

TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY: Getting Healthy Food On The Table..

A 2016 Australian study has shown that a healthy diet is cheaper than the current unhealthy diet of many Australians¹. However, in 2014 approximately 6.9 % of people across NSW reported that they had suffered food insecurity in the previous 12 months; that is there were times when they ran out of food and could not afford to buy more². This included 6.6 % of Far West Local Health District (LHD), 6.8% from Murrumbidgee LHD, 9.2% from Hunter New England LHD and 9.9% from Western NSW LHD. The Western NSW 2014 Food Access and Affordability summaries³ report on the availability, cost and affordability of a basic healthy diet during 2014. They suggest that many households in western NSW may have had difficulty affording a healthier diet to maximize their health and wellbeing. As a result, they may need to buy cheaper foods and may have less healthy diets which is sometimes called food stress⁴.

So what can we do about food insecurity and food stress? Action strategies can be both universal (for everyone) and targeted (to high risk groups /communities), such as those that are more socioeconomically disadvantaged, more remote and communities with higher Aboriginal populations. A few common sense and evidence informed ideas are;

Grow, cook and share healthy food and food skills:

- Grow some fresh food and share/swap what you can't use.
- Have fun cooking tasty healthy and cheap meals regularly with kids, family and friends of all ages.
- Share tasty healthy food and recipes using cheaper seasonal and local foods.
- Start or support a community vegetable garden or food co-operative for low cost vegetables and fruit.



Strengthen food literacy, food relief and recovery services:

- Make it easier for kids and adults to learn about growing their own food, purchasing fruit and vegetables in season, cooking healthy food and minimizing food waste. This knowledge is often described as food literacy⁵ skills.
- Search for FoodREDi⁶, YHunger⁷ and OzHarvest NEST⁸ programs and Love Food Hate Waste⁹. Start or support these food classes to meet the needs of more people and disadvantaged groups.
- Share knowledge of where people can go to get cheap or free healthy food or meals if they are hungry e.g. Wagga District Food Group has made a "Food Help" poster/pamphlet¹⁰ to promote local options.
- Donate time and skills, edible fresh food, money or other resources to agencies recovering edible food or providing food relief locally. *Oz Harvest*¹¹, *SecondBite*¹² and *Food Bank*¹³ have lessons to share via their websites.



Advocate and build support for local community, state and national action:

- Get together to collect evidence on or monitor local issues and design sustainable solutions to tackle them using local strengths.
- Each of the following documents detail many opportunities for individuals, organisations, governments of all levels to advocate for and take action on food insecurity at various levels;
 - The National Rural Health Alliance publication *Food Security and Health in rural and Remote Australia*¹⁴.
 - The Right to Food Coalition advocacy document *The Human Right to Food*¹⁵
 - The Public Health Association of Australia, Dietitians Association of Australia, Australian red Cross, Indigenous Allied Health Australia, Victoria Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and National Heart Foundation of Australia, *Joint Policy Statement on food Security for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples Policy 2016*¹⁶.



Research issues, evaluate activities and share evidence and stories:



- Conduct needs assessments and research to describe local issues, opportunities and solutions. Ask local universities for help. Many Australian universities are involved in the INFORMAS¹⁷ projects leading monitoring efforts internationally and nationally, including a recent publication by Lee et al. (2016)¹.
- Evaluate the strengths and achievements of action strategies and opportunities to improve them and their sustainability.
- Identify local champions (individuals, groups, stores or organizations) and what they are doing to make healthy food choices easier. Share these stories and achievements.
- Get inspired, learn with and from others by getting together and participating in groups like the Right to Food Coalition¹⁸.

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