



The Tasmania Project

Is high food insecurity the new normal in Tasmania?

Report number: 45

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Date: 4 June 2021

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Nearly 1 in 5 Tasmanian respondents are still running out of food. Is this the new normal?

It has been nearly 12 months since our supermarket shelves have returned to normal and panic buying has become a thing of the past. Unfortunately, The Tasmania Project's latest survey in May 2021 indicates that food insecurity continues to affect close to 1 in 5 Tasmanian respondents to the survey. **Is this the new normal for food insecurity in Tasmania?**

The Tasmania Project's fourth general survey of 1,110 Tasmanians (open from 29 April to 12 May 2021) has measured food insecurity for the third time in 12 months. The results show that 18% (or close to 1 in 5) of Tasmanian respondents have run out of food because they could not afford to buy more. In May 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, [26% of Tasmanians were food insecure](#).*

In September 2020, food insecurity had [reduced to 18%](#). Our current results are still concerningly higher than the 6% of Tasmanians who were experiencing food insecurity in 2019. Given more than a year has passed since the introduction of the public health restrictions that reduced access to food, this suggests that other issues are causing food insecurity.

Our latest survey shows the groups of Tasmanians at the highest risk of food insecurity hasn't changed. Vulnerable Tasmanians continue to experience the highest rates of food insecurity including those whose jobs have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, those with disabilities, families 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 1,110 respondents to the May 2021 Tasmania Project Survey experiencing food insecurity.
- 11% of households are experiencing severe food insecurity, meaning they are regularly going without food.
- There has been no reduction in the rate of Tasmanians experiencing food insecurity since September 2020 and only a minor reduction since May 2020.
- Young people, households with dependents, those with disabilities, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, temporary residents and those whose jobs have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be the most affected.
- Financial stress appears to be the biggest factor. Respondents who were concerned about their income were 5 times more likely to be food insecure. Additionally, households that experienced a reduction in income resulting from the pandemic were twice as likely to be food insecure.
- Food insecure households coped by eating less food (32%) and eating lower quality food (25%). Only 5% of food insecure respondents accessed emergency food relief through charities, indicating community food solutions to food insecurity remain a priority.

**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. The Tasmania Project uses a 6-item screening tool to measure food insecurity, developed and validated by the [USDA](#).*

Survey Date	Total Number of Participants	% of Food Secure Participants	% of Participants with Marginal Food Security	% of Participants with Low Food Security	% of Participants with Very Low Food Security	Total % of Participants Classified as Food Insecure
May 2020	1067	74%	12.0%	9.9%	3.7%	26%
September 2020	1097	82%	6.2%	8.2%	3.6%	18%
May 2021	1100	82%	6.7%	8.2%	2.9%	18%

Figure 1: Change in the prevalence of food insecurity in Tasmania over 12 months as measured by the Tasmania Project

Survey results*

The burden of food insecurity continues to exceed pre COVID-19 levels (6% in 2019), with 18% of respondents to our survey reporting that they had experienced some degree of food insecurity within the last month (April - May 2021).

This figure is the same as in September 2020, and slightly less than in May 2020, which found 26% of Tasmanian respondents were experiencing food insecurity. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of people experiencing marginal food security has nearly halved from 12% to 7%.

Marginal food security refers to households who at times had some problems or anxiety about accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced. This indicates that some strategies put in place during the pandemic have helped these Tasmanians recover.

However, it is concerning that the proportion of Tasmanian respondents reporting low or very low food security has not changed much over time (14% in May compared 11% in September 2020 and May 2021), meaning there are still many people

in the community who are regularly going without food and whose food intake and nutrition may have been compromised.

The groups within the Tasmanian community experiencing the most food insecurity have remained largely unchanged:

- Young people aged 18-24 years still have the lowest levels of food security of all age groups (54%).
- Food insecurity decreased with age, with respondents aged 65 years and above reporting the lowest levels of food insecurity in all surveys (75% in May 2020 and 89% in both September 2020 and May 2021).
- A third of respondents (35%) who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were food insecure, compared with 17% 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 (27%) when compared with Tasmanians without a disability (13%).

**Survey data for this report was analysed using descriptive statistics (prevalence data) and at-risk groups were identified using univariate and multivariate binary logistic regression.*

- Compared with Australian citizens and permanent residents, temporary residents have experienced far higher levels of food insecurity during the pandemic, with 50% experiencing food insecurity.
- Most respondents (58%) who earned less than \$20,000 per year were food insecure, compared with 28% of those earning up to \$60,000, 21% of those earning \$60-80,000, and 5.6% of people earning up to \$100,000 per year.
- Regardless of income level, those who were concerned about their finances were 5 times more likely to be food insecure.
- A quarter of families with dependents (25%) reported experiencing food insecurity, compared with 10% of couple families without dependents.
- 30% of households who had lost income because of the pandemic were food insecure, compared with 12% for those whose income stayed the same.

Like we found in September 2020, most participants who were food insecure reported using no behaviour changes to cope with their situation (48%), however a large proportion employed several strategies. The most common strategies were eating less food (32%) and eating food of a lower quality (25%). Other strategies included borrowing money for food or buying food on credit (10%), seeking food from social networks (11%), selling possessions to buy food (7%) and foraging for food (6%).

Interestingly, despite reports of an increase in demand for emergency food relief across the state during the pandemic, only 5% of food insecure respondents to our survey reported accessing these services. While emergency food relief agencies provide an important service to people experiencing multiple social disadvantages, a new focus on developing community food solutions to reduce food insecurity in Tasmania is paramount.

Our findings give rise to several new questions:

- Is a prevalence of 18% the “new normal” for food insecurity in Tasmania?
- Why are government investments for addressing food insecurity focused primarily on emergency food relief when only 5% of food insecure people access these services?
- What can be done to support those experiencing food insecurity beyond emergency food relief?
- What will it take to transition away from reliance on emergency food relief to authentic, scalable community and school food solutions?
- What investments beyond emergency food relief will be used to support communities to build food resilience?

Where next?

Food insecurity has been recognised on [Tasmania's political agenda](#). Our latest findings reinforce the need for continued investment into community food solutions that reduce food insecurity in Tasmania.

The next steps should include:

- Appropriate funding by the Tasmanian Government of community programs that tackle food insecurity. This would involve a transition to ongoing, long-term, financial support for scalable community and school food solutions.
- Support for scalable food social enterprises to provide convenient and affordable healthy food and build resilient local communities.
- Support for place-based networks that bring together food systems stakeholders (i.e., growers, retailers, hospitality, local government, community organisations including schools) to create customised community solutions.