

Exploring the capacities and responses of the community and  
emergency food sector in the Geelong region:

Report 5

April 2021

Prepared by Dr Fiona McKay, Deakin University

For more information, please contact:  
Dr Fiona McKay  
School of Health & Social Development, Faculty of Health  
Deakin University  
Locked Bag 20000, Geelong, VIC 3220  
+61 3 92517183  
[fiona.mckay@deakin.edu.au](mailto:fiona.mckay@deakin.edu.au)



## Executive Summary

This is the fifth report in a series exploring the emergency and community food landscape in the Geelong region. This work seeks to investigate how the emergency and community food aid sector are responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and the constant changes and uncertainty related to welfare payments.

Building on the work of the Give Where You Live Foundation, and their support of the Geelong Food Assistance Network, this study focuses on the various providers of emergency and community food aid in the Geelong region to gain an understanding of how they are responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, and to investigate the relationship between the provider of food aid itself and those in need. This research seeks to enable additional collaboration and assist share results as they come to hand for rapid evidence-informed policy and practice.

Data for this report were collected from 11 of the 40 emergency food aid providers in the region, including community, religious, welfare and/or non-profit organisations. The online survey was open from 15 March 2021 to 30 March 2021.

Respondents reported a stabilisation of need and supply this month, with only a slight uptick in the number of people seeking assistance. Fortunately, many respondents also reported an increase in funding.

There remains widespread concern that the JobSeeker rate will be insufficient to meet the needs of recipients who will be forced to rely on emergency and community assistance. Time will tell if the reduced rate of JobSeeker will have a noticeable impact on the emergency and community food sector.

Once again, we thank all agencies who took time to complete this survey.

## Introduction

A Covid-19 free March has seen many in Victoria taking a well-deserved deep breath. However, a small outbreak in Brisbane followed by a snap lockdown reminds us that Covid-19 is not gone yet. Of greatest concern this month is the ending of JobKeeper and the Coronavirus JobSeeker supplement, with the suggestion that changes to government welfare will significantly increase the number of people who are in need of charitable assistance. Of greatest concern is that the base rate of JobSeeker for a single person at \$310 per week, below the poverty line of \$457.

This is report 5 of 6 exploring the response of emergency and community food agencies in the Geelong region to the immediate and long tail of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This research builds on the work of the Give Where You Live Foundation, and their support of the Geelong Food Assistance Network to explore the response and capacity of emergency food aid agencies in the Geelong region. Understanding who is seeking emergency food relief, the capacity of the agencies to meet this need and any changes in demand will give us a greater understanding of community and emergency food aid provision within the Geelong region. Furthermore, how the sector is functioning in this crisis period, in terms of human resources, food supplies, funding and similar operational functions, will help to illustrate opportunities for additional support and collaboration as we move out of the initial crisis period of the pandemic in Victoria.

### Aims

The aim of this project is to explore the various providers of emergency and community food aid in the Geelong region to gain an understanding of how they are dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, and to investigate the relationship between the provider of food aid itself and those in need.

Specifically, the aims of this research are to:

1. Investigate any change in client need as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Explore problems in meeting demand as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. Investigate the implications of food insecurity and food aid use as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Additionally, this research will provide an up-to-date overview of the emergency and community food aid sector in the Geelong region and will provide a space in which emergency and community food sector and their clients' experiences and inequalities can be reported and recorded. This research seeks to enable additional collaboration and assist share results as they come to hand for rapid evidence-informed policy and practice.

## Method

### Sample and recruitment

A database of agencies and organisations providing food relief services to people in need in the Geelong region was compiled by the Give Where You Live foundation from information publicly available on the Geelong Food Assistance Network website. This database included information such as name, email, and location, and included 40 individual organisations with 69 email contacts in total.

An email containing an overview of the study and a link to the second web-based survey was sent to each organisation. Ethics approval was granted by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee [HAEG-H 219\_2020].

## Data Collection

The survey was open from 15 March 2021 to 30 March 2021. It consisted of 35 closed and open-ended questions with no forced responses. This survey is the fifth of six and aims to gather continuous data which can be assessed against previous surveys to report any changes. This survey covered the following areas of investigation:

- General overview of the organisation including services provided, operating hours, location, and any impacts on the delivery of services due to the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Staffing and funding; including percentage of paid to volunteer staff, where funding comes from and if/how this has changed due to the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Food that the organisation provides; including types of food provided as per the Australian Guide to Healthy eating, sources of the food supply and any changes to this supply, and storage preparation and delivery of food
- Profile of who the organisation supports, including any changes in clientele since the Covid-19 Pandemic, how the changes in government support has affected clients and if the organisation is supporting more children than before

## Data analysis

Data from close-ended questions were analysed using basic descriptive statistics to characterise the sample. Categorical data were reported using frequencies and percentages while continuous data were presented as means, medians, and standard deviations. Data were analysed using Excel. To ensure respondent privacy and confidentiality, a participant identification number is used to differentiate between quotes. Data are presented as statistics supported by direct quotes where appropriate.

## Results

### General characteristics

Of the 40 emails sent, eleven completed surveys were received, this is a similar response rate to previous months, with most respondents also having completed previous surveys.

Of the six agencies that provided meals as part of their food relief services this month, the number of meals averaged 520, this is slightly higher than previous months.

Most respondents provide a range of foods from the different food groups. The most common food groups provided by respondents were fresh, tinned and frozen fruit and vegetables and breads, grains and cereals (n=9, 82%); this is similar to previous reporting periods – possibly reflecting some stabilisation in supply. When asked if they had sufficient supply of these food groups to meet demand, most respondents had no supply issues.

Respondents reported referring clients to a range of services, most notably to accommodation services (n=7, 64%). There is continues concern that people experiencing homelessness and who are sleeping rough will increase in number as changes to welfare come into effect.

More pre prepared meals to give to people sleeping rough or in motel/emergency accommodation.

The distribution of primary population groups serviced by respondents was similar to previous months. The most serviced group were families (n=9, 83%), and people experiencing homelessness, young people, and people with a disability (n=7, 64%). The gender split was largely even this month, unlike previous months.

See table 1 for an outline of the general characteristics of the emergency food providers who responded to the survey.

Table 1. General characteristics of emergency food aid providers (n=11)

Referrals*^	
Accommodation support services	6 (55%)
Family support services	4 (36%)
Family/domestic violence services	4 (36%)
Mental health service providers	4 (36%)
Financial counselling	4 (36%)
Primary population*^	
Families	9 (83%)
People experiencing homelessness	7 (64%)
People with a disability	7 (64%)
Young people/children	7 (64%)
Aged People	6 (55%)
People from casual/unstable industries	6 (55%)
Migrants (including refugees and asylum seekers)	6 (55%)
People with drug and/or alcohol dependency	5 (45%)
International Students	4 (36%)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	3 (27%)

\*respondents could chose more than one option, ^not answered by all respondents

### Changes in services and need because of Covid-19

In this reporting month, Victoria was Covid-19 free all month. Allowing some certainty to enter the lives of many people and resulting in some stability in the number of restrictions, and even the relaxation in others.

The relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions was reported by respondents, with only four respondents reporting any restrictions still in place, and most people operating this month the same as they did last month. Interestingly, respondents reported that as people were getting used to these restrictions, there were fewer problems in ensuring service provision. However, 5 of 11 respondents did report that they had lost some of their volunteer staff in the last month. This change in workforce is concerning for some agencies who are now seeking to recruit more volunteers or apply for more funding to employ more paid staff.

Most respondents reported that the number of people accessing their services this month were roughly the same or had increased compared to the past month (n=9, 83%), unlike last month where most respondents reporting that their numbers were leveling off or returning to normal, there was a small uptick in need this month; this will be a concern if this is a trend that continues into coming months.

Respondents reported consistent supply of food from providers, with most food coming from Foodbank. Like last month, respondents were not overly concerned about supply, with donations of food and cash evening out somewhat.

There has been a decrease in food donations however our financial donations have increased so we are able to provide cash vouchers to be used at supermarkets.

Like previous months, most respondents reported no change to their funding this month, with some reporting an increase in funding.

Table 2. Changes in services and need as a result of Covid-19 this month (n=11)

Impact on operation as a result of Covid-19 Pandemic	
No change	6 (55%)
Providing services to more people/extended hours	3 (27%)
Temporary closed	2 (18%)
Impact of government restrictions on agency	
Impacted by government restrictions	7 (64%)
No Impact	4 (36%)
Impact on funding amount since Covid-19 Pandemic	
No Impact	8 (73%)
Increase in funding	3 (27%)
Frequency of use by regular clients	
No change	5 (55%)
Increased	4 (33%)
Decreased	2 (18%)

^not answered by all respondents

## Implications for food security

This reporting was free of lockdowns and increased in Covid-19 restrictions. Of greatest concern in this reporting period is the upcoming change to the government welfare support. The decrease in monetary benefit for people on JobSeeker and the removal of JobKeeper are expected to have a significant negative impact on the lived experiences of hundreds of thousands of Australians. The impact of this on the emergency sector will play out over the coming months and there is considerable uncertainty in what this will mean for agencies.

## References

- Crawford, B, Yamazaki, R, Franke, E, Amanatidis, S, Ravulo, J & Torvaldsen, S 2015. 'Is something better than nothing? Food insecurity and eating patterns of young people experiencing homelessness'. *Aust N Z J Public Health*, 39, 4, 350-354. 10.1111/1753-6405.12371.
- FoodBank 2020. 'FoodBank Hunger Report 2020'. NSW: FoodBank Australia.
- McCarthy, L, Chang, AB & Brimblecombe, J 2018. 'Food security experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with young children in an urban setting: influencing factors and coping strategies'. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15, 12, 2649.
- McKay, F, Bastian, A & Lindberg, R 2020. 'Exploring the response of the Victorian emergency and community food sector to the Covid-19 pandemic'. *In press*.
- McKay, FH & Dunn, M 2015. 'Food security among asylum seekers in Melbourne'. *Aust N Z J Public Health*, 39, 4, 344-349. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12368>.
- McKay, FH & Lindberg, R 2019. 'The important role of charity in the welfare system for those who are food insecure'. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 39, 4. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12916>.
- Mungai, Nw, Priestly, J & Pawar, M 2019. 'Food Insecurity in Regional Rural Australia'. *Australian Social Work*, 1-13.
- Pollard, CM & Booth, S 2019. 'Food Insecurity and Hunger in Rich Countries-It Is Time for Action against Inequality'. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16, 10. 10.3390/ijerph16101804.
- Temple, J, Booth, S & Pollard, C 2019. 'Social Assistance Payments and Food Insecurity in Australia: Evidence from the Household Expenditure Survey'. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, in press.