



The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.

Photo: Wendy Wei from Pexels.

One in four Tasmanians experienced food shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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One in four respondents to The Tasmania Project's Food Survey reported running out of food because they could not afford to buy more during the COVID-19 pandemic. This large survey of 1,170 Tasmanians showed that food insecurity* has increased relative to pre-COVID levels. Tasmanians whose jobs have been impacted, and vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, single people with dependents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and young people, were more affected.

**Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. For comparison, the prevalence of food insecurity amongst the general Australian population (pre COVID-19) has been estimated to be approximately 5%. The Tasmanian Population Health Survey in 2019 reported that 6.2% of Tasmanians were experiencing food insecurity due to financial stress.*

Key findings

- The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have significantly worsened food security in Tasmania, with more than 25% of the 1,170 Tasmanian respondents experiencing food insecurity to some extent and 14% of respondents experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity.
- While a significant proportion of respondents are experiencing food insecurity to some extent during the pandemic, young Tasmanians, single parent households, those with a disability, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders and temporary residents have been the most affected.
- Tasmanian respondents who have experienced changes to employment or a reduction in income as a result of COVID-19 are experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity.
- One in two of Tasmanian respondents who are currently receiving JobSeeker payments reported running out of food and being unable to buy more, which is double the level of food insecurity experienced by those receiving JobKeeper Payments (25%).



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Survey results

The Tasmania Project surveyed more than 1,170 Tasmanians from across the State about food access and supply during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that the burden of food insecurity far exceeds pre COVID-19 levels, with more than 25% of respondents reporting that they have experienced some degree of food insecurity within the last month. Concerningly, 14% of Tasmanian respondents reported experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity, meaning they are regularly going without food and do not have access to enough healthy food to meet their needs.

Some Tasmanians reported experiencing higher levels of food insecurity than others. Nearly half (43%) of 18-24 year old respondents and 31% of 26-35 year old respondents reported being food insecure, which is higher compared with Tasmanians in older age groups (around 25%). 56% of Tasmanians identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reported being food insecure compared with 24.7% of respondents who did not identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Tasmanians living with a disability or health condition which impacts their lives were more likely to be food insecure (39%) when compared with Tasmanians without a disability (22%).

Where and how you live matters, with 33% of rural respondents reporting being food insecure compared with 23% of their urban dwelling counterparts. Nearly half of single people with dependents experienced food insecurity (46%), which is much higher than couples living with and without dependents (approximately 25%). Temporary residents were highly food insecure (59%) compared with Australian citizens and permanent residents (less than 25%).

The labour market has changed quickly due to COVID-19, and 35% of Tasmanians whose job has been impacted by COVID-19 have reported experiencing food insecurity compared with 22% of Tasmanians whose employment was unchanged. Tasmanians without work reported being worse off, with nearly half (48%) of unemployed respondents reporting food insecurity compared with 23% of those with jobs.

Two in five Tasmanians in the lowest quartile of income reported being food insecure compared with one in five from higher income quartiles. The increase in financial stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic including a sudden reduction in income had a major impact on food security. The majority of Tasmanian respondents (65%) who have lost most of their income (up to 99%) have reported being food insecure. Nearly half (42%) of respondents who lost up to 49% of income and one quarter of respondents who have lost up to 24% of their income have reported experiencing food insecurity.

Those receiving the Australian Government's JobKeeper Coronavirus Payments have reported a similar level of food insecurity (25%) to those whose jobs were not impacted by the pandemic. However, half of the respondents receiving the JobSeeker Payments (52%) reported experiencing food insecurity.

Where next?

The data captured as part of The Tasmania Project's Food Survey provide a sobering snapshot of the level of food insecurity experienced in Tasmania during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food insecurity is a serious public health problem and Tasmania must adopt a rights-based approach to food security. This approach requires States to fulfil their obligation to ensure that safe, nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable food is available under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Ensuring that food supplies are affordable and accessible to all people in the community is a priority, regardless of their financial means or geographical location.

Research to gain a deeper understanding of the skills and strategies Tasmanians have used to cope and manage when experiencing food shortages is an important next step.

The Food Survey sample

Of the 1170 respondents who completed the survey, 71.9% were female, 22.7% were male and 0.5% specified other. 26.6% were aged 56-65 years, 22% were aged 46-55 years of age, 19% were aged 65 or older, 18.8% were aged 36-45, 11% were aged 26-35 and 2.6% were aged between 18-25 years. 59.5% lived in Southern Tasmania, followed by 23.1% from the North and 17.4% from the North-West and West. The majority of respondents (72.1%) lived in urban areas and 29.7% lived in rural regions. 2.3% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 4 in 5 were born in Australia 43.1% were in a couple family with dependents, nearly a third were in a couple family with no children (23.2%), 5.9% were in a single parent family with dependents and 22.9% either lived alone or in a group household. 71.9% were partnered (married, de-facto, or partnered but living apart) and 12.9% were single. The majority of respondents (67.3%) had completed a University degree. 62% were currently employed, 5.1% were unemployed and 32.9% were retired, studying, or a homemaker.