



**Supplementary submission  
in response to the  
Senate Select Committee  
Inquiry on the Cost of Living  
August 2024**

[FOODBANK.ORG.AU](https://www.foodbank.org.au)



## Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry



### Contents

Background and Context .....	3
The current situation.....	3
Increased Client Numbers .....	5
Increased Demand .....	7
Changing Faces of Hunger .....	8
Drivers of Food Insecurity .....	9

## Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry



### Background and Context

Foodbank Australia's first submission in response to the Senate Select Committee's Cost of Living Inquiry was lodged in February 2023. At that time, cost of living pressures were not only driving demand for food relief, but also impacting supply. Our recommendations focused on initiatives that would enhance the ability of Foodbanks across Australia to provide additional food relief as a measure to assist vulnerable cohorts in freeing up scarce resources to ease other cost of living pressures.

In December 2023, we provided additional evidence in response to written questions on notice. This evidence focused on anticipated demand throughout the Christmas and back to school period, as well as the increased prevalence of households with at least one person in employment seeking food relief; the dramatic increase in the number of people new to food insecurity seeking food relief for the very first time; and the intersection between the cost of living crisis and natural disaster preparedness and responsiveness.

As explained during Foodbank Australia's appearance at the Committee's 1 February 2023 public hearing, the impacts of the cost of living crisis were still unfolding. We implored the Committee to consider both sides of the ledger – income and expenses. We called for *"solutions that are enduring – like a permanent increase to income support payments in the next Budget. We need solutions that are going to deal with the immediate crisis, like ensuring food relief is available to those struggling to put a meal on the table today. We need clever policy solutions that will deliver increased food and stimulate regional economies, like a national food donation tax incentive"*<sup>1</sup>.

### The current situation

Eighteen months later, these comments remain just as relevant, if not more, especially in light of the Reserve Bank of Australia's latest Statement on Monetary Policy, which highlights that *"Inflation is still too high and is coming down slower than ... expected [with] a risk that inflation stays above the target range for too long"*<sup>2</sup>. Whilst economic growth is expected to pick up in 2025, it must be recognised that Foodbanks have endured years of sustained, heightened demand for food relief, with supply of nutritious, culturally appropriate food simply not keeping up. There is only so long that Foodbank can lean on food and fund donors in an environment where those very donors are also being squeezed. The need for increased investment from the Federal Government to Foodbank has never been greater, noting that food relief remains the most common emergency relief service type by an order of magnitude, and searches for food relief (generally from those new to food relief) continue to grow.

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<sup>1</sup><https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22committees%2Fcommsen%2F26390%2F0000%22>

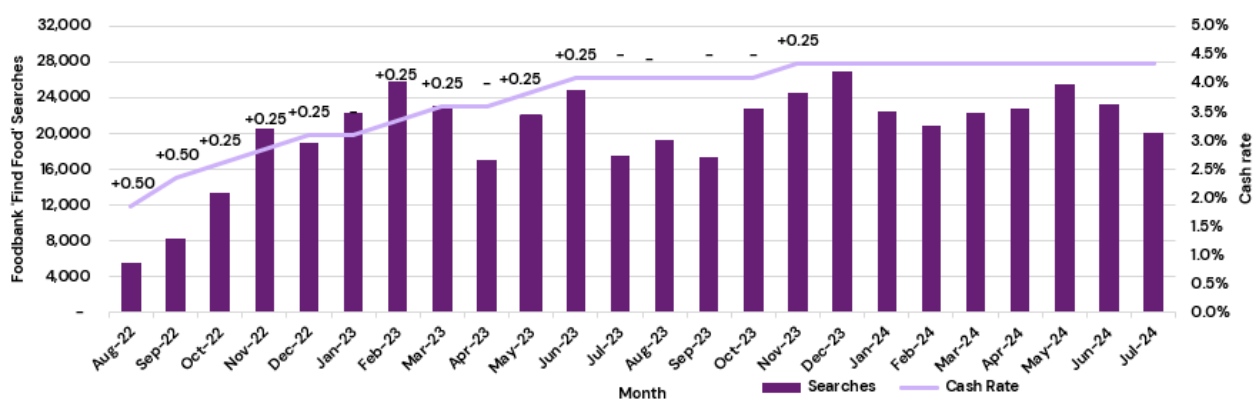
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/smp/2024/aug/>

## Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry



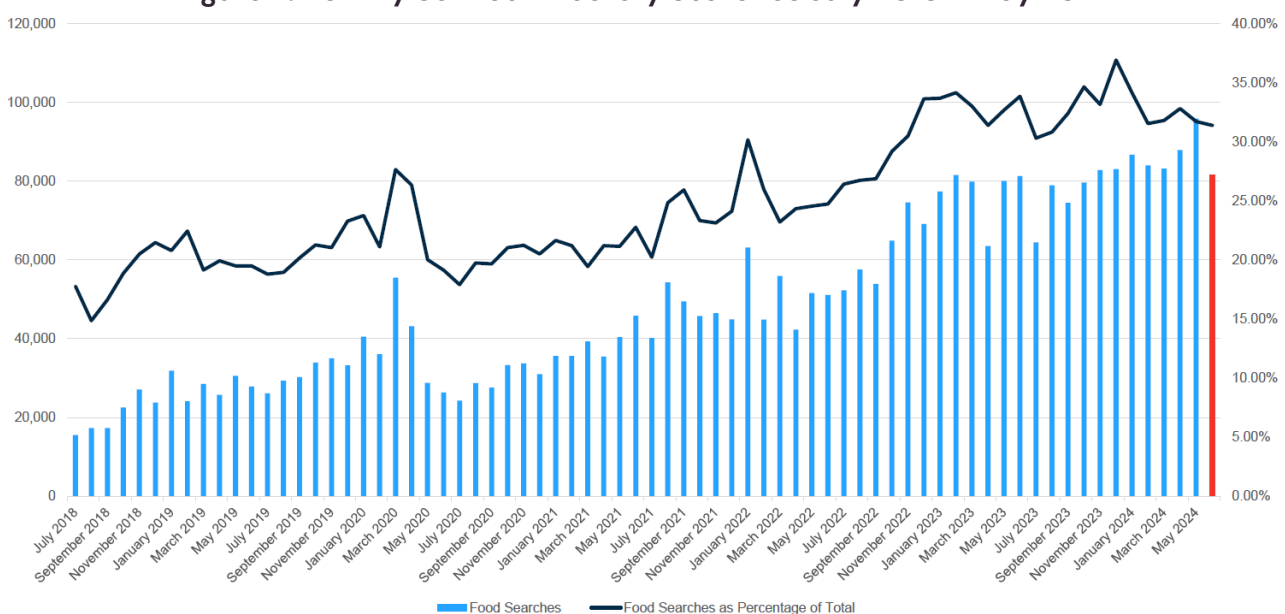
As shared with the Committee previously, Foodbank Australia has been tracking the number of people to have clicked on the 'Find Food' button on the Foodbank website against the cash rate since cash rates (and consequently interest rates) started increasing in August 2022 (see Figure 1 below). The majority of these page views are from people who are new to food relief, as those who have experienced hardship before tend to be more familiar with the options available to them for food relief and / or other emergency relief services. Whilst 'Find Food' page views have reduced somewhat during this period of cash rate stabilisation, observations from Foodbank Members suggest this is more a case of people now knowing how and where to get food relief rather than a reduction in demand.

Figure 1: Foodbank 'Find Food' Page Views vs Cash Rate Aug 2022–July 2024



Looking specifically at the AskLzzy service directory provided by Infoxchange, there were 259,637 searches for services in June 2024, which represents growth of 12.6% over a 12-month period. Of these searches, 31.39% were for food, **with almost a million (982,542) searches for food in the last 12 months** (up 17.5% on the year before), as shown in Figures 2 and 3 below.

Figure 2: AskLzzy Service Directory Searches July 2018 – May 2024

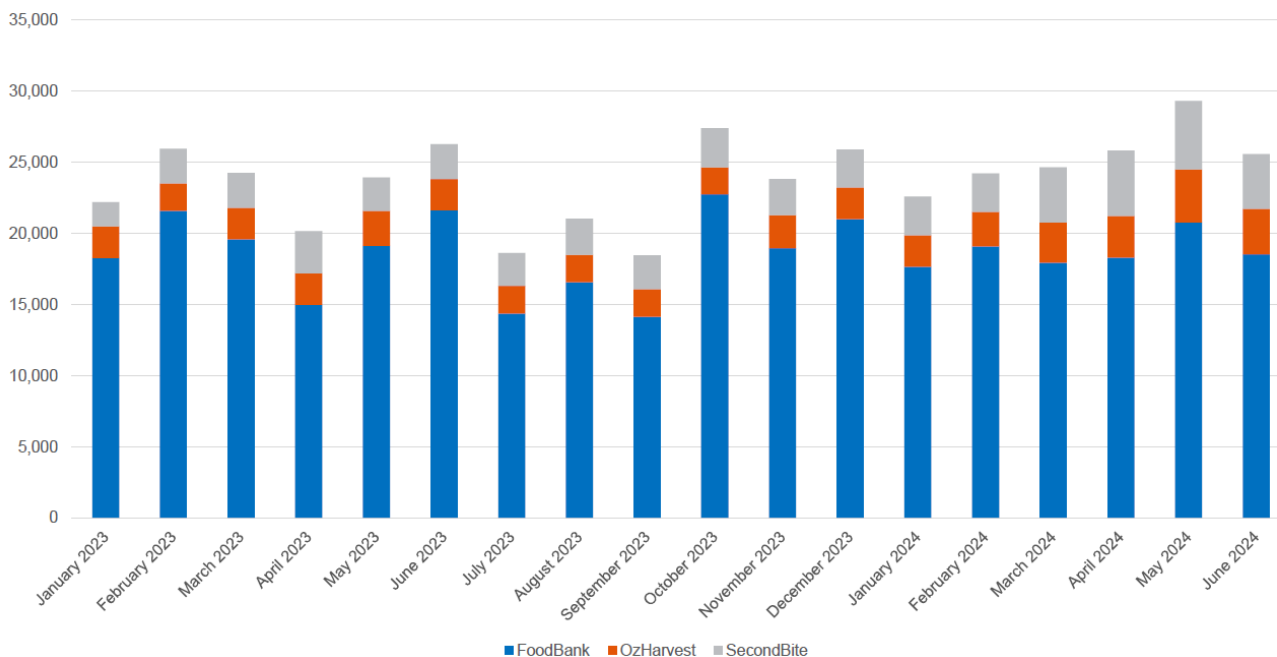




## Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry



Figure 3: Askizzy Service Directory Searches Food Relief Organisations



Foodbank has a federated structure, and foodbanking is delivered differently in every state and territory in order to deliver tailored solutions to meet the many and varied needs of communities across each state/territory. Looking at the country as a whole, Foodbank distributes food and groceries through 2,844 registered charities, 18 hubs/community food centres and mobile services. In 2023, Foodbank sourced the equivalent to 92 million meals (51 million kilograms), or 252,000 meals a day. The retail value of this food is \$560 million.

Whilst Foodbank's model varies across the country, what remains common is the seemingly never-ending increase in demand for food relief, with every state and territory continuing to experience demand levels far in excess of those experienced at the height of COVID (prior to the implementation of government assistance measures).

The following examples are provided to the Committee to demonstrate that the impacts of the cost of living crisis persist.

### Increased Client Numbers

For Foodbank Members providing food relief direct-to-client, for example through regional hubs or through mobile / pop-up arrangements in partnership with local communities and/or local frontline charities, the number of clients seeking food relief has continued to increase.

The below charts from Foodbank WA demonstrates the upwards trend in daily client numbers from January 2020 through to July 2024 across WA as a whole (see Figure 4), with this upward trend observed across both metro and non-metro areas (see Figure 5).

## Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry



Figure 4: FBWA Daily Invoices January 2020 – July 2024

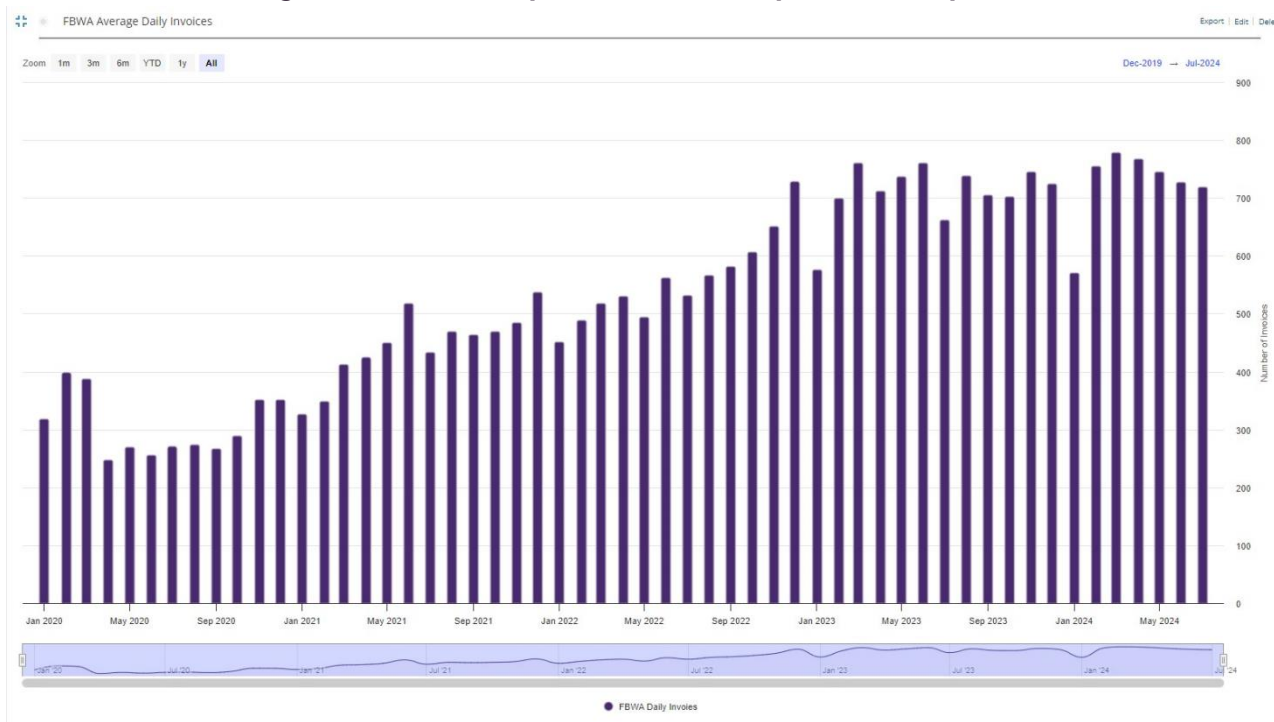
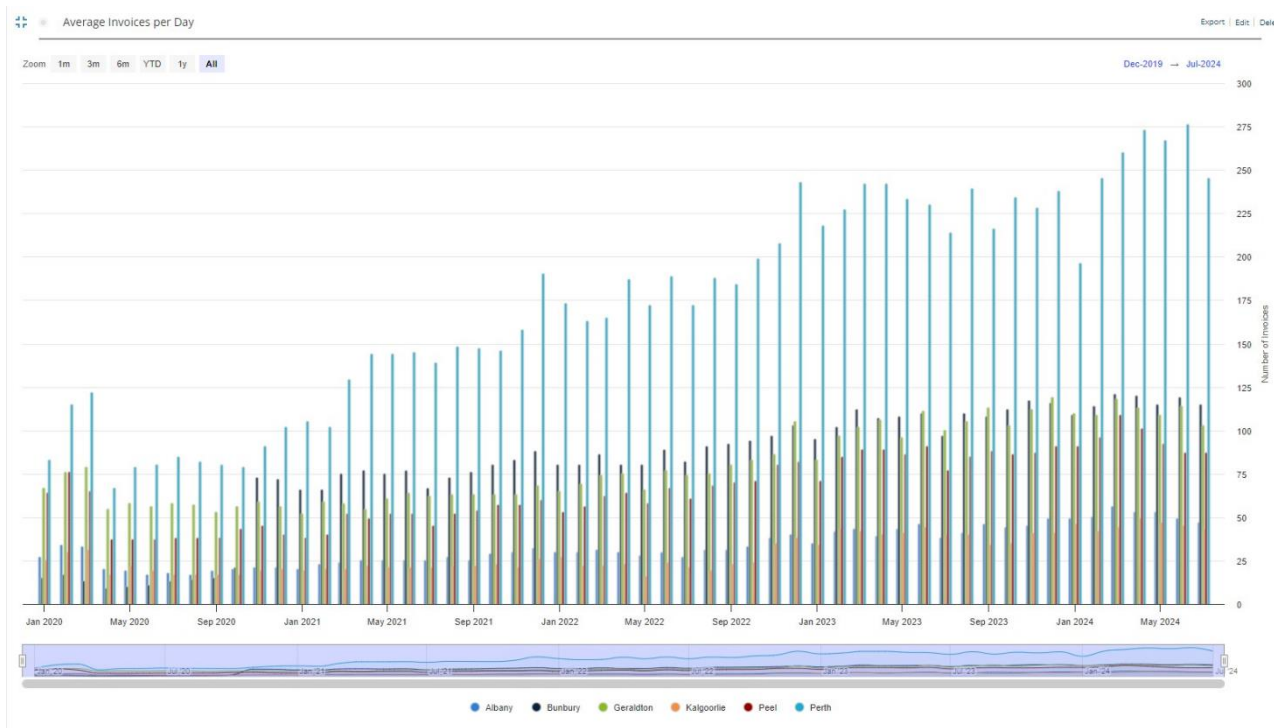


Figure 5: FBWA Daily Invoices Across FBWA Sites January 2020 – July 2024



The following case study provided by Foodbank WA exemplifies the everyday experiences that are leading people to compromise on nutrition, reduce their food intake and prioritise other essential expenses over food and groceries:

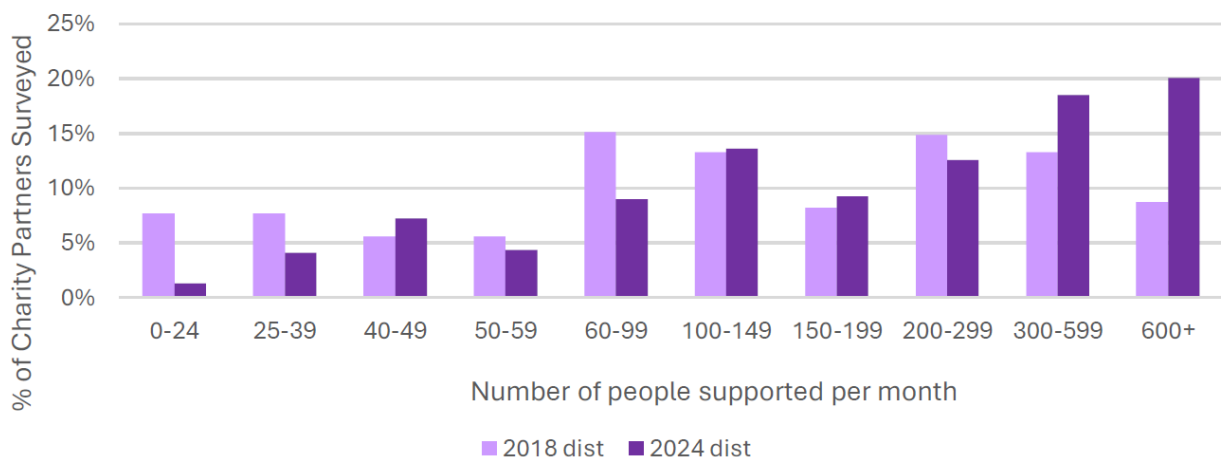
## Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry



A motorcycle accident ripped Leah's husband Steve from work, leaving him with a brain injury and their family in financial freefall. Medical bills mounted, the family business folded, and the family found themselves *"in a perilous position of not meeting our bills, let alone putting food on the table"*. One of Leah's son's lives with category 2 autism and a chronic illness, so medical bills exacerbated other strains on the household budget, and Leah *"suddenly became acutely aware of the price of food and how easily those prices can bring on anxiety attacks"*. Since starting to access food relief from Foodbank WA, Leah can *"stop missing meals in order to feed my family. I have a vehicle that is registered because I had money to pay the registration so my husband can be taken to rehabilitation and my son to Fiona Stanley Hospital for appointments. Without accessing Foodbank, I would be unable to put food on the table or to pay my other utilities."*

This increase in client numbers has also been mirrored in Victoria, with its recent member charity survey (see below) confirming that 40% of Foodbank Victoria's charity partners are now (July 2024) feeding more than 300 people per month, compared to 22% in 2018.

**Figure 6: Victorians supported with food per month 2018–2024**



### Increased Demand

Every single Foodbank Member (Foodbank Qld, Foodbank NSW & ACT, Foodbank Vic, Foodbank Tas, Foodbank SANT and Foodbank WA) has reported ongoing, increased demand for food relief.

Foodbank SANT, which offers both distribution through frontline charities as well as direct-to-client through hubs and mobile services, broke a record this year for the most food ever distributed, hitting 5 million kilograms for the first time ever, up 34% on last year. This increased demand was particularly pronounced in its food hubs, which now comprise 60% of Foodbank SANT's total food volumes. Looking at the food hubs overall, demand was up 51% on last year, but this was as high as 100% for some hubs (eg Northern and Ceduna).

## **Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry**



Looking at the frontline charities who receive food and groceries from Foodbank, there has also been a marked increase in demand.

As referenced above, Foodbank Victoria surveyed its 502 charity partners in July 2024, receiving responses from 74% (372) of those organisations surveyed (noting FBV did not survey community members accessing food relief from Foodbank Victoria directly). The results confirm 95% of charity partners have seen an increase in people accessing their food program, and more than half of Foodbank Victoria's charity partners cannot meet the demand for food, providing less food to people to make it stretch further.

Foodbank Queensland conducted surveys of its 401 member organisations (charity partners) in both 2023 and 2024. In 2023, 92% of Foodbank Qld's Members indicated an increased demand for food relief from people they service. In 2024, 87% of Foodbank Qld's Members indicated a further increase in demand for food relief (ie on top of the increase reported in 2023) from people they service.

### **Changing Faces of Hunger**

As reported in our supplementary evidence in December 2023, there has been a significant shift in the proportion of food relief recipients from households where there is at least one person in employment. What has emerged more recently is the emergency of those with multiple job holdings seeking food relief, such as households where at least one adult is working full time throughout the day, and taking on additional employment at night, often in the gig economy. This is presenting challenges for frontline charities and Foodbanks providing direct-to-client services, as traditional business hours are generally unsuitable for these cohorts. In the case of Victoria, the majority of Foodbank Victoria's charity partners are open Monday to Friday, with only 27% open after hours, and 17% open at least one day of the weekend, including more organisations running small-scale, 24/7 pantries in response to the increase in employed people becoming food insecure.

Foodbank Victoria's above-mentioned survey asked charity partners to select up to three of the most common groups of people accessing their food program in the previous three months, with 49% citing those experiencing financial hardship as the most common cohort accessing their food program, followed by unemployed and underemployed people (32%) and single parent households (19%).

In a pattern observed in every state and territory to varying degrees, there continues to be a stark increase in the number of people who are new to food relief. Foodbank Victoria's survey found that more than 95% of charity partners had community members accessing food relief for the first time in the previous month, with 30% of charity partners reporting they are seeing 30+ new community members every month.



## Supplementary Submission: Senate Select Committee Cost of Living Inquiry

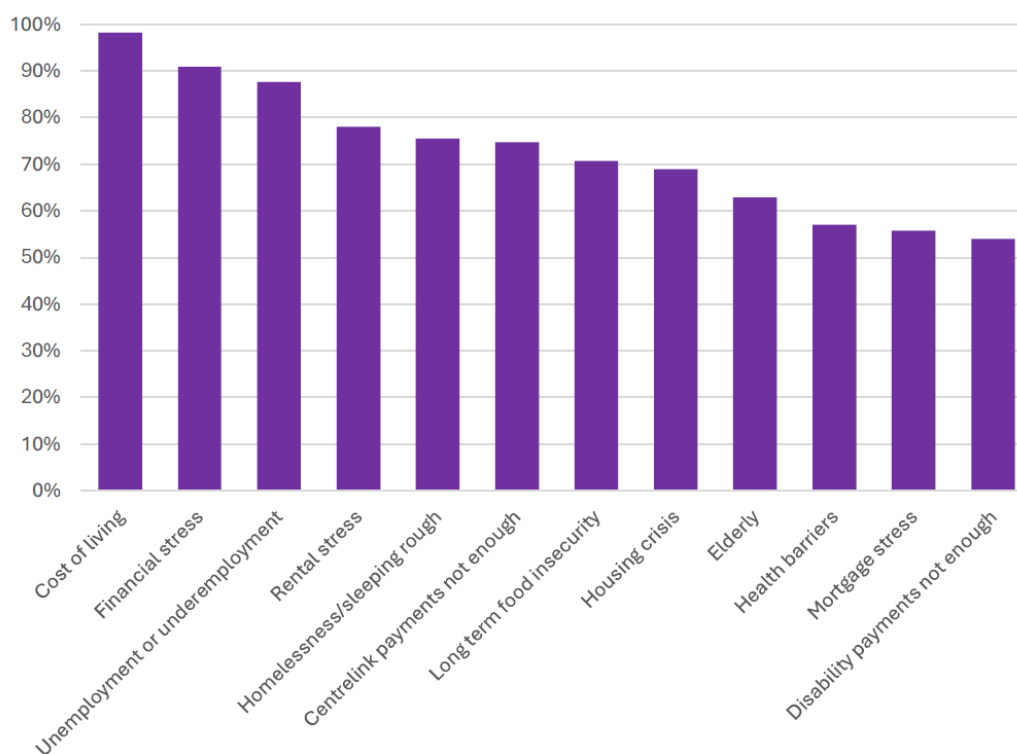


### Drivers of Food Insecurity

The following is provided to complement evidence already provided by Foodbank Australia in previous submissions and evidence, including findings from the *Foodbank Hunger Report 2023*. The *Foodbank Hunger Report 2024* field work is currently underway, with the report due to be released 15 October 2024. Noting the Committee is taking submissions through to 30 October 2024, we will ensure the Committee receives the report in time for its findings to be considered.

Looking again at Foodbank Victoria's recent charity partner survey, a staggering 98% of charity partners surveyed reported the cost of living as the most common reported reason why community members access food relief, followed by financial stress (90%). The other reasons cited are provided in Figure 7 below, with housing affordability and availability also persisting as a contributing factor to food insecurity.

**Figure 7: Contributing Factors to the Access of Food Relief (Victoria)**



The following quotes from the survey demonstrate the factors leading to people needing food relief at present:

*"One lady who comes says after she pays all of the bills and cost of living, she is left with \$20 a week for food."*

*"Our international students are often quite shocked by the cost of living in Melbourne. The weekly pantry opening for them has provided great relief to them, with the added benefit of helping create community within our school."*

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