



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF FOOD INSECURITY

Bundaberg Community Food Assessment Fact Sheet

BACKGROUND

Food insecurity has many components that are influenced by both the food system and individual, social and economic factors. Factors that may affect food insecurity at an individual level include nutrition knowledge, cooking skills, availability of cooking equipment and time and ability to prepare food¹. These in turn are influenced by social and economic factors of the individual, family or community².

As part of the Bundaberg Community Food Assessment (CFA) relevant social determinants of food security for the Bundaberg region were collected. A demographic profile identified prevalence of at risk groups and interviews with key local informants identified the relevant individual level determinants e.g. cooking skills. This fact sheet discusses the results of these analyses and makes recommendations for managing and improving food security within high risk groups.

DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

While the overall prevalence of food insecurity in Australia is estimated at between five and 10 per cent research suggests that it may be more prevalent within specific population groups such as those on a low income, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the frail aged^{3,4}.

Within the Bundaberg region the following groups were identified as significant:

Demographic group	Per cent of Bundaberg population	Relevant food insecurity issues
Elderly	17.6%	Lower income levels (e.g. aged pension); ↓ Vehicle ownership; ↑ Physical or mental disabilities; Lack of cooking knowledge for some e.g. men or people suffering from dementia.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons	2.8%	Lower income levels & unemployment; inadequate transport; cultural transition; lower levels of education; higher rates of illness and chronic disease
Low income earners and unemployed	26.1% earned a low income (\$500 per week or less) 7.7% unemployed	Low discretionary income; ↓ budgeting skills; ↓ cooking skills; lower levels of education

Other groups in the Bundaberg region that may also potentially be experiencing food insecurity included young people, single parent families, some immigrants groups (e.g. Filipino), men and people with a disability.

PERSONAL BARRIERS

Key informant interviews identified a number of social determinants that they saw as contributing to food insecurity. These were categorised into affordability characteristics and access characteristics excluding transport related factors (these are discussed in the Access to Food in Bundaberg fact sheet of this series).

¹ Rychetnick, L, Webb, K, Story, L, & Katz, T 2003, Food Security Options Paper – A planning framework and menu of options for policy and practice intervention, New South Wales Centre for Public Health Nutrition.

² Queensland Health 2006, Urban indigenous nutrition issues in the greater Brisbane area, Central Area Population Health Services, Queensland.

³ Radimer, KL, Allsopp R, Harvey PW, Firman, DW & Watson, EK 1999 'Food insufficiency in Queensland', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* vol. 23, no.1, p.108.

⁴ Booth, S & Smith, A 2001, 'Food security and poverty in Australia-challenges for dietitians', *Australian Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics*, vol. 58, p. 3.

Affordability

Many informants identified that affordability of food for their clients was a relevant issue due to the following:

- Food was not a priority budget item due to other living expenses such as housing and transport costs
- Food was not a priority budget item due to the cost of lifestyle priorities or addictions like alcohol, drugs, cigarettes and gambling.
- The cost of food, particularly healthy food was increasing
- Lack of ability to budget

"I think budget's a big problem. We've done a number of programs and surveys, and budget always seems to be a problem in the community. I think it's knowledge and awareness. They've never been taught to budget their money but you have to be on a low income. It's not much money to play with out there." (B014)

Access to Food

A lack of cooking skills was identified as one of the key barriers to being able to access appropriate food. In some cases this related to technological skill – how to use the equipment and in other cases related to the ability to menu plan and cook meals from a range of foods. Some informants however, acknowledged a broader issue related to the inability to be resourceful and problem solve.

"I think with the young people I suppose it depends on what you grow up with. A lot of them have just grown up with quite easy food, not necessarily set meal times and things like that. A very unstructured learning in relation to food and healthy food. So I guess education wise they've been taught what they've grown up with. So education wise it's about letting them know about what's out there, what are some healthy options and what are some even cheaper options. Just how to prepare cheap, easy meals rather than just the easy option." (B02)

Single older men, single parents, young people and people with a disability were all identified as needing cooking skill interventions. There were indications from some service providers that skills were adequate but that clients were "lazy" or "could not be bothered". For some it was a value judgement, however for others there was recognition of the reality of everyday life and the stresses on families. The inability to cook or the lack of desire to cook was also linked to social isolation for some groups such as elderly men. Another point raised was that this lack of skills and motivation to prepare your own food is now generational, where young adults haven't learnt to cook because their parents also never cooked.

While the ability to cook was identified as a critical issue, there was recognition that many families lacked the basic equipment to prepare a meal. This may have been due to their living conditions at the time or due to financial difficulties which meant that utility services were no longer available. Food storage was an issue for those who are homeless. A lack of cooking equipment however, was not seen as an issue across all service providers.

"Lack of time" was identified as an issue, however most service providers framed time as the compression of time in which families were prepared to spend on food preparation and eating.

"And I think there's another element to where we've come with healthy lifestyles is this notion that nobody has time anymore. It's not one that I personally sit with because we've all got the same amount of time in a day; it's how we prioritise that time. And, if you don't think food and healthy lifestyle is important then you don't prioritise it. If you think sitting down and playing a game boy is your priority, you prioritise it." (B018)

KEY ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority groups for food insecurity include the elderly, those on a low income and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Other at risk groups are youth, people with a disability, some culturally diverse groups. A lack of personal skills around food preparation was raised as a barrier to food security, particularly for people in the most at risk groups. Lack of time, motivation, budgeting skills and access to cooking equipment are compounding factors.

Recommendations include working with local community organisations to improve these social determinants through cooking skills and food budgeting programs particularly for young people and low income earners but also other groups like the elderly and culturally diverse groups.