

**Shining the light
on food insecurity
in Aotearoa**

Auckland City Mission's Call To Action



The demand for emergency food parcels is at an all-time high

Over the last few years, the demand for food at the Auckland City Mission has continually and dramatically increased.

Moved by the reality that tens of thousands of Aucklanders – and in increasing numbers – don't have enough food and are forced to seek support, the Auckland City Mission worked with community partners and researchers at the University of Auckland to better understand how we might more effectively respond.

Over 650 people who were accessing the Mission's foodbank services were surveyed. The research, led by the Mission's GM of Social Services, Helen Robinson, uncovered a clear relationship between food insecurity, emotional wellbeing, and psychological distress.



Photo: Kathrin Simon

What is food insecurity?

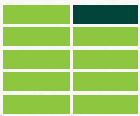
Food insecurity is about more than hunger. Hunger is a physiological experience caused by a lack of food – a person can feel hungry if they are running late and skip breakfast. Food insecurity, which is also called food poverty, is not having enough appropriate food.

How many Kiwis are experiencing food insecurity?

Information about food insecurity in New Zealand is outdated and sparse. What we can say is:



In 2008/2009, 7.3% of our population was food insecure.



10 years later, the Mission estimates 10% of New Zealand's population is affected – about 500,000 people.



Predominantly, women are the face of food insecurity and are bearing the greatest burden of poverty.



Māori and Pasifika people are over-represented in those living with food insecurity.

According to the Ministry of Social Development, from 2014-19 food remained the main reason for needing hardship assistance. In the March 2019 quarter, 212,871 food grants were provided. This is more than double the number provided in March 2014 (91,301).

Food insecurity causes

distress and reduced wellbeing.

Food insecurity is intrinsically

linked to poverty.

The reality is, once housing costs are paid, low-income individuals and families are often forced to choose between buying food and other essential costs.

When there's no money for food, people either eat poorly or miss meals completely. They have no choice but to rely on foodbanks to provide them with enough food.

We know that people living with food insecurity are doing the very best they can on a low income. We see that asking for help by coming into a foodbank or seeking an emergency food grant from Work and Income can leave them feeling embarrassed or ashamed.

Until now, we have not had sufficient New Zealand data to back up our assumptions of how food insecurity impacts people's wellbeing.

The survey of over 650 people aimed to understand the severity of food insecurity among people coming into the Mission's foodbank, how this affected their wellbeing, and what that meant for them in their day-to-day life.

Measuring the effects of food insecurity

Our survey included two measurement tools:

- > The World Health Organisation-5 (WHO-5) scale, which asked people to rate their emotional wellbeing over the past two weeks, and included statements like:

“I have felt cheerful and in good spirits”

“I have felt calm and relaxed”

“My daily life has been filled with things that interest me”

- > The Kessler-6 (K-6) distress scale, which asked people to rate their level of psychological distress during the past 30 days, and included questions like:

“How often did you feel hopeless?”

“How often did you feel so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?”

“How often did you feel that everything was an effort?”

What we learned:

Our research showed that about once a week, survey participants experienced a high level of food insecurity. Nearly 40% of those surveyed have struggled to access enough appropriate food for them and their household for two years or more.

For people experiencing food insecurity, much of their day-to-day lives (about two-thirds) is lived in an unwell state of being. Not only are people who are food insecure emotionally unwell much of the time, they are also distressed some of the time. Moreover, women experienced higher levels of distress.

**There is enough food
in New Zealand that no one
should ever go hungry**

We now know that food insecurity is unmistakably linked to reduced wellbeing and increased distress.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #2 is “Zero Hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.”

In New Zealand, the Auckland City Mission has come together with partners The Salvation Army, VisionWest, Wellington City Mission, Christchurch City Mission and Council of Christian Social Services to form the Kore Hiakai collective, with a focus of Zero Hunger in Aotearoa.

How can we create a New Zealand where everyone has enough food to eat, and where no one is suffering, either physically or psychologically, because of a lack of food?

How can we encourage all sectors to make healthy and sustainable diets affordable to everyone?

“We need to distribute the resources we have differently, and perhaps that is the real challenge. Unless we choose to intervene and change the status quo, we are condemning all those who are food insecure, especially women, women raising children, women sole parenting, Māori and Pasifika, to not having enough food on a weekly basis, to being unwell at least half of their days and to suffer distress, for as long as the food insecurity lasts. For some, that is years.”

**Helen Robinson, GM Social Services,
Auckland City Mission**

Our Call To Action

To respond appropriately and effectively to food insecurity, we need to better understand who is experiencing it and how best to create positive change. Here are some actions we want New Zealanders to take – immediately – to address food insecurity:

Action

Hold an annual survey to gather information about how adults and children are affected by food insecurity.

Action

Develop a national food strategy giving vision and direction, cohesion and coordination to ensure all people in New Zealand have enough appropriate food.

Action

Consider women-oriented interventions, such as raising the level of the Sole Parent Support payment, and providing further financial assistance to women raising children.

Action

Raise income levels and ensure a living wage for all.

Above all, we must ensure that all of our actions toward addressing food insecurity enhance mana; that is, they uphold the dignity of both the individual and the whānau.

**Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou
ka ora ai te iwi.**

**With your food basket and my
food basket the people will thrive.**

With special thanks for supporting this research to the University of Auckland, Ngā Whare Waatea Marae in Māngere (MUMA), Papakura Marae, St Luke's Anglican Parish in Manurewa, Te Whare Awhina O Tamworth and its partner Randwick Park Community Centre – and to every person who willingly shared their story so that together we can better respond to food insecurity in Aotearoa.



aucklandcitymission.org.nz

Content in this publication is adapted from Shining a Light on Food Insecurity in Aotearoa New Zealand, an unpublished Master's thesis, by Helen Robinson (The University of Auckland 2019).

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