

The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.

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Running out of food an ongoing issue for Tasmanians during COVID-19.

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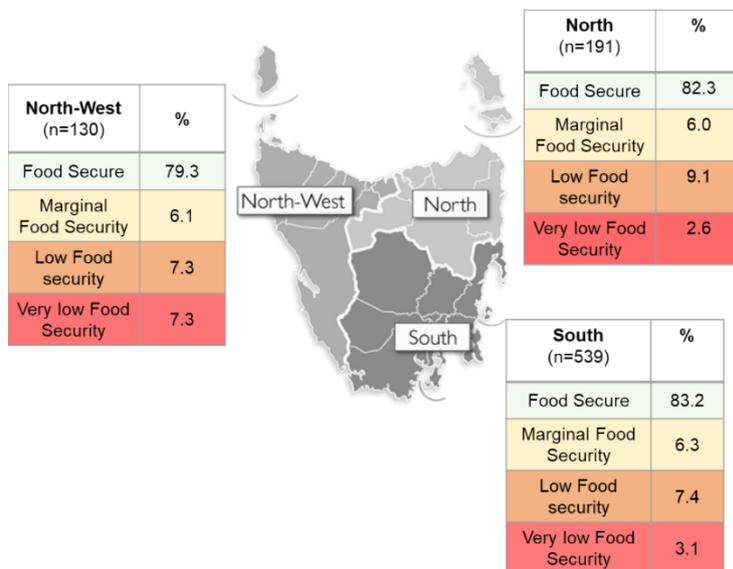
Even as the supermarket shelves return to normal and panic buying becomes a thing of the past, rates of food insecurity* reported by Tasmanians have not greatly improved since earlier in the pandemic.

In our latest survey of 1,133 Tasmanians, we found an alarming number (close to 1 in 5) have run out of food because they could not afford to buy more during the COVID-19 pandemic. This represents an increase relative to pre-COVID levels and shows there has been little improvement compared to results from the Food Survey we conducted in June.

The same groups of people within the Tasmanian community continue to experience the highest rates of food insecurity - those whose jobs have been impacted, and vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, single people with dependents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, temporary residents, and young people.

Key findings

- The COVID-19 pandemic appears to be having long-term impacts on the food security of Tasmanians, with 18% of the 1,133 respondents experiencing food insecurity to some extent.
- While there has been some reduction in the rate of Tasmanians experiencing food insecurity since June (which was found to be more than 25%), there continues to be an alarming number of Tasmanians (1 in 5) struggling to buy enough food.
- Young Tasmanians, single parent households, those with a disability, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, and temporary residents continue to be the most affected, with high levels of food insecurity reported in both surveys.
- Higher rates of very low food security were reported by respondents in the North-West and West (7%) compared with those in the North (3%) and South (3%).
- Similar patterns of food insecurity to those found in June were found amongst groups receiving government benefits, with around half of respondents on JobSeeker (48%), youth allowance (50%) and the disability pension (56%) experiencing food insecurity.



The prevalence of food security by region. Map sourced from the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services

Survey results

The Tasmania Project surveyed 1,133 Tasmanians from across the state about food access and supply during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the third general survey (TTP3) conducted from 26 August to 6 September.

The results show that the burden of food insecurity continues to exceed pre COVID-19 levels, with 18% of respondents reporting that they had experienced some degree of food insecurity within the last month. This is less than the rate found in the Food Survey we conducted in June, which found 26% of Tasmanian respondents were experiencing food insecurity. Concerningly, the proportion of Tasmanian respondents reporting low or very low food security has not changed much over time (14% in June compared to almost 12% in August), meaning there are a large number of people in the community who are regularly going without food and do not have access to enough food to meet their needs.

The groups within the Tasmanian community experiencing the most food insecurity have remained largely unchanged since June. Young people aged 18-24 years still have the lowest levels of food security of all age groups (63%), though there has been some improvement since June when the rate of food security in this group was even lower (57%). Food security rose with age, with respondents aged 65 years and above reporting the highest levels of food security in both surveys (75% in June and 89% in August).

Less than half (44%) of respondents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were food secure, compared with 84% 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 also more likely to be food insecure (32%) when compared with Tasmanians without a disability (85%). These groups showed similarly high rates of food insecurity in June.

While results were not significantly different by region, 7% of respondents in the North-West and West reported very low food security compared with only 3% in both the North and South. This suggests the pattern of food insecurity has not changed since June, as the previous survey found higher levels of food insecurity were experienced by rural respondents compared with those living in urban areas (33% vs. 23%).

Compared with Australian citizens and permanent residents, temporary residents have experienced far lower levels of food security during the pandemic, with more than half experiencing

low or very low food security in both June (59%) and August (58%). The majority of respondents not receiving government benefits were food secure (85%) in comparison to respondents receiving JobSeeker (48%), the disability pension (56%) and youth allowance (50%). Those receiving JobKeeper and the age pension shared a similar level of food security to those not receiving benefits (85% and 89% respectively), however any level of food insecurity is concerning.

Respondents who did not have to make any financial actions due to COVID were largely food secure (88%). Of those who had made financial changes, only 56% of those who reduced their home-loan and rent were food secure, compared with 50% of people who increased their credit, 26% who borrowed money from family/friends and 31% who sold household goods. Financial stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly having a major impact on food security, with similar results obtained in the June survey.

The majority of respondents experiencing food insecurity reported doing nothing to cope with their situation (57%), however a large proportion employed several strategies. The most common strategies were eating less food (31%) and eating food of a lower quality (26%). Other strategies included borrowing money for food or buying food on credit (10%), seeking food from social networks (8%), selling possessions to buy food (8%), emergency food relief (7%) and foraging for food (7%).

Where next?

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the lives of Tasmanians, especially through challenges to the Tasmanian economy and ongoing border restrictions, it is critical to continue to monitor food insecurity in our state. With the impending reduction to the Australian government support payment "the Coronavirus supplement", it is anticipated that financial challenges in many households will result in increased food insecurity. Given the majority of our respondents reported not accessing help through emergency food relief, it is important that Tasmanian residents are supported to access enough healthy food to meet their needs in order to avoid the long-term health implications of going without food.

**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.*