



OZHARVEST FRONTLINE REPORT 2026

Food insecurity insights from local organisations
providing food relief

Acknowledgements

This report was written on Gadigal and Bidjigal Land, with information collected across the country. OzHarvest acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and live, and pays deep respects to Elders past, present and emerging. As a national organisation, we recognise the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country across Australia.

OzHarvest extends gratitude and sincere thanks to the staff and volunteers from our partner organisations who shared their knowledge and insights through this survey. Their generosity and commitment plays a critical role in ensuring people can access food when they need it most.

If you are reading this report and need help accessing food or other essential support, free and confidential assistance is available. You can visit AskIzzy (askizzy.org.au) to find food relief and other support services near you, now and when you need them.

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This document is available at ozharvest.org.



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Definitions

Food security	Exists when 'all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food'. ¹ There are six dimensions of food security: availability, access, stability, sustainability, utilisation and agency. ²
Food insecurity	Exists 'whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain'. ³
Household food insecurity	Hunger and/or food stress experienced at the household level.
Charities, active charities	Community organisations, schools and service providers that receive food rescued and delivered for free by OzHarvest, and distribute it to people experiencing food insecurity through place-based support.
Waitlist charities	Organisations who have registered to receive food from OzHarvest, but due to its funding, logistics and infrastructure limitations, OzHarvest is unable to service at this time.
National Food Relief Sector	Australia's three largest food relief organisations; OzHarvest, Foodbank Australia, Secondbite Fareshare.
Surplus food	High quality, nutritious food that would otherwise be wasted, but is rescued and distributed for free by OzHarvest.

The food system in this country is paradoxically broken: a third of food produced is wasted, yet up to a third of Australian households go hungry.

Tragically, pressures are continually intensifying – geopolitical conflict, supply chain disruptions, fuel hikes, fertiliser shortages, interest rate rises, and ongoing climate shocks flow through to higher prices for households.

Food security at the kitchen table must be understood not only as a social issue, but as an indicator of our food system's health and function. Given food security connects to so many other social challenges, it can also be considered as the canary in the coalmine for broader household stress.

OzHarvest connects with the frontline of food insecurity every day – our 80 vans deliver 750,000 meals per week to over 1,500 local charity partners in every state and territory.

This report is a snapshot of what we are seeing and hearing on the ground – a survey of 875 food relief partners operating across communities nationwide. Their insights are devastatingly consistent: families are at breaking point, the cost-of-living crisis is crippling budgets, and food is often the first thing to go.

We are hearing unequivocally that charities themselves are under immense strain, painting a concerning future picture for those needing support. This data is a critical window into the state of community food relief networks, and the experiences of families doing it tough.

OzHarvest will continue to do all we can to respond to this challenge – rescuing nutritious food and delivering it at no cost, supporting small organisations who would otherwise be unable to provide food relief, delivering food literacy education to schools and communities across the country, and advocating for systemic change.

Food relief is not a substitute for addressing the core drivers of food insecurity, but it is essential during times of need. In the absence of structural support for households, it is a foundational service that paves the way for other interventions to succeed.

This current moment matters – the emerging National Food Security Strategy presents a pivotal opportunity to truly recognise household food security as a shared national responsibility – aligning policy, funding and support for those most vulnerable – while simultaneously addressing Australia's unconscionable levels of food waste.

As a final note, on behalf of OzHarvest, I would like to express my gratitude for all our food rescue and relief partners; solidarity and deep compassion for those made to experience food insecurity; and hope for committed, systemic policy change in the very near future.



James Goth
CEO, OzHarvest



The national context

Food insecurity in Australia is a structural, ongoing crisis, affecting 1 in 8 households overall and 1 in 3 sole parent households.⁴ Rising cost-of-living, housing stress and insufficient incomes are leaving many Australians unable to meet basic needs, with food forced to be an adjustable expense. While Australia produces enough food to feed three times its population, millions lack reliable access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, with significant implications for health, education, productivity, and social cohesion.

Food insecurity insights from the frontline

This report draws on findings from a survey completed by 875 frontline charities across Australia who are supported with food by OzHarvest, or on OzHarvest's waitlist. As these organisations are often the final safety net for those under food stress, their insights provide an on-the-ground view of food insecurity in Australia.

The OzHarvest Frontline Survey closed 1 March 2026. A subsequent pulse survey was conducted on 15 April 2026 to understand the impact of the conflict in the Middle East, with 69% (n=158) reporting a further increase in people seeking relief since March, and average demand up by an additional 31%.

Insight 1: Food insecurity is widespread and growing

Survey respondents collectively support 358,750 people per month with food relief. 70% have reported an increase in those seeking food relief in the last 12 months. A staggering 36% of those accessing support are new faces, likely seeking relief for the first time.



The significant amount of new families in the last six months has been eye opening. The predominant commentary is that they are working, more than one job, and still unable to cover the basics.



Insight 2: Children are disproportionately affected

Families (46%) are the most commonly supported group for food relief. Single-parent families (31%), and children and young people (26%) also rank highly (multiple responses were permitted). Schools report children arriving hungry, affecting classroom behaviour and learning outcomes.



We are seeing women, no criminal record, being charged for stealing formula. Many others unable to breast feed, in crisis and giving unsuitable alternatives to formula.



Insight 3: Under cost-of-living pressures, food is the first thing to go

Economic pressure is overwhelmingly identified as the root cause of food insecurity. Rising grocery prices are cited by 76% of respondents as the reason their clients are accessing food relief, followed by housing affordability and access (74%) and low or insufficient income (69%).



[The] cost of living impacts the ability to have adequate funds for food purchasing... the only flexible financial choice in their budget is food.



Insight 5: The current support system is fragile

Without free OzHarvest deliveries, 43% of charities would need to scale back their programs and 41% would need to seek food from other places. Only 44% could independently collect food – highlighting both the crucial role of OzHarvest and the fragility of the support network.



We recently paused briefly for a few weeks, and we had clients reach out to say they had to put their kids into foster care as they couldn't then afford to feed them.



Insight 4: Demand for food relief is outstripping supply

Two thirds of charities need more food to meet increasing demand. Charities completing the survey turn away a total of 74,000 people per month due to limited resources. OzHarvest supports ~1,500 charities nationwide, with ~1,600 on the waitlist for support.



The growing demand for assistance means we need additional support and resources to continue meeting these needs effectively.



Insight 6: Food relief is an essential support, delivering multiple benefits

Food relief stabilises households in crisis and paves the way for long-term interventions to succeed. Charities report improved nutrition (61%), better mental health (54%), and increased financial stability (48%) in clients accessing food.



Most people really appreciate the food access. A few people have said that our service has really saved them from entering into a catastrophic decline.



These insights provide unique perspectives into the policy levers required to deliver essential support to Australians in the short-term, and prevent food insecurity in the long-term. OzHarvest is calling on the Government to:

1. Address the core drivers of household food insecurity.

- 1.1 Lift income support payments, and index payments to wages and prices.
- 1.2 Improve housing affordability: review tax concessions and expand public housing.

2. Improve nutrition and food literacy in schools and communities.

- 2.1 Invest in proven food literacy and nutrition education training programs.
- 2.2 Embed food literacy in the Australian Curriculum to empower young people with essential skills.
- 2.3 Introduce a national school meal program.

3. Recognise food relief as critical social support infrastructure.

- 3.1 Increase funding for food relief so that by 2030, all Australians who seek support can receive it.

4. Reduce food waste to improve food availability.

- 4.1 Introduce proven mechanisms to increase food donation across the supply chain.
- 4.2 Support households to save food and money through clearer date labelling laws and dedicated education campaigns.

5. Build a resilient, inclusive National Food Security Strategy.

- 5.1 Adopt the internationally-recognised six-dimension definition of food security.
- 5.2 Ensure reducing household food insecurity is a core success indicator of the Strategy.

Findings from the 2026 OzHarvest Frontline Survey



Evidence from 875 charities, schools and community organisations providing local food relief.

Overview of respondents

OzHarvest's 2026 Frontline Survey was completed by 875 organisations who receive food rescued and delivered by OzHarvest, or are on the waitlist to receive food.

Responses were geographically diverse, with strong representation across the country (except for the NT, where no responses were received).

State	Total responses
ACT	23
NSW	337
QLD	169
TAS	12
SA	68
VIC	119
WA	147
Total	875

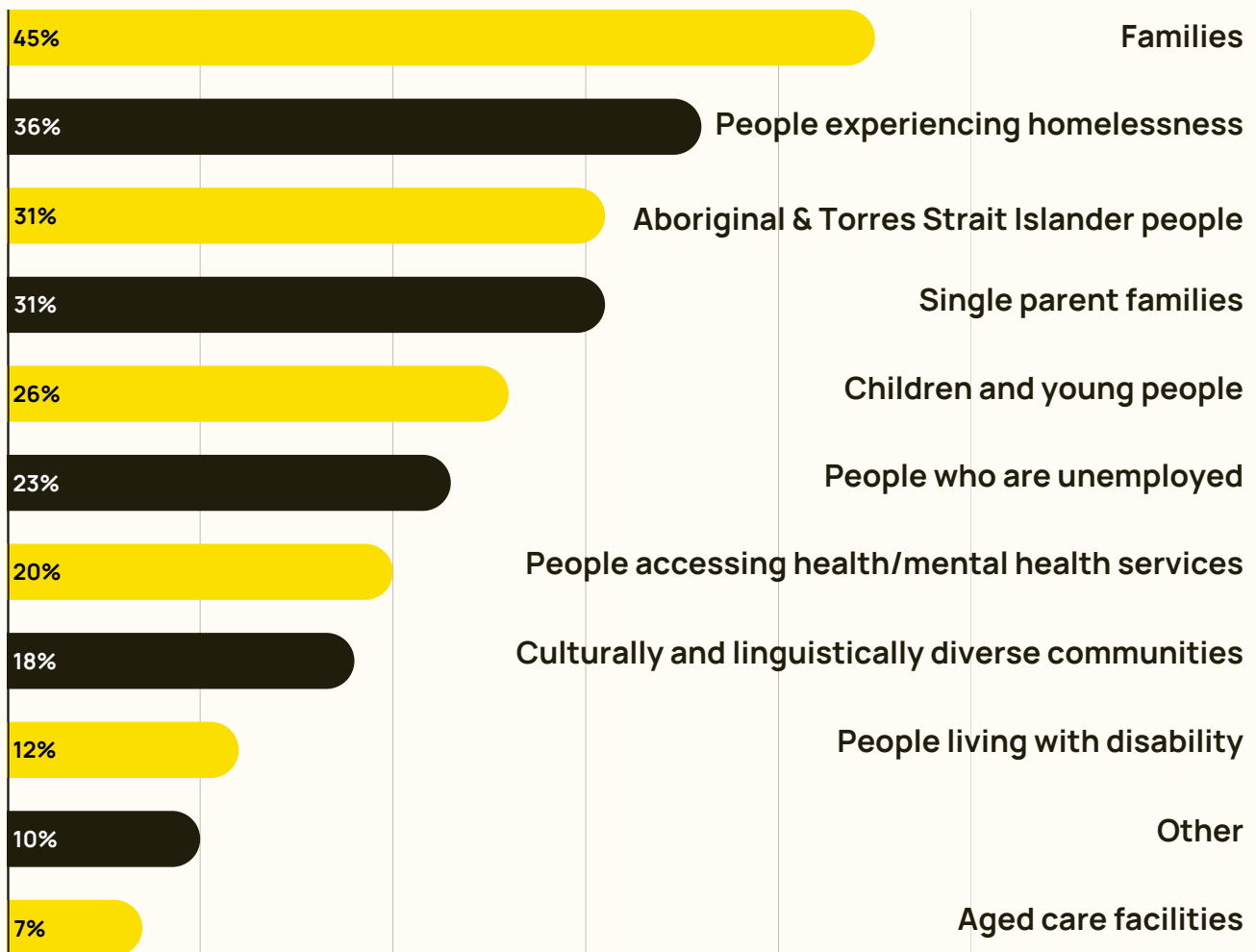
Who is seeking food relief?

Charities report most commonly supporting families (45%) and single parent families (31%) – highlighting the impact of food insecurity on households with dependents. Children and young people (26%) partly reflects relief delivered to schools and children’s services.

People experiencing homelessness(36%) and people currently unemployed (23%) are among majority recipients, reflecting the link between insufficient social support and food insecurity.

Very high recipient numbers amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (31%) and CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities (18%) indicate a need for targeted support for marginalised communities.

Most charities support all genders. Of those focused on one gender, slightly more support women (29) than men (16).

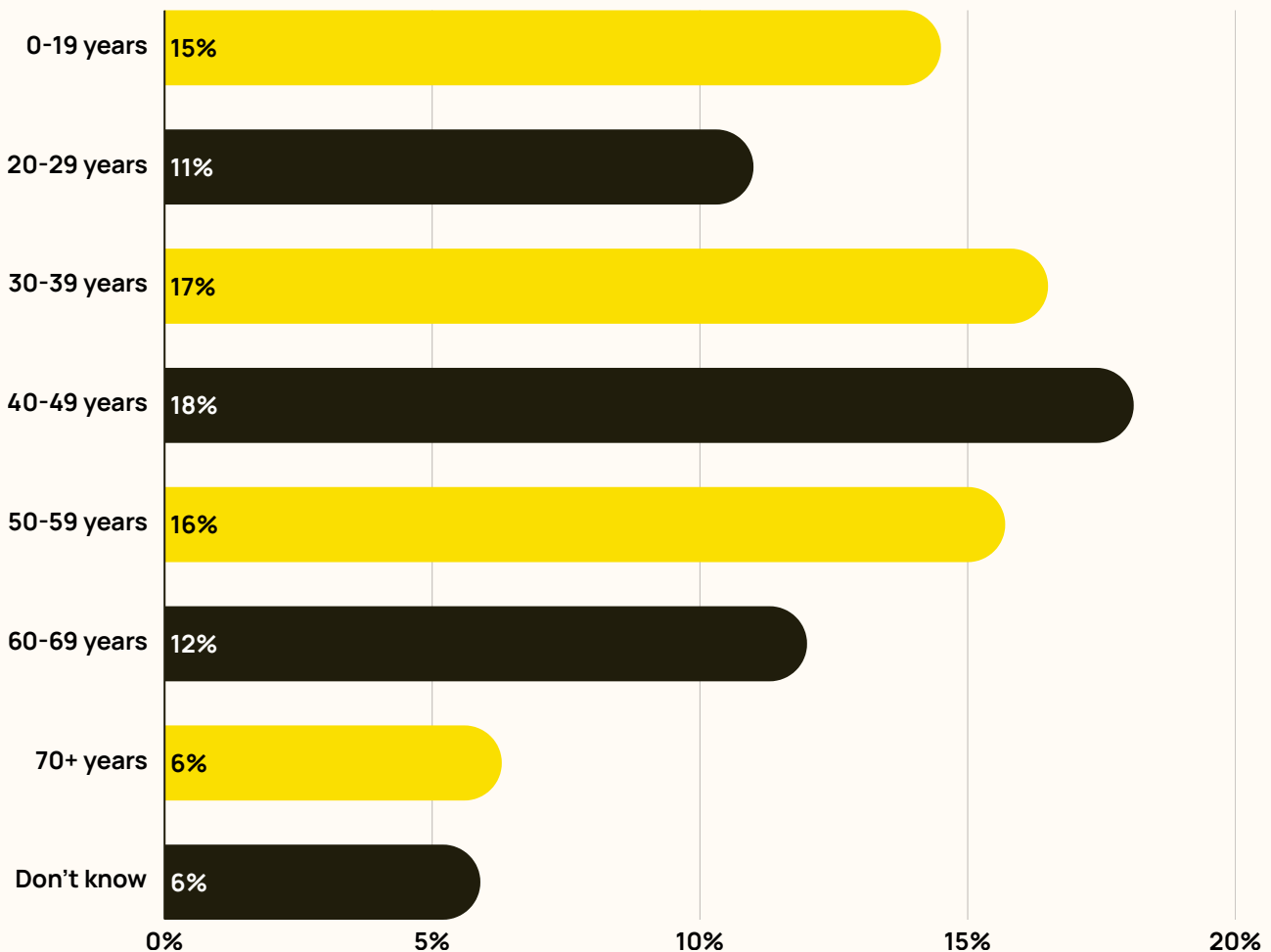


Responses to: “Which are the most common client groups you provide with food relief?” (Up to 3 selections)

Which age groups are seeking food relief?

While those accessing relief are relatively spread across all age ranges, it is of concern that children and young people (0-19 years) are a large cohort regularly receiving food relief in an average month.

The below comprises an average across all charities, from a percentage spread of different age ranges, cross-referenced with the average people per month supported by individual charities



Responses to: 'In the average month, what percentage of the people you provide with food relief are in the following age ranges?'

How many people are charities supporting?

Survey responses show charities support a wide and varied number of people each month, reflecting a diversity of service models and need. Estimates ranged from four people per month to more than 22,000 for one charity.

Charities answering the survey collectively support a total of 358,750 people each month. On average, charities report supporting 410 people per month.

Extrapolated across OzHarvest's network of 1,500 charity partners, this rises to 615,000 per month.

Over half of responding charities support fewer than 150 people per month, and more than two thirds support fewer than 350 people per month, highlighting the critical role OzHarvest plays for smaller charities to meet local relief needs.


Every month, 875 charities support 358,750 people with essential food relief.

Who is missing out on food relief?

Survey responses highlight substantial unmet demand for food relief across the network. On average, charities report turning away 85 people per month due to limited food supply. Across all survey respondents, a total of 74,375 people seeking relief are being turned away each month.

Extrapolated across all of OzHarvest's active and waitlisted charities, the number of those turned away rises to 263,500 people per month.

62% of charities need more food to meet demand. More than a third of charities need at least 50% more food. These numbers further highlight the growing unmet need, due to constrained supply.



875 charities are having to turn away 74,000+ people each month.

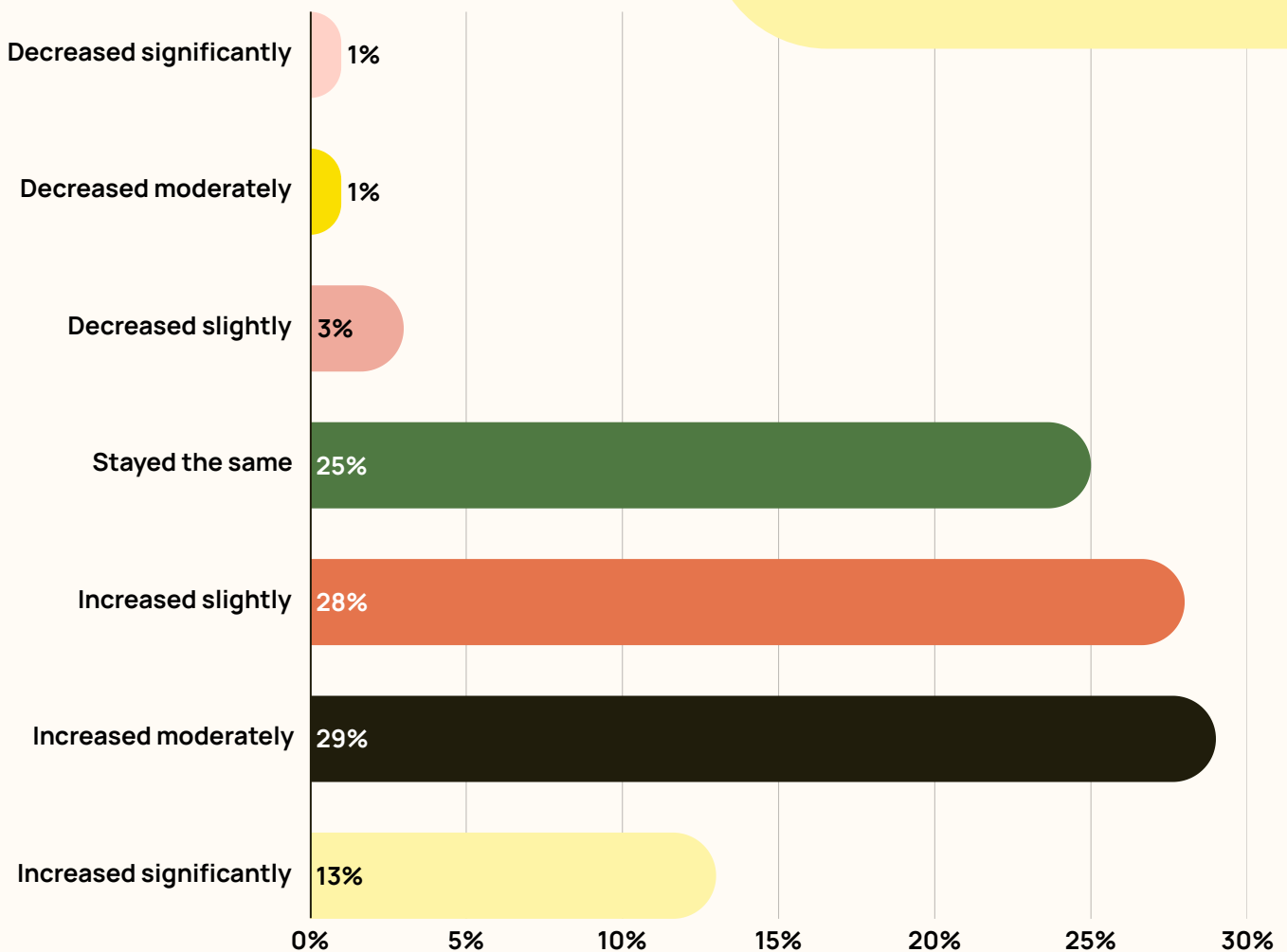
How has demand for food relief changed?

Demand for food relief remains high, with 70% of charities reporting an increase in those seeking support over the past 12 months. 36% of people accessing relief are doing so for the first time, signalling a shifting profile of food insecurity.

Almost one-third (31%) are households with at least one person in employment, highlighting that compounding pressures are pushing more households, including those previously considered financially secure, to seek assistance.

The OzHarvest Frontline Survey closed 1 March 2026. A subsequent pulse survey was conducted on 15 April to understand the impact of the conflict in the Middle East. 69% (n=158) charities reported a further increase in people seeking relief since March, with average demand up by an additional 31%.

36% of those seeking relief are doing so for the first time.



Responses to: "In the past 12 months, the number of people who approached your organisation for food relief has..."

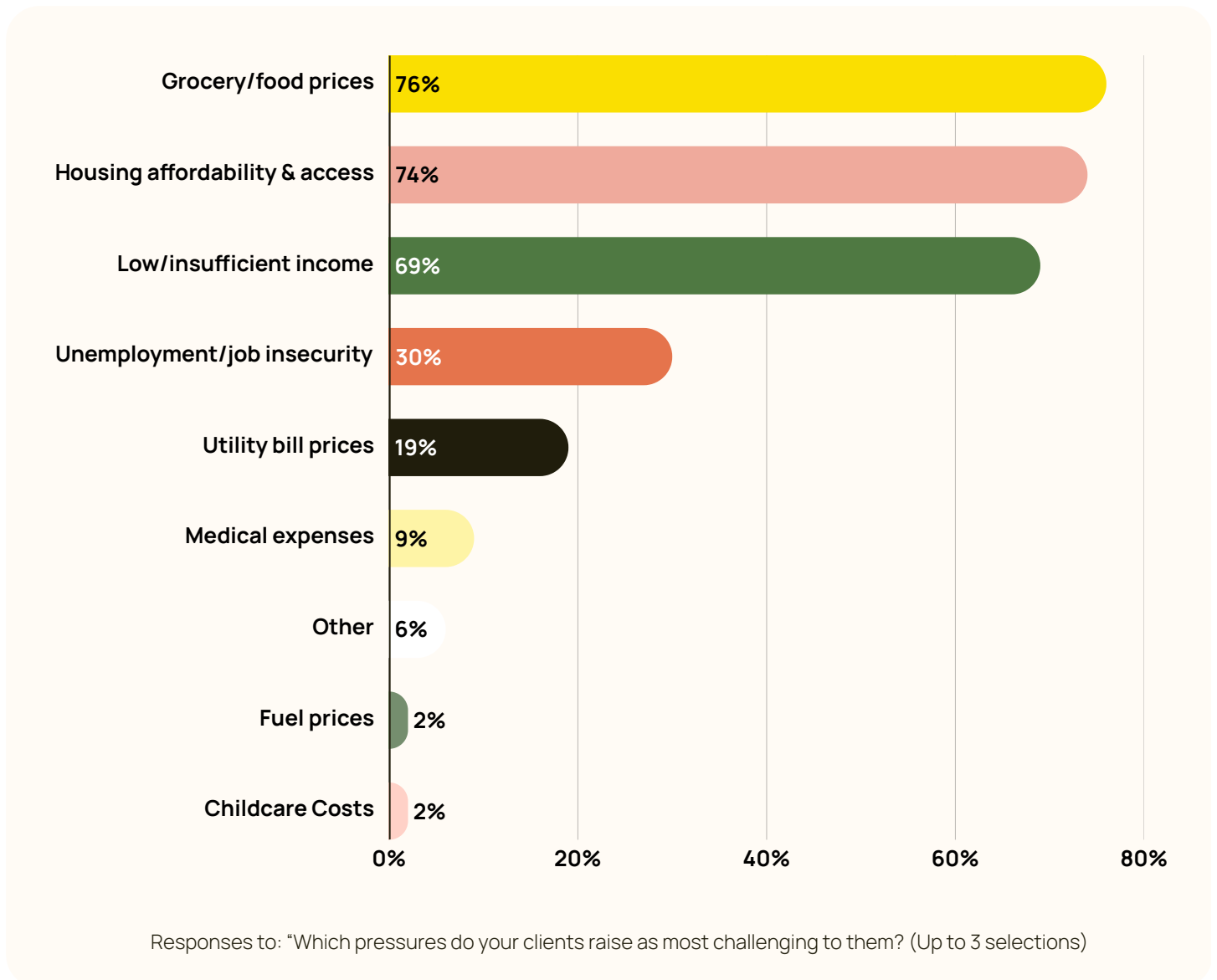
What is causing people to seek food relief?

Cost-of-living pressures remain the dominant driver of food insecurity across communities.

Charities stated high grocery and food prices as the driving cause of clients needing to seek food relief (76%).

Housing affordability and access was cited by 74% of respondents, reflecting the persistence of the housing crisis and marking a further increase on an already high result from last year's survey (68%). Low or insufficient income remains a major driver, highlighted by 69% of charities.

Note: This survey closed 1 March 2026, before impacts of the 2026 fuel supply disruption began.



Where do charities source their food?

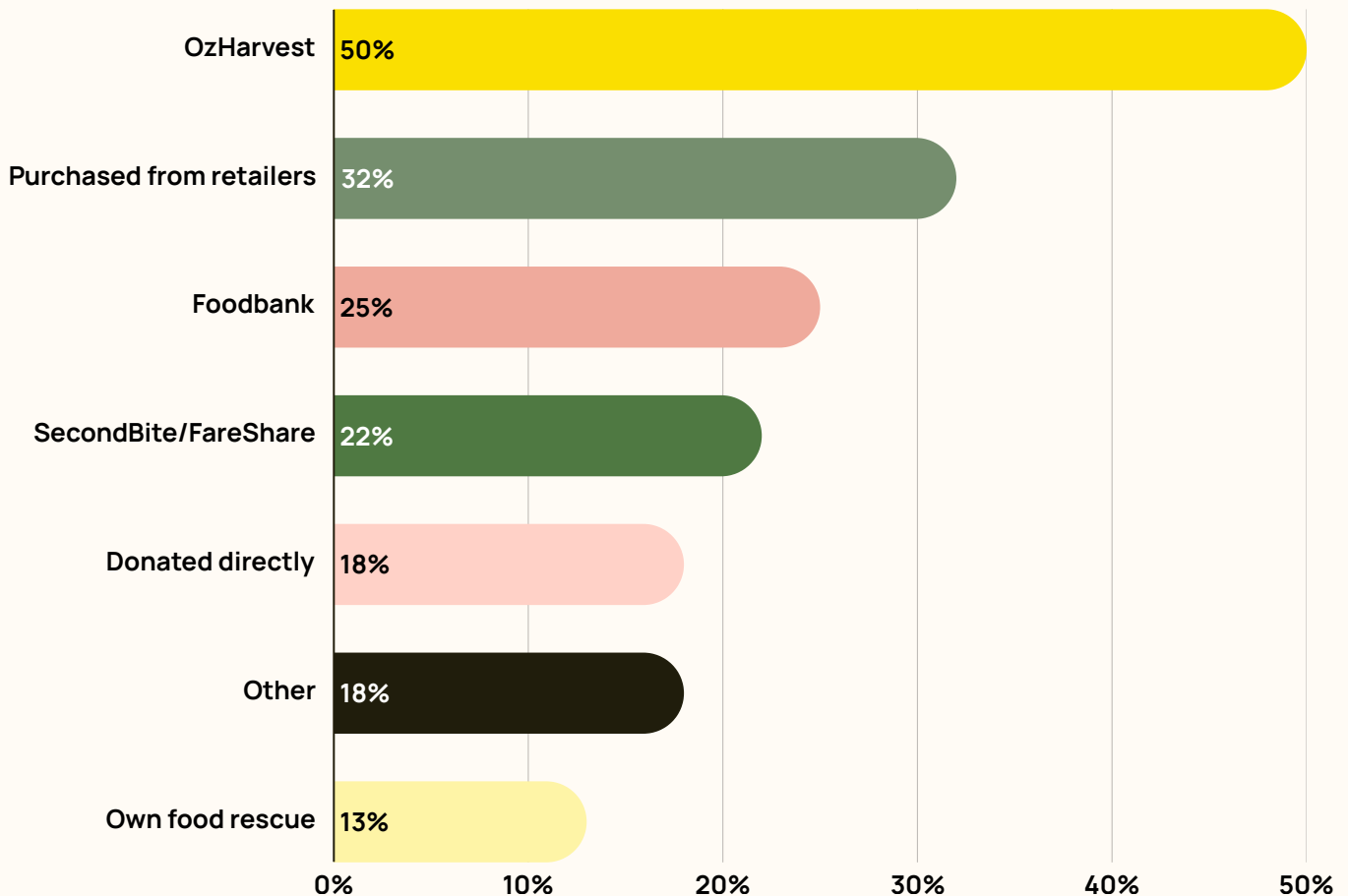
Survey findings reinforce the central role OzHarvest plays in enabling place-based community food relief, noting many respondents are active OzHarvest charity partners.

Most charities report the majority of their food supply comes from OzHarvest, and a total of 74 charities report OzHarvest is their sole source of food.

If OzHarvest support were unavailable, 43% of charities would need to scale back food relief services, while 41% would attempt to source food from elsewhere.

Only 44% of charities confirmed they had the capacity, food safety systems and resources required to independently collect food from donors, with many citing barriers such as limited volunteers, transport and storage.

OzHarvest's free deliveries underpin local food relief, especially for smaller charities.



Responses to: "What percentage of your food comes from the following sources?"

What else does food relief provide?

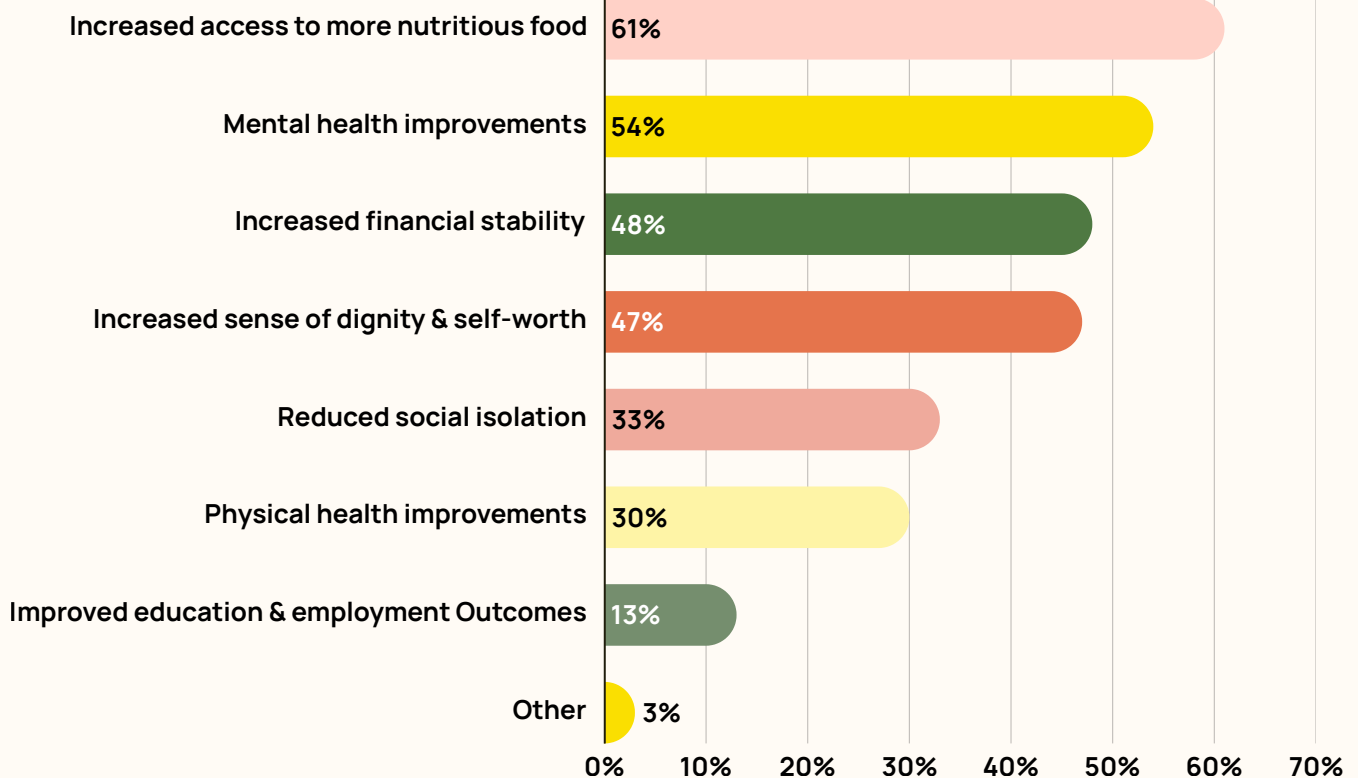
Charities report that the impacts of food relief extend beyond addressing immediate hunger, delivering social, health and financial benefits for those they support.

The most commonly identified impact of relief is improved access to nutritious food (61%), enabling clients to eat more nutritiously than would otherwise be possible.

Over half of charities (54%) report improvements in mental health outcomes, including reduced stress and anxiety. Nearly half of respondents (48%) highlight increased financial stability as a key benefit, noting food relief frees up limited household income to cover essentials such as healthcare.

Many charities report positive impacts on dignity and self-worth, as well as reduced social isolation, reflecting the relational and community-based nature of food relief services.

Food relief is a stabilising intervention, delivering broad-reaching benefits.



Responses to: "Beyond hunger relief, what are the most significant impacts food relief has on the people you support?"

What do frontline services think the government should do?

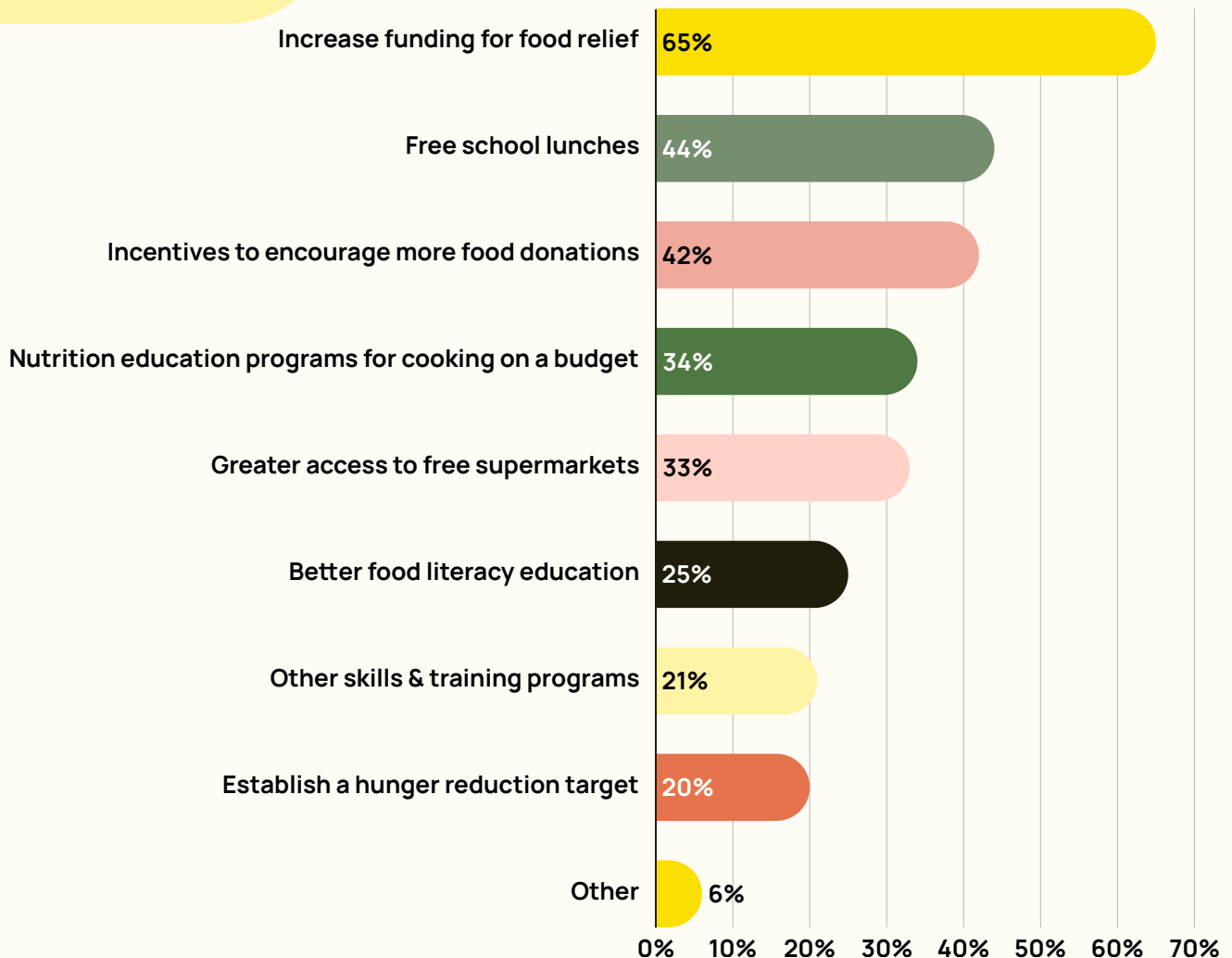
Over 670 frontline staff identified a range of practical solutions to strengthen food security.

The most commonly-identified solution was increased funding for food relief (65%), reflecting the critical pressure frontline services face to meet current and rising demand.

This was followed by support for free school lunches (44%), recognising the importance of nutrition, equity and improving educational outcomes for children.

Incentives to increase food donations from farmers and manufacturers were also strongly supported (42%), alongside nutrition education programs (34%) and greater access to free (social) supermarkets (33%).

76% of charities want urgent government action.



Responses to: "As the Federal Government looks to develop Australia's first National Food Security Strategy, what do you think would help ensure all Australians have reliable access to enough safe, nutritious food to live a healthy and active life (beyond income and housing support?)" (Up to 3 selections)



In their own words, over 540 frontline staff shared what they are seeing and hearing.

1. Housing and living costs are consuming food budgets

“The rising costs of electricity, council rates, car registration and other essentials are reaching an unmanageable level. Members have to make choices between food, heating and other basics.”

2. Parents are regularly going without so children can eat

“Our staff are still shocked at how frequently an adult will give up meals to feed their child or children.”

3. Shame and stigma are shaping whether people ask for help

“Our families are embarrassed to ask for help. Every time a food package is offered, we are told how much that means to the family.”

4. Schools are often the last safety net

“Students turn up with no food - there's no money to do the shopping.”

“They don't have food at home, and usually end up coming to TAFE hungry - so having food before class is great and helps them learn.”

“Staff have purchased food out of their own pockets to donate to students and families.”

5. Food relief also provides connection, care and emotional support

“For many people, the kindness, conversation and dignity matter just as much as the meal.”

“People are so happy to receive anything. They feel part of our community and can count on us every week.”

6. New groups seeking help for the first time include working families

“Working families are the hidden epidemic of the cost-of-living crisis.”

“Food insecurity is a constant concern, and more people are seeking food relief who have never needed assistance before... Some are working but still can't keep up with expenses, while others are facing job loss, reduced hours, or unexpected financial setbacks.”

7. Charities are under strain from limited resources and increasing demand

“Things are getting harder and harder, and the need keeps increasing.”

“Last year the buzz word was 'cost of living pressures'. This year it has transcended to 'cost of surviving pressures'.”

OzHarvest's 2026 Frontline Report findings highlight the reality faced by those struggling with food insecurity, and their support networks. Government action is needed on two fronts: immediate investment to ensure families can access essential food relief now; and bold policy reform to reduce food insecurity and build a more resilient food system. OzHarvest recommends the government:

1. Address the core drivers of food insecurity

The majority of households experiencing food insecurity cite cost-of-living pressures as the primary driver. Food insecurity cannot be solved without addressing its root causes: rising costs of housing and essentials, and insufficient income support.

1.1 Lift income support payments, and index payments to wages and prices

Income support should be sufficient to meet basic living costs, however payments (such as JobSeeker and Youth Allowance) remain well below the poverty line. Lifting base rates to parity with the Age Pension plus Pension Supplement, and indexing payments to wages as well as prices, would prevent people falling further behind.

1.2 Improve housing affordability; review tax concessions and expand public housing

Secure, affordable housing is foundational to food security - high housing costs mean food budgets are forced to shrink. Reviewing investor tax concessions could reduce demand pressure and improve the efficiency of public spending. Expanding public and community housing would increase the supply of affordable homes.

2. Improve nutrition and food literacy in schools and communities

Children and young people are disproportionately impacted by food security, with negative impacts on health, learning and future opportunities. Supporting children and young people, and their families, can help break the cycle of disadvantage.

2.1 Invest in proven food literacy training

Food literacy is a foundation of food security (under the utilisation dimension). Place-based food literacy programs, such as OzHarvest's NEST program, build long-term food security, reducing downstream costs to health and social services.

2.2 Embed food literacy in the Australian Curriculum

Schools have a critical opportunity to build lifelong food skills, but food literacy is not mandated to be taught. While nutrition education programs like OzHarvest's FEAST play a crucial role, embedding food literacy in the curriculum would empower all children and young people with essential life skills to plan, cook and eat food that promotes health.

2.3. Introduce a national school meal program

School meal programs are a proven, highly-effective way to improve nutrition and educational outcomes. Australia remains one of the few high-income countries without a national school meals program. Tasmania's School Food Matters is a proven model that should be expanded and replicated, with prioritisation to low-SES areas.

3. Recognise food relief as critical social support infrastructure

The National Food Relief Sector provides essential relief to 1 million people each month. It underpins the broader charity sector, and acts as a gateway to other support services. However, with current funding, the Sector can meet only 31% of demand, leaving millions of Australians without food.

3.1. Increase funding for food relief, commensurate with need

Ensure that by 2030, all Australians who seek food relief can receive it, by stepping up funding to food relief charities to meet demand during ongoing cost-of-living pressures.

4. Reduce food waste to improve food availability

Reducing food loss and waste is key to boosting food availability and ease cost-of-living pressures. Allowing one third of food produced to go to waste undermines productivity and system resilience.

4.1 Introduce incentives to increase food donations across the supply chain

Create incentives and mechanisms for food donation to ensure safe, surplus food is redirected to people rather than wasted, reducing costs for businesses while increasing food availability for communities experiencing food insecurity.

4.2 Support households to save food and money


Food waste costs families thousands each year. Help people reduce food waste at home through clearer date labelling laws and dedicated consumer education campaigns to change habits and save money.

Implications for the National Food Security Strategy

The development of Australia's first-ever National Food Security Strategy presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set out policy commitments to reduce household food insecurity for good.

Alongside including the policy recommendations listed above, OzHarvest urges the following for a resilient, equitable Strategy:

- Adopt the UN's six dimension definition of food security, reflecting global best practice and ensuring policy addresses not just supply, but affordability, nutrition, and sustainability, tackling the core drivers of food insecurity and building a resilient food system for the future.
- Ensure a reduction in household food insecurity is a core success indicator of the Strategy, recognising household food stress as the canary in the coalmine for wider food system issues.



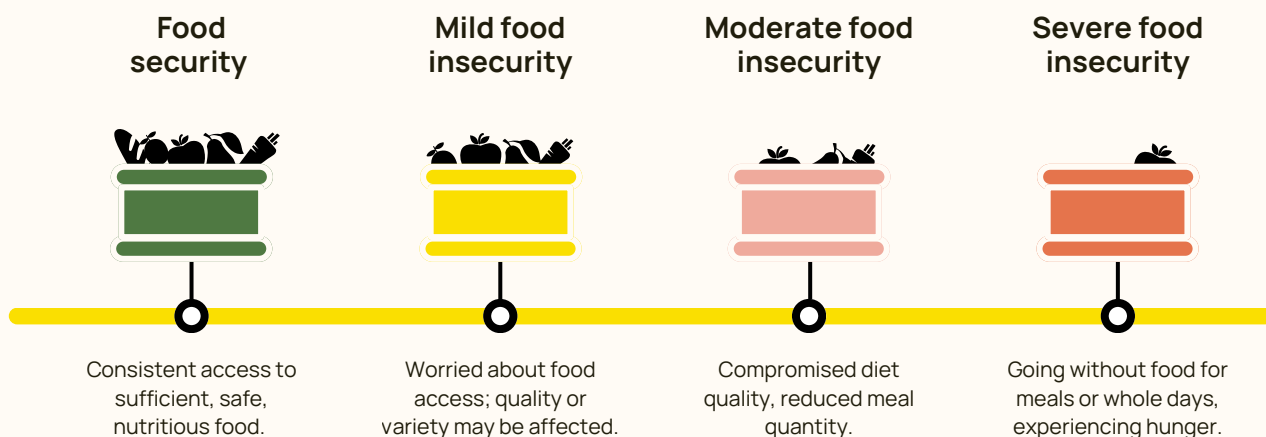
The 2026 OzHarvest Frontline Report must be situated within the broader context of food insecurity in Australia.

The scale of the problem

Food security affects 1 in 8 households overall and 1 in 3 sole parent households according to official government data from 2023-2024.⁵ Foodbank's 2025 Hunger Report found up to one third of Australian households are considered food insecure.⁶ The paradox is, at a macro level, Australia is considered food secure, producing enough food to feed 70 million people, but the data indicates that between 1.3 million to 3.7 million households are in food stress.

A person is considered food insecure when they lack regular access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to support an active and healthy life⁷. Food insecurity exists along a continuum, from anxiety about affording food, through to going whole days without eating.

Food security continuum



Multidimensional food security

National food security is a practical measure of Australia's progress on delivering its international commitment to the human right to food. Genuine food security is more than just "having enough food" - international best-practice⁸ outlines six dimensions to assess food security.

Six dimensions of food security

Dimension		Definition	Impacted by
Availability	Is there food available in the system?	The availability of food in the supply chain, through domestic production and imports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural production • Climate events • Supply-chain disruptions
Access	Do I have the means to buy food?	A person's economic, physical, geographical and social capacity to access food, without compromising other essential needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-of-living • Income • Transport barriers • Geographic location • Health status
Utilisation	Can I cook and store food?	A person's knowledge and ability to safely prepare meals that meet nutritional needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food literacy • Kitchen facilities • Time poverty • Health status
Stability	Is food security resilient over time?	The stability of all other dimensions, through shortterm shocks and longerterm economic, social and environmental changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geopolitical volatility • Climate change • Inflation • Unstable employment & housing • Crisis frequency
Agency	Do I have choice and a voice in my food system?	A person's ability to choose their food, and to participate in the development of policies that shape the food system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power imbalances • Service design • Governance processes
Sustainability	Can the food system meet needs now and into the future?	The capacity of food system to deliver food security now, while protecting the environmental, social and economic foundations needed for the food security of future generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for regenerative farming • Climate change • Resource use • Food waste • Circular economy practices



Food security is a social determinant of health, influencing an individual's wellbeing and quality of life.

The vicious cycle of food insecurity

In Australia, household food insecurity reflects the cumulative impact of multiple, intersecting pressures. The most significant are rising cost-of-living pressures, housing stress, and inadequate income, often exacerbated by insecure employment and insufficient income support.

Household food insecurity can lead to declining mental and physical health, reduced educational performance and workforce participation, increased family and domestic violence, and weakened social cohesion, all of which can lead to further increased food insecurity.

This presents a reinforcing, bidirectional dynamic: social stressors both lead to and result from food insecurity, with impacts intensifying over time - compounding physical, mental, and social harm.

The canary in the coalmine

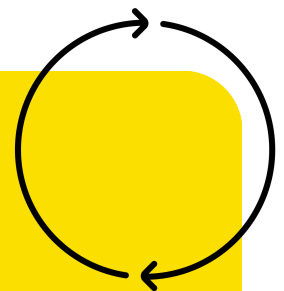
The connection between food insecurity and other social stressors mean that demand for food relief can be considered an early warning sign of wider household stress, including economic strain, compromised health, and family safety risks.

Example: The compounding relationship between food insecurity and domestic violence

Household food insecurity is associated with an increased risk of family and domestic violence. Food insecurity is a form of economic stress and household strain contributing to increased anxiety, depression and anger, which can increase the risk of violence and abuse.⁹

Food insecurity can also be a consequence of domestic and family violence. Research shows financial abuse and coercive control can restrict access to food or resources, while fleeing an abusive household is associated with sudden economic precarity, which increases the risk of food insecurity.

Evidence from systematic reviews indicate food insecurity and domestic violence reinforce one another over time, with impacts most pronounced for women and children.¹⁰



The link between food waste and food insecurity

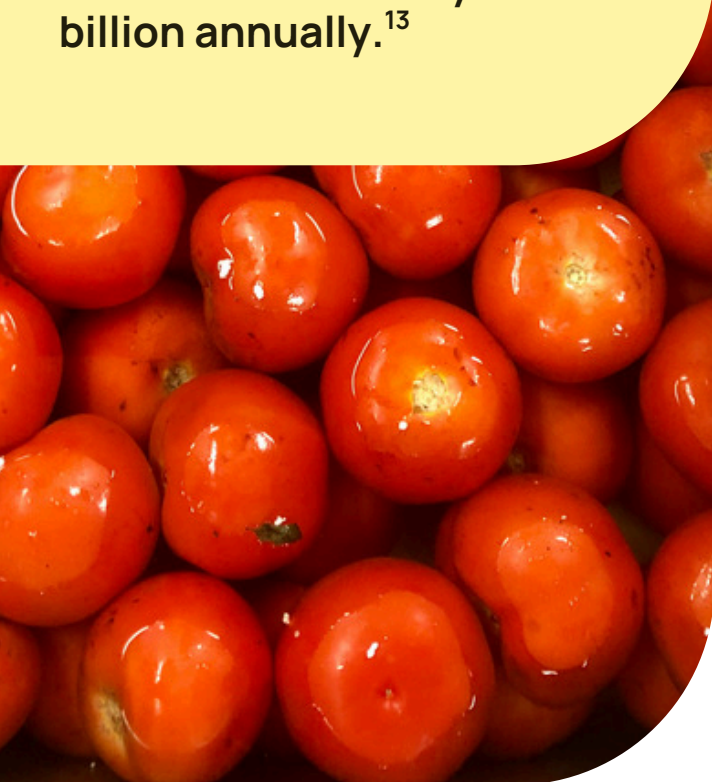
Food waste and food insecurity are connected challenges, and are both symptoms of inadequate policies. Around one-third of all food produced in Australia is lost or wasted each year, representing a failure of efficiency, sustainability and equity. Addressing food insecurity must go hand-in-hand with addressing food waste, which is currently affecting food availability, cost and environmental damage.

While OzHarvest plays an important role in redistributing surplus food to charity partners, food rescue and redistribution represents just 0.2% of food waste, highlighting the important role of food waste reduction interventions across the supply chain.

Land the size of Victoria is used to grow food that ends up in the bin.¹¹

In Australia, emissions from food waste are similar to that of the aviation industry.¹²

Food waste costs the Australian economy 37.7 billion annually.¹³



How does food waste impact food security?

Reduces food availability

7.6 million tonnes of food is lost or wasted annually - shrinking the volume of food available for consumers. Reducing food waste is a low-cost measure to increase food availability, without increasing production.

Increases food prices

Food loss and waste across the supply chain is priced into what consumers pay at the checkout. This structural inefficiency disproportionately affects low-income households.

Costs families thousands

Household food waste costs the average Australian household up to \$2,500 annually.¹⁴ Low food literacy can lead to avoidable waste. Improving food literacy is a proven dual-benefit intervention: it reduces financial strain and waste simultaneously.¹⁵

Contributes to a less resilient food system

High-waste food systems have limited buffer capacity to absorb shocks such as supply-chain disruptions. Food waste also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, amplifying climate impacts which further threaten food availability and stability. Food waste reduction is a food security strategy - stretching existing supply during periods of disruption.



The role of food relief within a sustainable food system

Australia's food relief network provides essential support for people experiencing food insecurity. Each month, the National Food Relief Sector (OzHarvest, Foodbank, Secondbite | Fareshare) provides food for over 1 million people and underpins the work of thousands of community organisations.

For households facing housing instability, family violence, sudden income loss, health challenges or a natural disaster, food relief can be the difference between eating and not.

Food relief is not a long-term solution to solving food insecurity. Ending household food insecurity requires policies that bolster our food system, and ensure households can afford food, consistent with Australia's commitment to SDG2: Zero Hunger.

However, there will always be people who need immediate assistance in a crisis, and a resilient food system must be able to respond with dignified support whenever need arises. Food relief plays an essential part in a holistic food system.

“

We are so grateful to OzHarvest for their generosity, their consistency, and quality. We are able to rely on their service, and plan with reasonable certainty, to incorporate the weekly delivery of food donations into our budget.

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Food relief is also an essential part of the national social support infrastructure. When food is one less thing to worry about, people are better able to engage with other services, for example, education, and employment support. Food relief is a foundational, interim service that enables other interventions to succeed.

Despite its central role, food relief remains severely under-resourced. For example, just 3% of OzHarvest's funding is from the Federal Government. In parallel, only around 0.2% of Australia's surplus food is rescued and redirected to people in need. Yet food relief from surplus food is the most cost-effective way to support those experiencing food insecurity, with the dual benefit of increasing circularity and reducing emissions.

OzHarvest is committed to rescuing and delivering nutritious food where it is needed most, and supporting schools communities with food literacy education programs. These efforts alone cannot resolve food insecurity, but until we see stronger government action, such initiatives are critical. OzHarvest will continue to advocate for policy solutions for all Australians to have access to safe, affordable, nutritious food.

This report presents findings from OzHarvest's national, point-in-time survey of charity partners: organisations and education sites who receive and distribute food rescued by OzHarvest, as well as those currently on OzHarvest's waitlist to receive food.

Undertaken annually since 2020, the survey captures frontline insights from staff and volunteers at organisations working directly with people experiencing food insecurity every day.

It is designed to complement other population-level assessments of food insecurity (noting Australia did not gather regular or reliable official data on the extent of food insecurity at a national level for a long period¹⁶ until recently-released 2024 survey data¹⁷), and measurement of intersecting pressures such as the housing crisis, poverty and material deprivation.

The 2026 survey closed 1 March. A pulse survey was circulated 15 April 2026 to understand updated insights from the fuel crisis and supply chain disruptions.

Methodology

The survey was delivered via SurveyMonkey and comprised 25 questions, including organisational characteristics, service delivery metrics, observed demand, and demographics.

Data cleaning procedures were applied, including the exclusion of responses exceeding three standard deviations from the mean where appropriate. Analysis compared responses across key variables, including triangulating estimates of the number of people supported against key demographics.



Founded in 2004, OzHarvest is Australia's leading food rescue organisation and a critical lever in the national food relief supply chain.

Through a place-based, business-to-business model, OzHarvest rescues surplus food from more than 2,500 retail and hospitality partners and delivers it at no cost to over 1,500 local charities and community organisations - many of which would otherwise be unable to collect food themselves - ensuring food reaches people where need is greatest.

As a last-mile operation, OzHarvest provides essential, reliable access to food for communities experiencing hardship, supporting food relief as foundational social infrastructure. OzHarvest increases circularity and tackles waste at scale, diverting nutritious food from landfill, reducing associated greenhouse gas emissions, and advancing innovation to valorise surplus food.

Each week, 80 OzHarvest vans rescue over 350 tonnes, and deliver over 750,000 meals to those in need. OzHarvest also operates free supermarkets in Sydney and Adelaide, as well as Sydney's Refettorio restaurant, offering free 3-course meals in a welcoming setting for people experiencing food insecurity and social isolation.

In addition to food relief, OzHarvest builds food security and food literacy through three education programs:

- FEAST – a curriculum-aligned program where students learn about the issue and impact of food waste on our environment, and how to plan, prepare and cook healthy and nutritious recipes and reduce household food waste.
- NEST – a 6 week, evidence-based public health initiative that teaches essential food literacy skills and improves long-term household food security.
- Nourish - a holistic approach to a Certificate II Cookery qualification and life skills training with pathways to employment for priority youth who face barriers to traditional education.

OzHarvest is committed to addressing the root causes of food waste and food insecurity, as well as supporting those experiencing hunger today.

Working in partnership with government, industry and community, we advocate for policy solutions to reduce food waste, achieve circular economy outcomes, address food insecurity and build a resilient, equitable food system.



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What we hear most from the people we support is that they are struggling to make ends meet, particularly with the rising cost of living. Many families tell us they are having to choose between paying rent, covering utility bills, or putting food on the table. Food insecurity is a constant concern, and more people are seeking food relief who have never needed assistance before. We also hear that people feel overwhelmed and isolated.

Some are working but still can't keep up with expenses, while others are facing job loss, reduced hours, or unexpected financial setbacks. Parents often express stress about being able to provide enough groceries for their children, especially during school holidays when food costs increase. Another common theme is that people value having a safe, welcoming place to come.

The community centre is more than just a place for food relief - it is somewhere they feel seen, heard, and supported without judgment. However, the growing demand for assistance means we need additional support and resources to continue meeting these needs effectively.

Overall, the strongest message we hear is that practical help - especially consistent food relief - makes a real difference, but the need in our community is increasing and ongoing.

- OzHarvest Charity Partner 2026

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