



Nourishing Our Country

1 February 2023

Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia.

OzHarvest would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. The submission discusses food insecurity as one element of living in poverty in Australia.

About OzHarvest

OzHarvest collects quality surplus food from more than 3,000 businesses, including supermarkets, restaurants, cafes, hotels, retailers, airports and retail food outlets reaching as wide as possible into the food supply chain. Every week over 250 tonnes of food is saved from going to landfill and delivered to 1,900+ charitable agencies free of charge helping to make a positive difference to the lives of vulnerable people across Australia, whilst the financial saving to those organisations enables them to deliver a wider range of ancillary services. OzHarvest uses agile just-in-time logistics to target end-of-the-day fresh and short life food, preventing it from going to waste. The food is distributed on the same day, directly and free of charge to charities. Preventing edible organic food from going to landfill saves greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change. In addition to immediate food support solutions, OzHarvest is committed to finding solutions to help end food waste and insecurity. Our educational programs and change campaigns are designed as interventions to help people lead fully sustainable lives and understand their impact on our environmental challenges.

OzHarvest's education programs include:

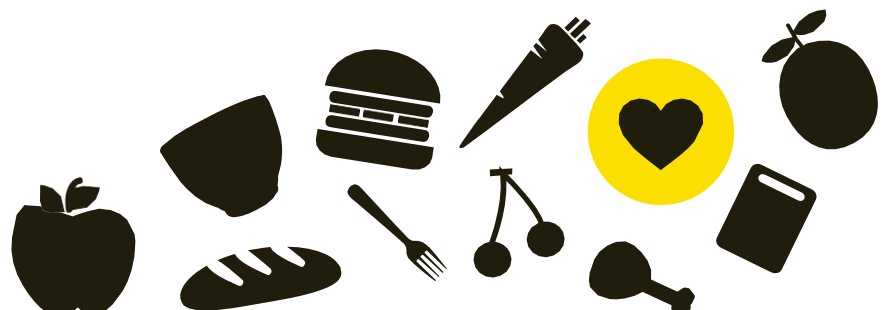
- [NEST](#) – an evidence-based nutrition and health education program teaching people in need how to cook and eat healthily on a budget,
- [Nourish](#) - a hospitality training providing a pathway to engagement and employment for 'at risk' youth and
- [FEAST](#) – a curriculum-aligned program teaching primary and high school students how to fight food waste, eat healthily and become future change-makers.

OzHarvest also operates a free supermarket in [Waterloo](#) in Sydney and the [Refettorio](#) in Surry Hills in Sydney which offers free lunches to those experiencing food insecurity. OzHarvest is planning to open a free rescued food supermarket in Adelaide in 2023.

OzHarvest operates in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Newcastle, and Perth and in regional communities. Since inception OzHarvest has delivered over 227 million meals and saved over 76,000 tonnes of food from landfill.

Submission

Rising food prices alongside other cost of living pressure are contributing to growing food insecurity in Australia. The upheaval caused by bushfires and floods in late 2019 and early 2020 plus measures to address the spread of COVID over the past few years led to an increase in the demand for food relief services. Unfortunately, demand has not subsided back to previous levels.



One element of this continuing demand may be the rising cost of living pressures including food prices. Food prices rose by 9.4% between November 2021 and November 2022.

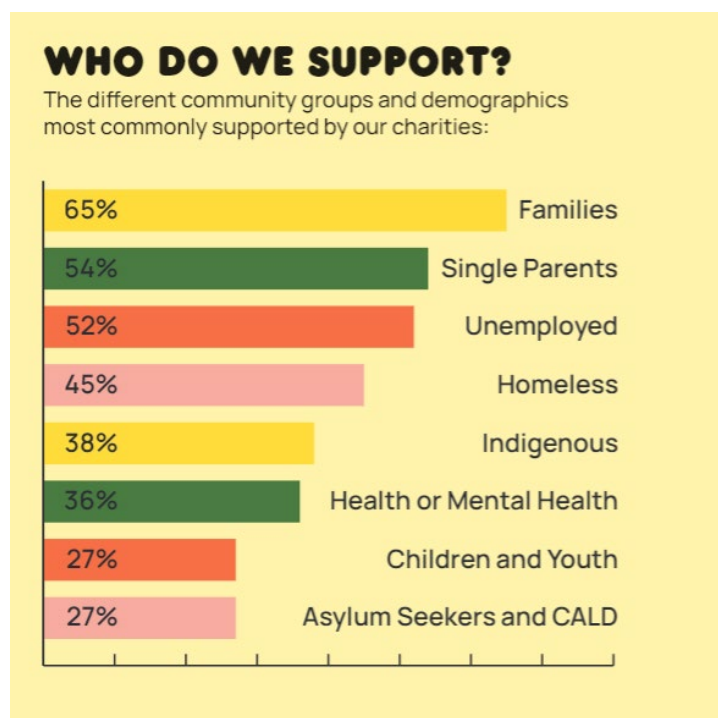
All the food we rescue is provided to charities free of charge. Our partner charities and our direct work through OzHarvest's [Waterloo Market](#) and [Refettorio](#) help us form a picture of Australia's food insecurity. We also survey our charity partners every six months, the key findings from our last community needs survey from June 2022 are:

- 61% of the 1900 charities we support reported an increase in demand for food relief in the previous 6 months.
- 32% of the charities we support cannot meet the current demand for food relief.
- 30% of the people they support are seeking food relief for the first time.

After paying rent, energy, medical bills and other expenses people are struggling to put food on the table. Our charity partners tell us that demand remains consistently high and the type of new people that need help is changing to include more people who are employed.

Across the country there are over 600 charities on our waiting list who we don't have the resources to provide rescued food to. As examples in Sydney there are over 170 charities, Melbourne 160, Brisbane and the Gold Coast over 100.

The breakdown of the type of people and household types our charity partners support is below.



The increase in demand for food we have been seeing is supported by Foodbank's [Hunger report](#) which found that food insecurity has been on the rise for the last 12 months to July 2022. The report found that a third of households with children in Australia experienced severe levels of food insecurity. Over 2 million households experienced severe food insecurity, meaning they had reduced food intake as well as disruption to normal eating patterns.¹

¹ Foodbank, [Hunger Report](#), October 2022

The Melbourne Institute's [Taking the Pulse of the Nation Survey](#) found that the rate of food insecure Australians receiving free food or meals is quite low in comparison to the high level of food insecurity prevalent in the community.² It is unclear how much of this can be attributed due to a lack of service availability or people not wanting to ask for help. Either way there is work to do to ensure food relief is made more widely available.

Statistics like this are distressing and ultimately unnecessary as Australia has more than enough food for everyone. 7.6 million tonnes of food is wasted in Australia every year, 70% of which is edible. This is enough food to feed everyone in Australia for six months.³

People who are food insecure are often experiencing other elements of disadvantage. Many of them are experiencing housing stress, inability to afford the health and dental care they need and are struggling to pay household bills.

OzHarvest employs social workers to help people who initially come to access food at our free supermarket in Waterloo, Sydney or the Refettorio in Surry Hills, Sydney. Part of their work is connecting people to other services. Currently the largest referrals are to housing and financial aid services.

Food insecurity has impact on quality of life. According to a paper published in the International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health titled 'Food insecurity and socioeconomic disadvantage in Australia':

Food insecurity has significant short- and long-term impacts on physical health and social and economic participation.⁴ Food insecurity often leads to stress, cycles of fasting and bingeing, and the substitution of relatively higher cost, higher nutrition food with lower cost, higher energy food, resulting in nutrient deficiencies, metabolic changes, weight loss or, seemingly paradoxically, overweight and obesity.⁵ Children in food insecure households in Australia were more likely to miss days of school, miss out on school activities, and more likely to have emotional and behavioral issues.⁶ Eighty percent of food insecure university students reported that their studies were negatively affected by their food insecurity. They were also three times more likely to have deferred study due to financial difficulties and twice as likely to report poor or fair health⁷. Food insecure adults are more likely to have lower self-assessed health status, higher prevalence of chronic disease such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and depression, and lower rates of social and economic participation.⁸ Elderly food insecure people were six times more likely to rate their lifestyle as unhealthy than healthy, five times less likely to have private health insurance, and four times more

² Melbourne Institute, [Taking the Pulse of the Nation](#), October 2022

³ [FIAL \(2021\). National Food Waste Strategy Feasibility Study](#)

⁴ Booth, S.; Smith, A. Food security and poverty in Australia-challenges for dietitians. *Aust. J. Nutr. Diet.* 2001, 58, 150–156.

⁵ Ramsey, R.; Giskes, K.; Turrell, G.; Gallegos, D. Food insecurity among adults residing in disadvantaged urban areas: Potential health and dietary consequences. *Public Health Nutr.* 2012, 15, 227–237.

⁶ Ramsey, R.; Giskes, K.; Turrell, G.; Gallegos, D. Food insecurity among Australian children: Potential determinants, health and developmental consequences. *J. Child Health Care* 2011, 15, 401–416.

⁷ Gallegos, D.; Ramsey, R.; Ong, K.W. Food insecurity: Is it an issue among tertiary students? *Higher Educ.* 2014, 67, 497–510.

⁸ Ramsey, R.; Giskes, K.; Turrell, G.; Gallegos, D. Food insecurity among adults residing in disadvantaged urban areas: Potential health and dietary consequences.

likely to report needing household help.⁹ Therefore, although there is an inverse relationship between food insecurity and age, food insecurity exists in populations at all stages of the life course and results in significant health, social and economic consequences.

Assisting Charity Partners:

OzHarvest food rescue operations are critical as they help feed thousands of vulnerable people every year and assist charities to provide food for clients at no cost. For every dollar invested in our food rescue program, \$8.97 is returned to the community.

Some of the measurable gains reflected in this figure that financially aid agencies, vulnerable Australians, governments, and food donors include:

- a. Reduced expenditure on food by agencies and food recipients
- b. The number of new/additional clients that agencies and food recipients can reach out to and serve by diverting increased funds to core services
- c. Costs saved by recipients by not having to shop for food (e.g. fuel and agency labour costs)
- d. Health improvements and long-term health benefits (e.g. costs saved from fewer GP visits and medical services required).
- e. Access to better social services from reduced food expenditure
- f. Increase in waste diverted from landfill which leads to:
 - Decreased landfill and associated costs
 - Lower emissions
 - Lower food disposal costs

We understand that whilst food rescue and relief is a solution that addresses hunger and some extent food insecurity in a short-term way, interventions are required to help people live better lives. This is why we employ social workers at OzHarvest who can refer people to other services and why we run skills-based training and education to vulnerable individuals through our [NEST](#) (Nutrition Education and Skills Training) program which works directly in the communities we help provide food to and our [Nourish](#) program which works with at risk youth.

NEST is a six-week guided public health nutrition program which aims to improve the nutrition, food literacy, and cooking skills of low – socioeconomic adults. It also provides education around affordable and healthy food options, food storage techniques and shopping strategies. It helps participants stretch their food budgets further.

One participant has described that NEST taught them:

How to make use [of] what you have in the cupboard, which saved us a lot of money in the long run, and gave us healthier food... our money budget for shopping has reduced, and we are coming back with change as well, we used to run out¹⁰

⁹ Quine, S.; Morrell, S. Food insecurity in community-dwelling older Australians. *Public Health Nutr.* 2006, 9, 219–224.

¹⁰ West et al, 'The Role of a Food Literacy Intervention in Promoting Food Security and Food Literacy – OzHarvest's NEST Program' in *Nutrients*, 2020

A study of the NEST program also revealed that it improved participants food security status, cooking confidence, food preparation behaviours, nutrition knowledge, vegetable consumption and a reduction in intake of sugar sweetened beverages and salty snack foods.¹¹

Beyond nutrition education and cooking the program helps to strengthen community connections.

*I enjoyed learning about food and cooking at the NEST program, but the best part for me was enjoying the meals together and the conversations with the other guys.*¹²

OzHarvest funds this program mainly through philanthropy and small-scale government grants from states and local governments. This type of program could be rolled out on a wider scale with appropriate funding.

OzHarvest's Nourish program trains and mentors a cohort of 'at risk' young people aged between 16 - 25 to achieve a nationally recognised hospitality qualification (Certificate II in kitchen operations). The program currently operates in Adelaide, Newcastle and Sydney. These young people have often been disengaged from education and employment. We use our corporate partners and industry contacts to help students gain work experience and employment in the hospitality sector once they have completed their training. The program is offered free to participants and is funded by philanthropy.

Conclusion

In Australia over 2 million households and over a third of households with children experience food insecurity, this is particularly shocking considering there is so much edible surplus food going to landfill. To address food security in Australia, food waste and food security must be acknowledged as inherently related problems and addressed together.

There is a growing demand for food relief in the community and this reflects the growing pressure on many people unable to afford basic costs such as housing and food. In a wealthy country such as Australia it is devastating that poverty remains an issue for so many.

OzHarvest supports government interventions that help alleviate these pressures on people so they can live healthier, more fulfilled lives.

For more information please contact:

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¹¹ 'The Role of a Food Literacy Intervention in Promoting Food Security and Food Literacy – OzHarvest's NEST Program'

¹² Richard a participant from a NEST program organised via Hume City Council. 2022.