October 2022	Anthony Middleton	Shire President	Shire of East Pilbara
	Emma Landers	Acting Chief Executive Officer	
	Annabel Landy	Councillor	
	Eric Plet	Director Community Services	
	Rosie Davidson-Tuck	Manager of Community Services	
31 October 2022	Sue Davenport	Executive Director	Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa
	Peter Johnson	Executive Director	
	Gina O'Connor	Families Program, Kunawarritji	
	Michele Bentink	Martu Support	
1 November 2022	Edward Box	Retail Manager, Mily Store	Milyirtjarra Aboriginal Corporation, Warburton
1 November 2022	Damian McLean	President	Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, Warburton
1 November 2022	Oriwa McKay	CDP Engagement Officer, former youth worker, former school Nutrition Program Coordinator	Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, Warburton
	Angelica McLean	Housing (Thrive Program), former youth worker	
1 November 2022	Scott Fatnowna	Deputy Principal	Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, Warburton Campus
1 November 2022	Margaret Butterworth	Deputy Principal	Leonora District High School
	Jonathan Attwell	Principal	
1 November 2022	Naomi Sprigg dos Santos	Senior Project Officer, Child Safety	WA Country Health Service, Leonora
	Cheryl Cotterill	Community Resource Centre, former WACHS Aboriginal Health Worker, Home and Community Care Coordinator and Enrolled Nurse, Leonora Hospital	

Hearings and briefings

22 November 2022	Amy Berson	General Manager	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Alaa Al-Batati	Acting Community Programs Manager	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Daniel Sherifi	Acting Youth Programs Manager	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Wahida Aziz	Settlement Caseworker, Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Hafiz Nazari	Settlement Caseworker, Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Jordan Iley	Youth Program Coordinator	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Chloe McGrath	Youth Program Coordinator	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Lueth Dengdit	Youth Program Coordinator	Edmund Rice Centre WA, Mirrabooka
	Glenys Cunningham	Deputy Principal	Koondoola Primary School
	Caroline Kiambi	Multicultural Community Worker	Edmund Rice Centre WA/Koondoola Primary School
	Alice Mboneye	Multicultural Community Worker	Edmund Rice Centre WA/Koondoola Primary School
	27 February 2023	Julie Dunbabin	Project Manager
Kirsty Grierson		Executive Officer	School Food Matters, Tasmania
Jen Lea		Project Officer	School Food Matters, Tasmania
Kate Carlin		Project Officer	School Food Matters, Tasmania
Sam Rathmell		Project Officer (North)	School Food Matters, Tasmania
Fran Lennard		Project Officer (South)	School Food Matters, Tasmania
Pietta Jackson		Project Officer (South)	School Food Matters, Tasmania
Claire Galloway		Community Dietitian, Public Health Services (School Food Matters)	Department of Health, Tasmania

Appendix Four

	Kate DePaoli	Community Dietitian, Public Health Services (School Food Matters)	Department of Health, Tasmania
	Carl Saunder	State Manager	Eat Well Tasmania
27 February 2023	Stuart Lord	Principal	New Norfolk High School, Tasmania
	Chris Woolley	Support Teacher	New Norfolk High School, Tasmania
	Riki Ohia	Social Worker	New Norfolk High School, Tasmania
	Julie Dunbabin	Project Manager	School Food Matters, Tasmania
	Kate Carlin	Project Officer	School Food Matters, Tasmania
	Monique Reardon	Public Health Nutritionist, Public Health Services	Department of Health, Tasmania
27 February 2023	Nic Street	Minister for Community Services and Development	Tasmanian Government
	Roger Jaensch	Minister for Education, Children and Youth	Tasmanian Government
	Vince Taskunas	Chief of Staff to Minister Street	Tasmanian Government
	Loga Nadar	Adviser to Minister Street	Tasmanian Government
	Ben Coates	Adviser to Minister Jaensch	Tasmanian Government
	Julie Dunbabin	Project Manager	School Food Matters, Tasmania
	Kirsty Grierson	Executive Officer	School Food Matters, Tasmania
28 February 2023	Melissa Gray	Deputy Secretary, Community Partnerships and Priorities Division	Tasmanian Government
	Courtney Hurworth	Director, Community Policy and Engagement	Tasmanian Government
	Monique Reardon	Public Health Nutritionist, Public Health Services	Department of Health, Tasmania
28 February 2023	Benjamin Richardson	Principal	Rokeby Primary School, Tasmania
	Carla Brown	Assistant Principal	Rokeby Primary School, Tasmania

Hearings and briefings

	Kathy McInerney	Education Assistant	Rokeby Primary School, Tasmania
	Danielle Kempster	Teacher	Rokeby Primary School, Tasmania
	Taylor Assmann	Teacher	Rokeby Primary School, Tasmania
	Fran Lennard	Project Officer (South)	School Food Matters, Tasmania
	Kate Carlin	Project Officer	School Food Matters, Tasmania
	Monique Reardon	Public Health Nutritionist, Public Health Services	Department of Health, Tasmania
28 February 2023	Leanne Mclean	Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tasmania	Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tasmania
	Isabelle Crompton	Director – Office of the Commissioner	Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tasmania
	Monique Reardon	Public Health Nutritionist, Public Health Services	Department of Health, Tasmania
1 March 2023	Andrew Hillier	Chief Executive Officer	Loaves and Fishes, Tasmania
	Aaron Kroke	General Manager	Loaves and Fishes, Tasmania
	Helen Bennett	School Business Manager	Gagebrook Primary School
	Julie Dunbabin	Project Manager	School Food Matters, Tasmania
1 March 2023	Dr Kim Jose	Senior Research Fellow	Menzies Institute of Medical Research, University of Tasmania
	Dr Kylie Smith	Senior Research Fellow	Menzies Institute of Medical Research, University of Tasmania
	Associate Professor Verity Cleland	Associate Professor	Menzies Institute of Medical Research, University of Tasmania
	Monique Reardon	Public Health Nutritionist, Public Health Services	Department of Health, Tasmania

Appendix Five

Acronyms and abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACECQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
AHCWA	Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CAHS	Child and Adolescent Health Service
CaLD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CARE	Curriculum and Reengagement in Education
CCYP	Commissioner for Children and Young People
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEWA	Catholic Education Western Australia
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DoC	Department of Communities
DoH	Department of Health
DoE	Department of Education
DPAC	Department of Premier and Cabinet (Tasmania)
DPC	Department of the Premier and Cabinet
DPIRD	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
ECRU	Education and Care Regulatory Unit
ECU	Edith Cowan University
ERC	Edmund Rice Centre
EYP	Early Years Partnership
FACS	Food Access and Costs Survey
FEAST	Food Education and Sustainability Training
FFWA	Fair Food WA
FreshSNAP	School Nutrition Advisory Program
FSI	Food Stress Index
FSSM	Food Security Survey Module
HWSS	Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System
ICESCR	International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ISHAR	Ishar Multicultural Women’s Health Centre
LDC	Long day care

Appendix Five

NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NQF	National Quality Framework
NSRA	National School Reform Agreement
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NZ	New Zealand
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAMS	Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service
PESRAC	Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (Tasmania)
P&C	Parents and Citizens association
RHS	Refugee Health Service
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SCF	Supporting Communities Forum
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SNP	School Nutrition Projects
SSM	Social supermarket
TKI	Telethon Kids Institute
UFM	Universal free meals
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNFAO	United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
Vinnie's	St Vincent de Paul
WA	Western Australia
WACHS	Western Australian Country Health Services
WACOSS	Western Australian Council of Social Service
WALGA	Western Australian Local Government Association
WAPC	Western Australian Planning Commission
WASCA	Western Australian School Canteens Association
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children
WOSHEP	Whole of School Healthy Eating Program

Appendix Six

Convention on the Rights of the Child: Preamble and Articles 24, 27

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49.

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Convention,

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Bearing in mind that the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Recognizing that the United Nations has, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenants on Human Rights, proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Recalling that, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance,

Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community,

Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,

Considering that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity,

Bearing in mind that the need to extend particular care to the child has been stated in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1959 and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (in particular in articles 23 and 24), in the International Covenant on Economic, Social

and Cultural Rights (in particular in article 10) and in the statutes and relevant instruments of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children,

Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth",

Recalling the provisions of the Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally; the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules); and the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, Recognizing that, in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration,

Taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child, Recognizing the importance of international co-operation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, in particular in the developing countries,

Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:

(a) To diminish infant and child mortality;

(b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;

(c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;

(d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;

(e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;

(f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.

3. States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.

4. States Parties undertake to promote and encourage international co-operation with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right recognized in the present article. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.

3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

4. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to secure the recovery of maintenance for the child from the parents or other persons having financial responsibility for the child, both within the State Party and from abroad. In particular, where the person having financial responsibility for the child lives in a State different from that of the child, States Parties shall promote the accession to international agreements or the conclusion of such agreements, as well as the making of other appropriate arrangements.

Appendix Seven

Food literacy programs for adults

8.1 The following formal food literacy programs for adults were brought to our attention:

- Foodbank WA's Food Sensations for Children: previously called Food Sensations for Parents, this 5-week free program is funded by Telethon. Dietitians and nutritionists deliver the course to parents and carers of children aged 0-5. The program was developed through research with parents to ensure it aligns to their needs. It is offered in person and (since Covid) online at multiple locations across the Perth metropolitan area, often through Child and Parent Centres, playgroups and community centres. In 2021, 77% of participants reported improved feeding practices, including 3 months after the course.⁸⁸²
- Foodbank WA's Food Sensations for Adults: a four-week statewide program for low to middle income adults, where they learn cooking, food safety, healthy eating, label reading, budgeting and meal planning. This program was in demand and well attended, including by refugees and Aboriginal people, but ended in June 2022 when Department of Health funding ceased.⁸⁸³
- Foodbank WA's Healthy Food for All Abilities: funded by the Department of Communities for two years from 2022, this program is aimed at youth and adults living with disability.⁸⁸⁴
- The Salvation Army's 'Cooking on a Budget': a practical course run throughout WA using common ingredients. Participants take home the recipe and a box of the same ingredients so they can practice their new skills feeding their families.⁸⁸⁵
- Child and Parent Centre programs: as well as hosting Foodbank's programs, we received evidence of centres hosting Friday lunches with healthy meals and recipes, and the Jamie Oliver Ministry of Food cooking program, delivered by nutritionists.⁸⁸⁶ Participants valued this program, saying it taught them about good alternatives to takeaway food.
- WASCA Kindy Orientation: The WA School Canteen Association runs kindy orientation sessions to familiarise parents new to schools with the DoE's Healthy Food Policy and present information on packing a healthy lunch and the nutrition needs of young children. The sessions reached close to 14,000 families between 2018 and 2022.
- Cancer Council's 'Packed with Goodness' sessions: funded by Healthway to increase confidence amongst WA caregivers in packing a healthy lunchbox for school-aged

882 Foodbank WA, *Food Sensations for Children*, accessed 24 May 2023, <<https://www.foodbank.org.au/WA>>; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 9; Jennifer Tartaglia, Foodbank WA, Email, 26 May 2023. See also Participants, Katanning Shire Council roundtable, *Briefing*, 24 August 2022.

883 Dr Roslyn Giglia, Foodbank WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 March 2022, p. 3; Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 10; Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 3.

884 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 10; Jennifer Tartaglia, Foodbank WA, Email, 26 May 2023.

885 Submission 18, The Salvation Army, p. 10.

886 Submission 494, Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre Roseworth, p. 3; Parent participants, Child and Parent Centre, Mount Lockyer, *Briefing*, 23 August, 2022.

children. In 2022, 507 schools in WA participated, and the program was evaluated in 2021, showing an increase in daily vegetable and water consumption and a decrease in sugary drinks.⁸⁸⁷

- Cancer Council’s LiveLighter program: delivered on behalf of the DoH, this public health program is aimed at adults and expected to impact on children and teens. It employs multiple mediums to increase knowledge of good nutrition and includes targeted free resources.⁸⁸⁸
- Nutrition education is also a component of courses for parents run through Parenting Connection WA and Relationships Australia WA.⁸⁸⁹ Some school psychology services also run the Positive Parenting Program, which addresses nutrition in the early years.⁸⁹⁰

8.2 In terms of programs reaching populations at special risk of food insecurity:

- The Refugee Health Service employs a dietitian within its multidisciplinary team to work with newly arrived families on their nutrition needs and food literacy. The service has also used grant funding to develop pictorial resources based on the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating tailored to the needs and in the key languages of their patient cohort.⁸⁹¹
- Ishar provides GP care plan-funded dietitian and interpreter access.⁸⁹²
- Ishar and the Refugee Health Service are presently collaborating to deliver a Healthy Food, Healthy Cultures program. Funded through a 3-year Healthway grant awarded in 2022, the program will focus on refugees and migrants to provide culturally appropriate nutrition education across the life course through workshops and service provider training. It will be tailored to people with limited English proficiency.⁸⁹³
- The Edmund Rice Centre ran a popular training program teaching refugee and migrant parents how to cook Western food, with the assistance of an interpreter.⁸⁹⁴
- Foodbank’s Food Sensations aimed at parents of young children achieved 11% participation by Indigenous people, which is triple the population representation in WA. The program is being further tailored to Aboriginal families as part of a WA government project.⁸⁹⁵
- The Department of Health advised us that WACHS works very closely with 20 different Aboriginal Medical Services in WA to deliver programs focused on maternal and child health, which include nutrition.⁸⁹⁶

887 Submission 22, Cancer Council of WA, p. 9.

888 Submission 22, Cancer Council of WA, pp. 2, 6-8.

889 Submission 12, Anglicare WA, p. 14.

890 Narelle Ward, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

891 Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 10; see also Dr Sarah Cherian, CAHS Refugee Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 6-7.

892 Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, p. 13.

893 Submission 19, CAHS Refugee Health Service, pp. 11-12.

894 Edmund Rice Centre, *Briefing*, 22 November 2022.

895 Submission 10, Foodbank WA, p. 9.

896 Dr Andrew Robertson, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 March 2023, p. 11.

Appendix Eight

School lunch programs in four other countries

The US

The *Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act* (CNR) authorises all federal child nutrition programs. Congress reviews laws relevant to these programs about every five years, giving the opportunity to amend existing programs.⁸⁹⁷ Of the federal child nutrition programs, the:

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is the largest school food program and provides nutritious lunches for schoolchildren.
- School Breakfast Program (SBP) provides nutritious breakfasts for schoolchildren.
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides nutritious meals for children over the summer break.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides for meals in daycare centres, homeless shelters and afterschool programs; and
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutritious food, education, and healthcare access to pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to age 5 in low-income households.⁸⁹⁸

These programs, though federally funded, are administered and operate across federal, state, and school district levels, and can therefore vary in access, implementation, and results.⁸⁹⁹ The NSLP and WIC are the second and third-largest federal nutrition programs, behind the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, which is not part of the CNR.⁹⁰⁰

How long have food provision programs been running?

Current federal school food provisioning originates in two Acts. First, the 1946 *Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act* established the National School Lunch Program to protect children's health, and became a permanently federally-funded program for meal reimbursement in 1962. The CACFP, the SSFP, and other child nutrition programs were later additions to the *National School Lunch Act*.⁹⁰¹ Second, in 1966 *The Child Nutrition Act* authorised the School Breakfast Program to complement the lunch program, becoming permanent in 1975. More recently, the 2010 *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act* made broad

897 Feeding America and the Food Research and Action Centre, *2022 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Primer*, March 2022, p. 1.

898 *ibid.*, p. 2.

899 Hunger Free America, *From Well-Fed to Well-Read: How the Federal Child Nutrition Authorization Bill can slash child hunger, reduce poverty, and boost education*, 2019, p. 12.

900 *ibid.*, p. 15.

901 Feeding America and the Food Research and Action Centre, *2022 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Primer*, March 2022, p. 1.

changes to the NSL program, expanding availability of meal programs and requiring improvements in the quality of school meals.⁹⁰²

Are food provision programs universal?

With the exception of recent waivers mentioned below, the US does not provide universal free school meals for all children in all schools. Nationally, school lunch and breakfast programs are voluntary, and open to eligible children in participating schools. While school breakfast provision has expanded since 2010, participation is half the rate of lunch participation. Further, participation in the WIC has decreased despite improvements to it. USDA has expanded the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), but participation is also low.⁹⁰³

From March 2020 to mid-2022, in a measure prompted by COVID-19 disruptions, Congress expanded access to school meals through eligibility waivers, allowing schools to serve free lunches, year-round, to all American schoolchildren – effectively universal free meal provision. Congress ceased to fund the waivers past 2022, leaving most schools to revert to ‘the old three-tiered system where some families don’t pay at all, some receive discounted lunches, and others must pay full price’.⁹⁰⁴ The reversal of waivers has reportedly led to parents feeling confused and stigmatised as they must now revert to an onerous application process in order to access free or reduced-price meals.⁹⁰⁵

However, a number of states have recently gone alone in providing universal free school meals in their public schools. California, Maine and Colorado have made this a permanent policy, while others, Massachusetts, Nevada, Vermont, will do so for the 2022-23 year. More than 20 other US states are in different stages of considering universal school meal proposals, though the result of these might vary across states.⁹⁰⁶ Moreover, major cities in other states, including New York, Chicago and Boston, offer universal free school meals.⁹⁰⁷

How is eligibility determined for schools and/or individual students?

Since 2012 the Community Eligibility Provision to the *HHFK Act 2010* has allowed all students to access free meals in schools and school districts in low income areas i.e. where at least

902 Feeding America and the Food Research and Action Centre, *2022 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Primer*, March 2022, p. 2.

903 Hunger Free America, *From Well-Fed to Well-Read: How the Federal Child Nutrition Authorization Bill can slash child hunger, reduce poverty, and boost education*, 2019, pp. 17, 20.

904 Wilfred Chan, 'Free US school lunches were a dream come true. Now, a hunger crisis looms for 10 million children', *The Guardian* (web-based), 4 June 2022, accessed 28 February 2023, <<https://www.theguardian.com>>

905 Alia Wong, 'Are school lunches free this year? What to know now that pandemic-era meal program is ending', *USA Today* (web-based), 1 September 2022, accessed 1 March 2023, <www.usatoday.com>; Linda Qiu, 'Families Struggle as Pandemic Program Offering Free Meals Ends', *New York Times* (web-based), January 22 2023, accessed 1 March 2023, <www.nytimes.com>

906 Leah Butz, 'States that have passed Universal Free School Meals (So Far)', *Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center* (web-based), 21 February 2023, accessed 1 March 2023, <nycfoodpolicy.org>

907 Marlene B. Schwartz, 'Schools will stop serving free lunch to all students – a pandemic solution left out of a new federal spending package', *The Conversation* (web-based), 14 March 2022, accessed 28 February 2023, <<https://theconversation.com>>; Jocelyn Gecker, 'California launches largest free school lunch program in US', *PBS NewsHour* (web-based), 19 July 2021, accessed 1 March 2023, <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour>>

40% of students are deemed eligible for free meals by their participation in other means-tested programs.⁹⁰⁸ The Summer Food Service program also reimburses schools serving free meals to children in low-income areas or living in low-income households.⁹⁰⁹

In all other cases, most schools nation-wide that opt into the NSLP or SBP can offer eligible students free or reduced-price meals.⁹¹⁰ Depending on their family's income, students can access free or reduced price meals.⁹¹¹ School meals must also meet nutrition requirements to be reimbursable, which 'come with a higher price tag.'⁹¹² While some larger school districts have advantages in meeting nutrition requirements, it is harder for school districts that 'do not draw in the same volume of federal funding as urban school districts with more concentrated poverty.'⁹¹³

The WIC is not an entitlement program, so the number of availabilities is limited to annual discretionary funds. The USDA must fill availabilities according to a series of set priority levels.⁹¹⁴ According to one study, while WIC 'is arguably the single most effective major federal nutrition assistance program, it is also the most chronically under-funded, never able to meet the needs of millions of pregnant women and infants who need it.'⁹¹⁵

How are food provision programs funded?

The federal government funds national school lunch and breakfast programs through providing set-price per-meal reimbursements through the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to participating schools that meet meal and nutrition standards.⁹¹⁶ The USDA also provides child nutrition departments with funding to purchase commodity foods.⁹¹⁷ In most cases, schools will spend at least some reimbursement money on things beside food, covering expenses such as cafeteria workers, administrators, and supplies.⁹¹⁸ Moreover, states offering federal school nutrition programs must match funds at a set rate, though how they do so varies by state, from meal reimbursements, to salary support, to funding free meals for all.⁹¹⁹

908 Feeding America and the Food Research and Action Centre, *2022 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Primer*, March 2022, p. 1.

909 *ibid.*

910 *ibid.*

911 Physical Activity, Nutrition and Obesity Research Group (PANORG), Prevention Research Collaboration, University of Sydney, *School Meal Provision: A Rapid Evidence Review*, Sydney, November 2020, p. 11; Hunger Free America, *From Well-Fed to Well-Read: How the Federal Child Nutrition Authorization Bill can slash child hunger, reduce poverty, and boost education*, 2019, pp. 17-18, 25.

912 Hunger Free America, *From Well-Fed to Well-Read: How the Federal Child Nutrition Authorization Bill can slash child hunger, reduce poverty, and boost education*, 2019, p. 18.

913 *ibid.*

914 *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

915 *ibid.*, p. 36.

916 Analisa Sorrell, EdNC, *Behind the lunch tray: A look at how school meals are funded*, 18 April 2022, accessed 2 March 2023, <www.ednc.org>

917 *ibid.*

918 Hunger Free America, *From Well-Fed to Well-Read: How the Federal Child Nutrition Authorization Bill can slash child hunger, reduce poverty, and boost education*, 2019, p. 18.

919 Analisa Sorrell, EdNC, *Behind the lunch tray: A look at how school meals are funded*, 18 April 2022, accessed 2 March 2023, <www.ednc.org>

What is the student/parental contribution to school food provision?

National programs provide thresholds for free or reduced-price school meals. Children with family incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level (approx. U.S.\$36,000 for a family of four⁹²⁰) can receive free school meals, and those between 130% and 185% of the poverty level (approx. U.S.\$51,000) can receive reduced-price meals. That is, schools receive per-meal reimbursement for meals served to eligible students, who then pay a small co-payment per meal.⁹²¹ Children from families with incomes over the 185% threshold pay full price for their meals, though exact meal prices vary by school districts.⁹²²

Are school food provision programs supported by stakeholders and interested parties?

Research on support for school meal programs is complex. The academic literature is generally supportive of universal meal provision on several grounds. One recent study of major school districts found that Covid-19-era waivers allowing universal free meals reduced child hunger and supported school staff in providing meals to children.⁹²³ Another provided evidence that universal free meals supported higher academic achievement.⁹²⁴ As for general support, research suggested that 90% of parents in the U.S. support universal free school meals.⁹²⁵ However, a YouGov poll indicated that slightly over half of Americans support provision of free breakfasts and lunches to all students, and only a third who supported the same going to low-income students only.⁹²⁶

England

How long have food provision programs been running?

8.3 While 1906 *Education (Provision of Meals) Act* gave local education authorities the power to provide school meals, only in 1944 did Parliament pass laws requiring 'all local authorities to provide free nutritious meals for school children.'⁹²⁷ Two years later the provision of free milk to students was introduced in UK schools. The provision of free milk ended for children over seven in 1971, and for all ages in 1980.⁹²⁸ A new Education Act in 1980 removed minimum nutrient requirements for school meals, and required that Local Education Authorities provide school meals only for those families receiving benefits. The UK

920 Alia Wong, 'Are school lunches free this year? What to know now that pandemic-era meal program is ending', *USA Today* (web-based), 1 September 2022, accessed 1 March 2023, <www.usatoday.com>

921 Analisa Sorrell, EdNC, *Behind the lunch tray: A look at how school meals are funded*, 18 April 2022, accessed 2 March 2023, <www.ednc.org>

922 School Nutrition Association, *School Meal Statistics*, accessed 1 March 2023, <<https://schoolnutrition.org>>

923 Food Research and Action Center, *Large School District Report: Operating school nutrition programs during the pandemic*, FRAC, May 2022.

924 Amy Ellen Schwartz and Michah W. Rothbart, 'Let Them Eat Lunch: The impact of universal free meals on student performance', *The Maxwell School, Centre for Policy Research: Working Paper Series*, no. 203, July 2019, pp. 32-33.

925 Linda Qiu, 'Families Struggle as Pandemic Program Offering Free Meals Ends', *New York Times* (web-based), January 22 2023, accessed 1 March 2023, <www.nytimes.com>

926 Alia Wong, 'Are school lunches free this year? What to know now that pandemic-era meal program is ending', *USA Today* (web-based), 1 September 2022, accessed 1 March 2023, <www.usatoday.com>

927 Regina Keith, 'Marcus Rashford: a brief history of free school meals in the UK', *The Conversation* (web-based), 17 June 2020, accessed 10 March 2023, <www.theconversation.com>

928 *ibid.*

government began outsourcing meal provision to private companies, a trend that continued through the 1980s. In the early-2000s, the government established the Food Standards Agency, along with new nutritional requirements for school meals.⁹²⁹

Are food provision programs universal?

- 8.4 England does not provide universal free meals to all pupils of all ages in all schools. However, from September 2014, schools have provided free meals to all children in Reception (the preparatory class before Year 1) and Years 1 and 2.⁹³⁰ Schools might also offer free meals to pre-school children and students in sixth forms, sixth form colleges, and further education colleges.⁹³¹ Moreover, London's mayor recently announced all London's primary schools would provide free meals over the 2023-2024 academic year.⁹³²
- 8.5 During the first coronavirus lockdown, children staying home received meals or food vouchers, and a later council-run Winter Grant Scheme provided further support from December 2020-April 2021. During the January 2021 lockdown, families usually entitled to free schools meals could receive government-funded food parcels or vouchers. Other food programs covering the major holidays also provide some food relief.⁹³³

How is eligibility determined for schools and/or individual students?

- 8.6 Besides certain age-related 'universal' provision of free school meals mentioned above, students are otherwise eligible for free school meals if they or their parents receive any one of following government benefits:
- Income Support
 - Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 - the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
 - Child Tax Credit (provided they are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
 - Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for four weeks after a person stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
 - Universal Credit – with household income of less than £7,400 a year.⁹³⁴

929 Regina Keith, 'Marcus Rashford: a brief history of free school meals in the UK', *The Conversation* (web-based), 17 June 2020, accessed 10 March 2023, <theconversation.com>; Adrian Lobb, 'From Maggie to Marcus: A history of free school meals', *Big Issue* (web-based), 14 June 2012, accessed 10 March 2023, <www.bigissue.com>

930 Robert Long, Shadi Danechi, Nerys Roberts, UK House of Commons Library, *School Meals and Nutritional Standards in England*, House of Commons Library, London, 4 February 2022, p. 6.

931 *ibid.*

932 Isabella McRae, Hannah Westwater, 'Free School Meals: Everything you need to know', *Big Issue* (web-based), 20 February 2023, accessed 10 March 2023, <www.bigissue.com>

933 R Long, S Danechi and N Roberts, UK House of Commons Library, *School Meals and Nutritional Standards in England*, House of Commons Library, London, 4 February 2022, p. 7.

934 *ibid.*, p. 13.

- 8.7 The parents of eligible students can make claims for free school meals through local authorities, which are responsible for their provision.⁹³⁵
- 8.8 The rollout of Universal Credit from 2018 has gradually seen its replacement of other government benefits, which has led to changes in eligibility criteria. While some protections are in place for existing Universal Credit claimants for free school meals, from 'April 2018, households receiving Universal Credit with annual net earnings of over £7,400 no longer qualify for free school meals.'⁹³⁶
- 8.9 Eligibility for free school meals was temporarily extended during the Covid pandemic to include groups of children not usually eligible, including those under the compulsory school age but who are in full-time education.⁹³⁷

How are food provision programs funded?

- 8.10 Since 2011, the Government has funded school meals in England through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), and it is guided by nutrition standards.⁹³⁸ The DSG allows schools to each decide on their use of funding 'in line with the Government's drive to devolve responsibility for making decisions about the best use of resources to professionals in schools'.⁹³⁹ Under a system known as 'pupil premium', schools receive funding for each child eligible through income-related benefits for free school meals.⁹⁴⁰
- 8.11 The Education Department announced in March 2021 that it would provide £24 million for breakfast clubs through to July 2023, with participating schools receiving 100% subsidy, reduced to 70% to April 2022, with schools contributing the remainder from other funding streams, and pupils offered free breakfast supplies.⁹⁴¹

What is the student/parental contribution to school food provision?

- 8.12 As noted above, parents need not pay for school meals if they can claim certain government benefits including income support, income-based jobseekers allowance or employment and support allowance, child tax credits, universal credit and similar programs.⁹⁴²

Are school food provision programs supported by stakeholders and interested parties?

- 8.13 The introduction of a separate universal infant free school meals grant for all pupils in Reception and Years 1 raised concerns about implications for school funding and the overall costs for schools.⁹⁴³ Moreover, media reports and studies have noted issues relating to the rollout of the Universal Credit program, and the potential for revised earnings thresholds to

935 Robert Long, Shadi Danechi, Nerys Roberts, UK House of Commons Library, *School Meals and Nutritional Standards in England*, House of Commons Library, London, 4 February 2022, p. 13.

936 *ibid.*, pp. 6, 14.

937 *ibid.*, p. 13.

938 *ibid.*, pp. 6, 12.

939 *ibid.*, p. 12.

940 Department for Education, UK Government, *Guidance: Pupil Premium: Overview* (web-based), updated 16 December 2022, accessed 10 March 2023, <www.gov.uk/government/publications>

941 Robert Long, Shadi Danechi, Nerys Roberts, UK House of Commons Library, *School Meals and Nutritional Standards in England*, House of Commons Library, London, 4 February 2022, p. 39.

942 *ibid.*, p. 6.

943 *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

negatively impact parents on low incomes.⁹⁴⁴ As the BBC stated, the £7,400 eligibility cap could lead to to potentially difficult trade-offs in seeking work with a high enough income to offset the loss of free school meals: 'If a household is earning just under £7,400 and has the chance to earn slightly more money, it may have an incentive to turn it down.'⁹⁴⁵

Finland

Finland is one of a few countries to offer all school students free, daily nutritious school lunches. The equitable provision of schools meals and the promotion of food culture and nutrition is considered an investment in the future and an 'integral and important part of the Finnish education success story' and therefore free of charge alongside necessary learning material materials and transportation to and from school.⁹⁴⁶

How long have food provision programs been running?

Finland has a long history of school meal subsidies and provision, beginning in 1913 with subsidised meals for disadvantaged students. In 1943, legislation was passed that required one municipality to offer elementary school students free school meals. By 1948 this system was expanded nationwide, though in a post-war era of financial hardship the daily meal consisted of porridge and soup.⁹⁴⁷ On the basis of this program Finland claims the longest-running free school meal program in the world. In 1983, Finland began offering free school meals to upper secondary students.⁹⁴⁸ In 2004, the school meals system was given education status in Finland's core school curriculum.⁹⁴⁹

Are food provision programs universal?

All Finnish school students (some 850,000 pre-primary to secondary students in a general population of around 5 and a half million) can access free, daily nutritious meals, while snacks are provided when the interval between meals is deemed too long, and for children in before and after-school activities.⁹⁵⁰ Meal quality and the service provider standards are guided by national legislation, national and local regulations, and the recommendations of

944 Robert Long, Shadi Danechi, Nerys Roberts, UK House of Commons Library, *School Meals and Nutritional Standards in England*, House of Commons Library, London, 4 February 2022, pp. 24-25.

945 Reality Check Team, 'Universal credit: Free school meals proposal keeps cliff edge', *BBC News* (web-based), 17 November 2017, accessed 10 March 2023, <www.bbc.com/news>; Reality Check Team, 'Free school meals: How many children can claim them?', *BBC News* (web-based), 11 October 2022, accessed 10 March 2023, <www.bbc.com/news>

946 National Nutrition Council, 'Eating and Learning Together – recommendations for school meals', 2017 (web-based), p. 19, accessed 2 May 2023, <<https://www.julkari.fi>>; S Sarlio-Lähteenkorva and M Manninen, 'School meals and nutrition education in Finland', *Nutrition Bulletin* (2010): 35, p. 173.

947 S Sarlio-Lähteenkorva and M Manninen, 'School meals and nutrition education in Finland', *Nutrition Bulletin* (2010): 35, p 172; K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, pp. 6, 10.

948 K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, pp 6, 11.

949 *ibid.*, p. 11.

950 Finnish National Agency for Education, 'School Meals in Finland' (web-based), accessed 2 May 2023, <<https://www.oph.fi/en>>; National Nutrition Council, 'Eating and Learning Together – recommendations for school meals', 2017 (web-based), pp. 19, 39, accessed 2 May 2023, <<https://www.julkari.fi/>>

an expert National Nutrition Council.⁹⁵¹ Within these guidelines, however, municipalities and education providers have significant flexibility in arranging school food provision to account for different local circumstances and priorities.⁹⁵² This can include organising and providing for religious, ethical or health related dietary needs at no extra cost.⁹⁵³

School meals consist of typically Finnish food, with portion sizes and nutritional composition (quantity and quality of energy, carbohydrates, salt and fats) varying according to age groups and official recommendations. In all cases, maintaining a balanced, appealing and healthy diet is a priority. Schools usually offer meals in a self-service buffet style, allowing students the choice over what and how much food they eat, while caterers and teaching staff can provide advice on appropriate portions and table manners.⁹⁵⁴ The system also promotes a 'one-plate model' to encourage a rounded diet including salad and vegetables.⁹⁵⁵

How is eligibility determined for schools and/or individual students?

A key piece of legislation, the *Basic Education Act*, states that a 'pupil attending basic education shall be provided with a balanced and appropriately organised and supervised meal on every school day.'⁹⁵⁶ That is, school students are entitled to free, healthy daily school meals by law.

How are food provision programs funded?

There is no specific budget allocation for school food provision as it falls under general education funding. By law, education providers are responsible for offering school meals, and municipalities arrange 95% of basic education, the remaining 5% to state and private schools.⁹⁵⁷ While national law and regulations direct the school food system, its implementation is decentralised.⁹⁵⁸ Municipalities are thus responsible for allocating funding for school provision, with the state contributing around 25% of costs.⁹⁵⁹ In 2017, the national

951 National Nutrition Council, 'Eating and Learning Together – recommendations for school meals', 2017 (web-based), p. 5, accessed 2 May 2023, <<https://www.julkari.fi/>>

952 K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, pp. 13, 15-16.

953 National Nutrition Council, 'Eating and Learning Together – recommendations for school meals', 2017 (web-based), p. 41., accessed 2 May 2023, <<https://www.julkari.fi/>>

954 K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, p. 16.

955 Jane Bautista, 'In Finland, school meals keep students going', *Inquirer.net*, 18 October 2022 (web-based), accessed 2 May 2023, <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/>>

956 Basic Education Act 628/1998, Section 31 (2).

957 K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, p. 7.

958 *ibid.*, pp. 7, 31; S Sarlio-Lähteenkorva and M Manninen, 'School meals and nutrition education in Finland', *Nutrition Bulletin* (2010): 35, p 172.

959 K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, pp. 20, 25.

average cost of a school meal in basic education was EUR 2.80, including food personnel, equipment, and transport.⁹⁶⁰

What is the student/parental contribution to school food provision?

Students and parents need not contribute to the provision of school lunches. However, a 2022 report suggested that shortfalls in local municipality funding due to rising consumer prices could potential result in cutbacks.⁹⁶¹

Are school food provision programs supported by stakeholders and interested parties?

Surveys on student satisfaction with school meal programs is gathered nationally and locally.⁹⁶² Research suggests that the system, while perceived to be popular is also now somewhat taken for granted. And while younger students eat the free school meal every day, older students are more likely to skip free lunches and eat unhealthy snacks instead.⁹⁶³

New Zealand

How long have food provision programs been running?

New Zealand historically has not had broad government-based school meal provision programs, though recent years have seen limited attempts to provide and promote healthy food to students, such as the Fruit in Schools programme, and in various non-government programmes.⁹⁶⁴ Announced in 2019 as a limited two-year pilot programme in targeted areas, the Ministry of Education's Ka Ora, Ka Ako/Healthy School Lunches provides access to nutritious lunches in schools as part of the New Zealand Government's Child Youth and Wellbeing Strategy. This was the first comprehensive government programme to address school food security in New Zealand. As at January 2023, following a major expansion in May 2020, the programme has seen free lunches delivered in around 980 schools around New Zealand.⁹⁶⁵

Are food provision programs universal?

Healthy School Lunches does not provide universal free meals to all schools. However, it does provide access to universal free lunches to all students of all ages (Year 1-13+) in all

960 K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, p. 25.

961 YLE News, 'Schools in Finland may be forced to cut back on lunch menus', 15 August 2022 (web-based), accessed on 2 May 2023, <<https://yle.fi/a/3-12576218>>

962 K Pellikka, M Manninen and S Taivalmaa, 'School meals for all. School feeding: investment in effective learning – Case Finland', Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish National Agency for Education, June 2019, p. 26.

963 *ibid.*, p. 31.

964 Health New Zealand, Fruit in Schools programme (web-based), accessed 26 April 2023, <<https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz>>; D Pillay, A Ali and CA Wham, 'Examining the New Zealand school food environment: what needs to change?', *Nutrition Research Reviews*, vol. 4, no. 2022.

965 NZ Ministry of Education, *Ka Ora, Ka Ako/Healthy School Lunches programme* (web-based), accessed 26 April 2023, <<https://www.education.govt.nz>>; V Peirce, B Jarvis-Child, L Chu, K Lennox, N Kimber, H Clarke, N Wang, T Nguyen Chau and P Winthrop, 'Ka Ora, Ka Ako New Zealand Healthy School Lunches Programme Impact Evaluation', Ministry of Education, 2022, p. 9.

participating schools. While individual schools can opt-out for various reasons, nearly all have chosen to take part.⁹⁶⁶

How is eligibility determined for schools and/or individual students?

Health School Lunches aims to provide food security to the 25% of students facing the levels of relative disadvantage. But to avoid targeting individuals it identifies, through an official Equity Index, those schools with the highest concentration of students facing socio-economic barriers to academic achievement.⁹⁶⁷ Limits to funding mean participation extends to around 220,000 students.⁹⁶⁸ The programme thus combines the intended benefits of universal free lunches within participating schools (to limit stigma among students and to minimise administrative barriers for individuals), with restricted eligibility between schools (for government budgetary reasons). Moreover, the Equity Index is recalculated annually, and any other schools falling into the 25 percent criteria will, subject to funding, be invited to participate in addition to, rather than replacing, schools already in the programme.⁹⁶⁹

How are food provision programs funded?

The New Zealand Government funds the lunches for participating schools at a maximum 'per child, per day' cost, varying according to portion sizes, of:

- NZ\$5.55 for learners in Years 0-3
- NZ\$6.49 for learners in Years 4-8
- NZ \$8.27 for learners in Years 9+

Funding covers food, preparation and delivery, and paying staff working on school lunches.⁹⁷⁰

What is the student/parental contribution to school food provision?

As noted, for schools participating in the programme, government provides funding for daily school lunches.

Individual schools decide whether they take part in the programme, and do not need to give their reasons for their decision. Individual schools and school boards also decide how they will deliver lunches, including whether they make their own, whether they outsource to an external (approved) supplier, or a mix of the two. Schools and school boards also decide on staff training and available spaces.⁹⁷¹ If schools choose to make their own lunches they are

966 V Peirce, B Jarvis-Child, L Chu, K Lennox, N Kimber, H Clarke, N Wang, T Nguyen Chau and P Winthrop, 'Ka Ora, Ka Ako New Zealand Healthy School Lunches Programme Impact Evaluation' Ministry of Education, 2022, p 11.

967 NZ Ministry of Education, Education Funding System Review (web-based), accessed 26 April 2023, <<https://www.education.govt.nz>>

968 NZ Ministry of Education, *Ka Ora, Ka Ako/Healthy School Lunches programme FAQs* (web-based), accessed 26 April 2023, <<https://www.education.govt.nz>>

969 *ibid.*

970 *ibid.*

971 *ibid.*

responsible for nutrition, dietary, religious, capacity, safety and waste management requirements.

Are school food provision programs supported by stakeholders and interested parties?

In April 2023, Health Coalition Aotearoa, an umbrella healthcare organisation, cited research suggesting broad support for extending the Healthy School Lunches programme.⁹⁷²

Elsewhere, news media reported concerns with potential food waste associated with the programme.⁹⁷³ A government-commissioned evaluation in October 2022, which included a survey of 10,000 secondary-school students, found the programme to be broadly successful in providing nutritious school meals and in increasing student wellbeing. However, it was reportedly less successful in providing the same level of benefit to Maori students. The evaluation also found that programme did not improve school attendance.⁹⁷⁴

972 Media Release from Health Coalition, 'HCA research shows 63% of people support doubling Ka Ora Ka Ako healthy school lunches', *New Zealand Doctor*, 5 April 2023 (web-based), accessed 27 April 2023 <<https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz>>; John Gerritsen, 'Call for free school lunches to be extended to more children', *Radio New Zealand*, 7 February 2023 (web-based), accessed 27 April 2023 <<https://www.rnz.co.nz>>

973 "'Large amounts of food waste' thanks to lunches in schools programme', *Northland Age* 7 September 2022 (web-based), accessed 27 April 2023 <<https://www.nzherald.co.nz>>; Ellen O'Dwyer, 'Thousands of taxpayer-funded school lunches left uneaten by students', *Stuff*, 12 May 2021 (web-based), accessed 27 April 2023, <<https://www.stuff.co.nz>>

974 V Peirce, B Jarvis-Child, L Chu, K Lennox, N Kimber, H Clarke, N Wang, T Nguyen Chau and P Winthrop, 'Ka Ora, Ka Ako New Zealand Healthy School Lunches Programme Impact Evaluation' Ministry of Education, 2022, pp, 16-17, 45-47, 55.

Appendix Nine

Results of easy English responses (CEWA schools)

As discussed in Appendix 2, the Committee developed an easy English booklet to facilitate responses to the inquiry from children. Catholic Education WA distributed this to 7 schools they identified as being likely to have students experiencing food insecurity. These schools included primary and secondary, metropolitan, rural and remote, and large and small schools with a variety of Index of Cultural and Social Education Advantage (ICSEA) profiles. CEWA sent the responses back to us in several different formats:

- 37 scanned booklets
- 34 in the form of collages responding to the booklet questions
- 379 on Excel spreadsheets which recorded the responses to each question in the booklet.

These were combined into one spreadsheet allowing us to analyse 450 responses.

Three schools compiled summaries of their students' responses in table form or as dot points. We do not know the number of participants for two of those schools but CEWA said that the views of more than 500 students in total were represented (hence those three summaries represent more than 50 students).

Results of data analysis

1. Age

- 319 responses (71%) from children aged 12 to 15 years
- 128 responses (28%) from children under 12
- 3 responses from young people aged 16 to 18 years

2. Cultural identity

Children were asked to indicate whether they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and if their family was from another country.

- 5.6% indicated they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is a little less than the proportion of children and young people across the state who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (6.8%).⁹⁷⁵
- A high proportion (68%) indicated that their family was from another country. This is higher than for the state population.⁹⁷⁶ This is partly because the schools which participated had much higher proportions of children from CaLD backgrounds. It is also

975 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Profile of Children and Young People in WA – 2022*, Perth, 2022, p. 11.

976 Roughly one-third of WA's population was born overseas. Just over half of people born overseas (54%) were from countries where English is not the main language. <<https://dlgsc.geografia.com.au>>

possible that some respondents were thinking of their ancestry (several previous generations) rather than just their parents when they answered the question.

- Vietnam was the country cited most often as where the respondent's family was from (73).
- 73 were from 20 different African nations, with South Sudan the most cited (14).
- 46 were from Burma/Myanmar
- 17 were from Iraq
- 12 were from each of India, Italy and the Philippines

These figures are not necessarily representative of the cultural backgrounds of children across the state.

3. Going without food

Children were asked to indicate whether there were times when they did not get the food they needed, and how often this occurred.

- Around half of the children said this **never** happened to them. This was consistent for children from Australian and CLD backgrounds. Only a quarter of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents said this was the case. Given the low numbers of submissions from ATSI students (only 24) this percentage must be used with caution.
- Around 10% of the students indicated that they may not get the food they need **most days**. The figure was slightly lower for CaLD children (8%) and higher for Australian children (13%). Four of the 24 Aboriginal children said this was the case.
- A slightly higher number (13%) said they did not get the food they need on **some days**. However, this was not consistent across cultural backgrounds, with a higher proportion of CaLD and ATSI children indicating this than Australian children.
- Just under a third of children said they went without food **not many days**. This was the case for a slightly higher proportion of the ATSI children and slightly lower proportion of CaLD children.

While the Committee was not advised of the names of the participating schools, CEWA did advise that the students who completed submissions were from schools more likely to have children experiencing food insecurity (and possibly higher levels of disadvantage). Hence, the results are not an indication of the level of food insecurity across all schools. It is nevertheless concerning that half of the children said they did not always get the food they need.

(Note: open-ended comments on the submissions indicate that some students interpreted the question prompt *You may not get the good food you need* as not getting food that they like. i.e. they had enough food, but it was not necessarily what they would choose.)

Although one-third said that this happened on **not many days**, it is concerning if a child does not have the food they need on **any day**.

17 of the 24 ATSI kids said they do not get the food they need on at least some days. This is a much higher proportion than the other groups. Even though the numbers are small and hence not necessarily reliable, it accords with what we heard in remote communities (although, children in some of these communities receive breakfast and lunch at school).

Open-ended responses: What happens, how do you feel, does it stop you going to school?

Students could write anything they wanted to in response to these prompts. However, most answered the questions directly.

Only 12 said that it would stop them (or theoretically, someone) from going to school, but this was largely because they thought they would be too unwell to attend – not because they would be too embarrassed to go to school without food. None mentioned embarrassment or shame.

- Unsurprisingly, feeling hungry was the feeling that was mentioned most often – 79 times.
- Feeling sleepy, tired, weak or dizzy was mentioned 39 times
- Feeling sad, moody or disappointed was mentioned 35 times
- Feeling sick, sore or having pains was mentioned 33 times
- Being unable to focus or concentrate in class was mentioned 18 times
- Feeling angry or annoyed was mentioned 17 times.

4. What makes it hard to get good food?

Roughly 60% of students (266) provided valid responses⁹⁷⁷ to the question ‘What makes it hard to get good food?’. Three examples were provided in the booklet – ‘there is no food in the house, no one can cook the food, the shops do not have any good food’. Perhaps not surprisingly, these three featured among the top responses.

- No food or not enough good food in the house was mentioned 51 times
- Having no money or not enough money was mentioned 45 times
- The cost of food or food being too expensive was mentioned 39 times
- There being no food or not enough good food at the shops was mentioned 31 times
- No one who can cook the food was mentioned 26 times
- Not having any time or enough time to either shop, cook or eat was mentioned 24 times.
- Other reasons given (between 6 and 12 times) were that it was hard or not possible to get to the shops or the shop was not open, no parent was home to cook or prepare food, they could not be bothered to eat/cook or were too tired, and food not being to their liking.

⁹⁷⁷ By valid, we mean responses which provided a reason for not being able to get good food. Responses such as ‘I get good food’ or ‘I have the food I need’ were not counted.

5. Do you need more help to get good food?

Most children (about 85%) said they **did not need more help** to get good food.

According to age

- The proportion of children who said they **needed help** to get good food was the same for both the under 12 and the 12 to 15 age groups – 12%.

According to cultural background

- Of the 54 that said **yes, they did need more help**, the majority (38) were children from a different cultural background. Given the high number of submissions from children from CaLD backgrounds, this number represents only 12% of the CaLD cohort.
- Only 9 were Australian and only 6 were Aboriginal – although those 6 represent a quarter of the Aboriginal respondents.

According to whether they go without food

- Of those that said they did not get enough good food **most days**, nearly two-thirds said they **did not need more help** to get good food.
- The majority of those that said they did not get enough good food **some days** also said they **did not need more help** to get good food (59%)
- Almost all of those that said they did not have enough good food on **not many days** said they **did not need more help** to get food (90%).
- Overall, around **one in 5** children who said they did not get the good food they needed on **at least some days** said that they **needed more help** to get good food.

According to 'Do you go to other places to get food?'

- Around 35% of the respondents (n = 19) who said they **needed more help** to get good food said they **did not** go to other places to get free food.

6. Have you learnt about good food?

- Almost all respondents (95%) said they had learnt about good food.
- Almost a third (31%) said that this had helped a lot.
- More than half (57%) said it had helped a bit.
- Only 11% said it did not help at all.
- Australian children were less likely to say that it helped a lot than the other groups (23% compared to 32%) and more likely to say that it helped a bit (62% compared to 53% for CaLD.)

7. Do you go to other places to get free food?

Half of the respondents (228) said they sourced food from other places. We cannot be sure whether they did this because they were hungry or just because they happened to be at those places (e.g. a relative's house after school).

However, just over two-thirds of these respondents also said that they **do not get the food they need on at least some days** (and 13% said this was the case **most days**).

Most mentioned more than one place where they obtained food. Twenty-nine said they obtained food from somewhere not listed in the booklet, and all but 2 specified where this was:

- 12 mentioned school (other than breakfast club) e.g. the office or a recess/lunch program
- 9 mentioned shops e.g. free fruit for kids or free samples
- Other responses included from the bin (1), the pub (1), parties (2), fast food outlets (1) and work (1).

8. Idea of a school lunch for everyone

Respondents were asked what they thought about the idea of all children getting a good lunch at school each day.

- 64% believed it would be a good idea
- 5% said it was not a good idea
- 27% were unsure
- 4% did not answer the question or gave an unclear answer.

It was not made clear that the lunch would be provided by the government for free as this was considered too complex to put into simple language. As a result, it is likely that some students did not understand the question and may have answered according to the concept of children having a good lunch (i.e. 'of course all children need a good lunch') and not specifically the idea of having a lunch provided.

According to cultural background

- CaLD students (or students whose families are from a different cultural background) were more likely than Australian and ATSI students to say that a school lunch was a good idea (67% compared to 59% and 54% respectively).
- Around one-third of Australian and ATSI students were unsure about the idea, while only a quarter of students from CaLD backgrounds were unsure.

According to whether they go without food

- Those that said they went without food **most days** were a little more likely to say a school lunch was a good idea than others (70% compared to the overall average of 64%). They were less likely than others to be unsure (23% compared to 27%).
- Children who said they had enough good food were as supportive of the idea of a school lunch as children overall.

9. Ideas to help

The final question invited students to provide any ideas they had for helping children access healthy food. Since this question followed the question which asked their thoughts on a

school lunch, many answered in relation to school food specifically (and may have been instructed to do so by the administering teacher). 361 students provided a response.

- 43 responses related to just being conscious of eating healthy food and bringing healthy food to school. This included eating less food from the canteen, which many regarded as not providing healthy food.
- 28 students thought the canteen should provide healthier food and a greater variety.
- 42 thought canteen prices should be lower.
- 84 students mentioned access to free food at school in some form. This included:
 - a free lunch, food vouchers, and emergency food (such as sandwiches) for kids who needed it (36 mentions)
 - free fruit/vegetables for everyone (17 mentions)
 - some food types (unspecified) being free or food being free on some days of the week (14 mentions).
- Some students suggested that the school should provide food but not necessarily for free.
 - 18 thought there should be food available at school, with some suggesting some kind of payment system
 - 11 mentioned breakfast clubs
 - 5 thought a cafeteria (indoors place to sit and eat) would be a good idea.
- 18 thought some kind of food literacy program would be helpful.
- 10 suggested a healthy eating day or days when students would be encouraged to bring only healthy food.
- 22 responses related to food donations or fundraising activities being helpful.
- 10 said that they could get healthier food by asking someone.
- 11 said help to afford food generally (income support or lower cost food in the shops) would be helpful.
- 6 said it was up to parents to ensure their children were eating healthily.



Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace, West Perth WA 6005
Telephone: +61 8 9222 7222
Email: laco@parliament.wa.gov.au
Website: www.parliament.wa.gov.au