



# Foodbank Hunger Report 2023

# Message from the CEO

What is food insecurity? Let's put it in real terms. Food insecurity is waking early and sending your child off to school with a rumbling tummy and empty lunchbox because you've been forced into an impossible choice between paying the rent or buying food that week. Food insecurity is living at home alone as a pensioner, convincing yourself that three meals a day is a luxury, and that two – or even one – will suffice. Food insecurity is rushing to the fruit platter at a working lunch in the office because fresh fruit and vegetables have become a treat, rather than a dietary staple. Food insecurity is now having a mortgage, a full-time job and a side hustle, yet food is a discretionary spend in the household budget. I wish these were hypothetical examples. They're not.

Each year, the *Foodbank Hunger Report* gives us insights into food insecurity in Australia. To use the formal definition, *"A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food"*. This year's report highlights just how many households are experiencing food insecurity for the very first time, and how reluctant these people are to ask for help, despite how urgently they need food relief. It's clear the cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating the challenges facing those in vulnerable circumstances, and forcing people to make compromises on what, and when they are eating. We are fast heading towards a reality where more than half the population will know what food insecurity is because they are experiencing it themselves. Add to that, natural disasters of increasing frequency and severity, and it equals an increase in the demand for food relief that has never been greater.


Our country produces enough food to feed our population three times over. We must do better to ensure nutritious, culturally appropriate food reaches the dinner tables of everyone in Australia.

Brianna Casey

**3.7 million households experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months...**



**...more than all the households of Sydney and Melbourne combined**



**That's 36% of all  
households  
and  
383,000 more  
than in 2022**

# We are in a food crisis



**48%** of the total population now feels anxious about or struggles to consistently access adequate food

# How many people are experiencing food insecurity in 2023

- In the past year, 3.7 million Australian households (36%) experienced moderate to severe food insecurity, meaning – at the very least – they are reducing the quality, variety or desirability of their food and at worst, their eating patterns are disrupted.
- This is a 3% increase in the general population, the equivalent of 383,000 more households than in 2022 that were forced to make unenviable choices about what and when they eat.
- More than 2.3 million of all households (23%) fall into the category of severely ‘food insecure’, which means they are actively going hungry – reducing their food intake, skipping meals or going entire days without eating.
- Australia is in the midst of a food security crisis where 48% of the general population now feels anxious or struggles to consistently access adequate food. This is up from 45% in 2022 and, if this trend continues, by the end of 2023 we face the reality of more than half of the general Australian population having experienced some level of difficulty in meeting the most basic of need – food.

**Food insecurity  
is now being  
experienced in  
homes it has  
never touched  
before**





**In the last 12 months 77% of those households experiencing food insecurity did so for the first time**



**Households experiencing food insecurity for the first time are increasingly younger (81% aged <45), employed (83%) or with mid (80%) to higher (85%) incomes**





**At least 60% of  
food insecure  
households had  
someone in paid  
work**

**Half**  
**of all renters**



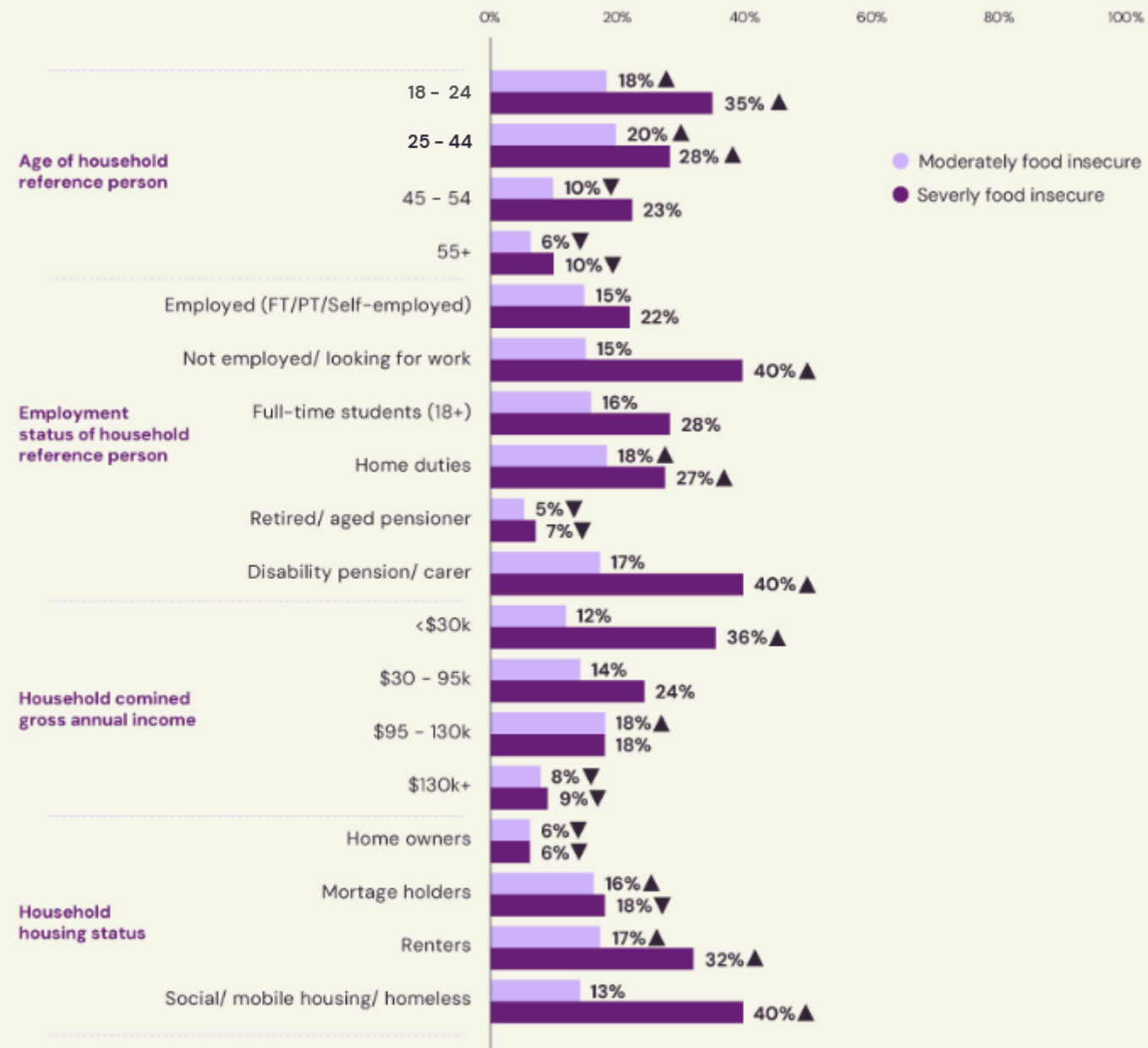
**A third**  
**of all mortgage**  
**holders**

**Are**  
**struggling**  
**to put a**  
**meal on**  
**their table**

# Who food insecurity is affecting in 2023

- Food insecurity is now affecting households that have never been touched by it before. In the last 12 months, 77% of those households experiencing it did so for the first time last year. For the majority of those, the episode was intermittent and brief as they struggled to manage their budget during a cost-of-living crisis. While for a few, it was due to an unexpected event such as the loss of their job or unanticipated medical bills – the more common reasons cited prior to the pandemic.
- Food insecurity is not experienced by everyone in the same way. To better understand this, Foodbank has developed a framework based on two key factors – the frequency and length of food insecurity episodes. Food insecure households are grouped to reflect the continuum from crisis (infrequent and short-lived food insecurity) to chronic (ever-present food insecurity).
- Being at the crisis end of food insecurity is generally triggered by a community or individual shock, such as a natural disaster or family breakdown. Households in these circumstances often do not see themselves as food insecure, rather as just having a bad patch. Those at the chronic end of food insecurity are generally in vulnerable circumstances, such as intergenerational poverty, long-term unemployment or marginalisation. For these people, food insecurity is a constant in their lives.
- We are now seeing increasing numbers of people moving into the crisis end of the food insecurity continuum. During the year, 3 million households went from being food secure to being food insecure. 2.7 million of food insecure households managed to get back to being food secure. The difference is an increase of 383,000 or 3% of the population. The number of households experiencing chronic food insecurity remained stable at around 750,000.
- Compared to 2022, the first-time food insecure are increasingly metro (up 4%), middle-income (up 7%), employed (up 5%), mortgage-holding (up 6%) and renting households (up 5%) who experience increased food insecurity. There was also a significant increase in food insecurity amongst households *without* children (up 6%).
- Food insecurity impacts households across a wide variety of demographic and socioeconomic cohorts including previously less vulnerable groups. Looking at all food insecure households, 60% have someone in paid work, which makes it clear that a job does not necessarily insulate a household against going hungry. Also, a half of all renters and a third of all mortgage holders were food insecure in the last 12 months.

# Level of Household food insecurity by demographics

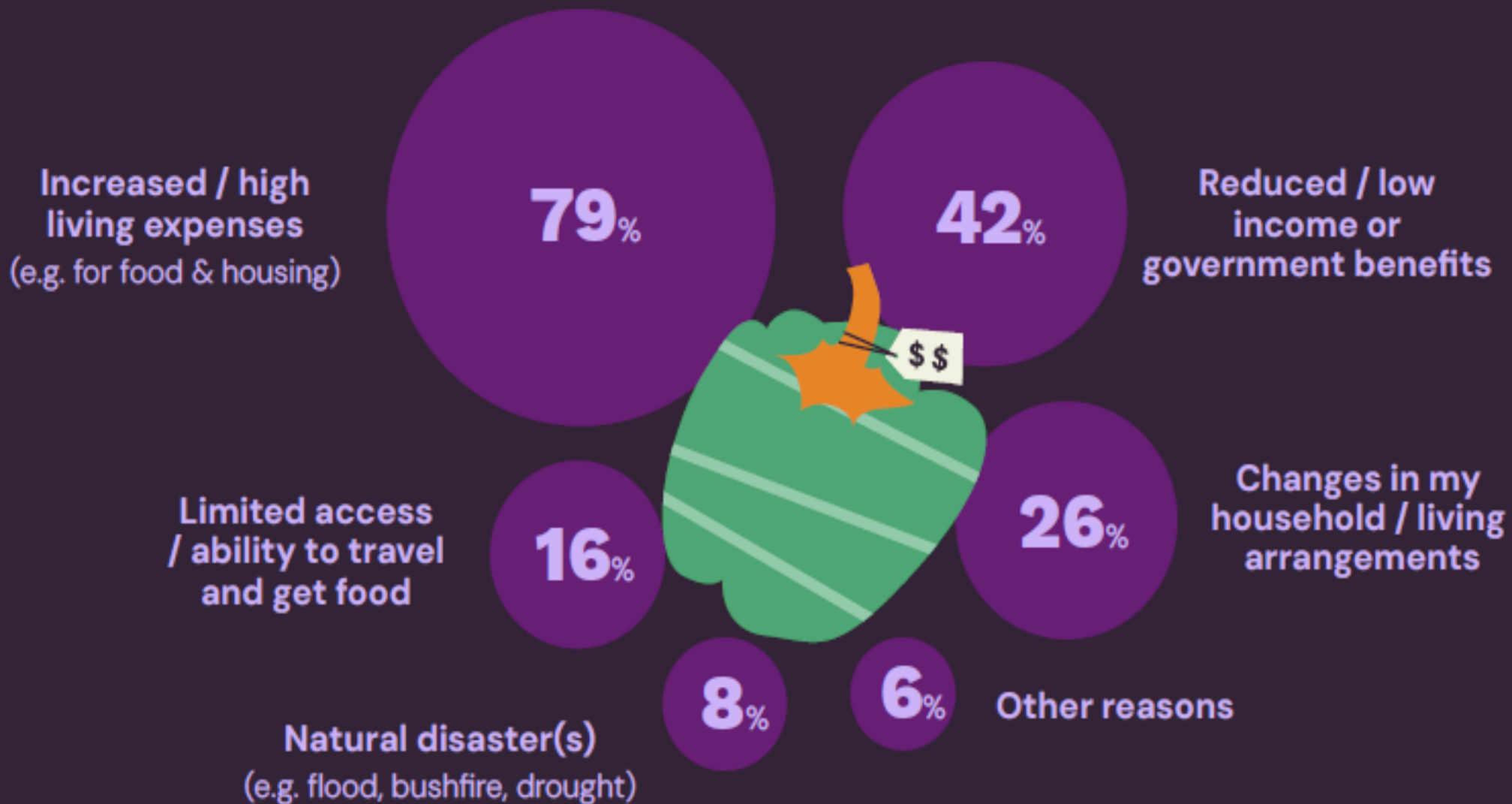


▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower than AU HH Level at 95% confidence interval

Source: Foodbank Hunger Report 2023 research

**The rising cost  
of living is  
tipping people  
over the edge**





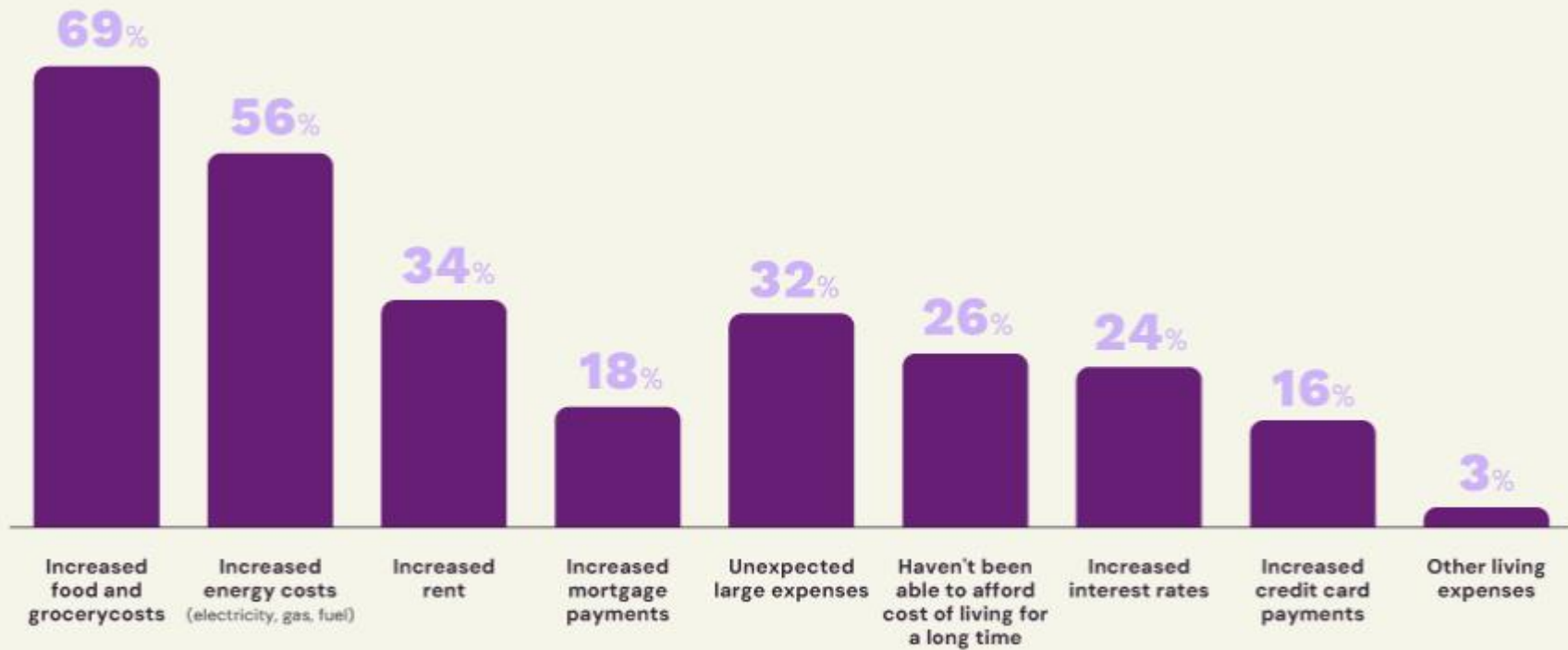
Note: respondents were able to cite multiple reasons

## What is causing food insecurity in 2023

- The majority of the Australian population (56%) reports that the cost-of-living crisis is by far their most important concern but for food insecure households, simple, everyday costs like food and housing are now overwhelming them.
- 79% of food insecure households reported the rising cost-of-living as the biggest reason for their hardship. This is up significantly from 64% in 2022.
- Reduced or low income/government benefits remains a significant contributor (42%) to food insecurity, as does a change in household /living arrangements (26%). Limited access or ability to travel to get food was a less significant contributor to food insecurity (16% vs 26% in 2022) likely due to the removal of travel restrictions in place during the pandemic. Whilst the impact of natural disasters on food insecurity at the national level reduced in the last 12 months (8%, vs 19% in 2022), this factor was very variable at the local level and the forecast of a hot, dry 2023/24 summer is cause for concern.



## The cost-of-living expenses crippling food insecure households



▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower than previous year

Source: FHR 2022-2023 Research; Q40B - Can you tell us more in what way increased/high living expenses (e.g. for food and housing) contributed to your food situation(s) in the past 12 months? Base: Total Food Insecure Households, 2023 n=1514.

\*Note - direct comparison to 2022 not available due to code frame changes

## What is causing food insecurity in 2023

- The cost of our most basic needs – food and shelter – is now the most common cause of food insecurity in Australia, with the cost of food and groceries reported as the chief contributor to food insecurity (69%), followed by energy costs (56%) and then housing costs (50%). Increasing rent (34%) is twice as likely to be cited as a factor compared to increasing mortgage repayments (18%).
- Increased credit/debt repayments were cited by 16% of food insecure households as a contributing factor and this may climb further given the number of references made by people to resorting to Buy-Now-Pay-Later services for general expenses including food.
- What we are seeing now contrasts markedly with the primary causes of food insecurity over the last decade – unexpected bills and expenses (32%) and not being able to afford the cost of living for a long time (26%). It is now everyday costs that are putting the pressure on households.

**Food is the  
most likely  
thing to be  
sacrificed to  
make ends  
meet**





**94% coped  
through  
shifting  
spending on  
food and  
groceries**



## What food insecure people are doing to cope in 2023

- As one of the biggest contributors to the strain on household budgets, food and groceries are also the first items people cut back on when trying to make ends meet. 94% of food insecure households reported changing their shopping and eating out habits in the last 12 months. This included looking for sales/discounts on food and grocery items (71%), cutting back on meals out of the home (69%) and swapping foods for cheaper alternatives (59%). Nearly half (48%) of people reported reducing their purchasing of fresh produce and protein.
- 62% of food insecure households attempted to cope through changing their expenditure on their housing and finances including dipping into personal or household savings (42%) or deferring payments by spending more on credit cards or Buy-Now-Pay-Later services. 58% made savings by cutting back on their energy usage or changing plans, and 41% reduced their transport costs by driving less.



**48%**  
**reduced**  
**purchasing**  
**of fresh**  
**produce &**  
**protein**



Coped through shifting  
spend on **housing & finance**  
in the last 12 months.



Coped through shifting  
spend on **energy**  
in the last 12 months.

## What food insecure household did in the most recent moment they struggled to afford food, 2023 Amongst Food Insecure households



*I ordered bulk food ingredients from HelloFresh, split out the ingredients into different packets of food along the lines of basic food groups. I then mix and matched various ingredients from the different packets at different times of the day to have different foods for say breakfast. Higher levels of nutrition at breakfast and lunch, than dinner. After all, people sleep at night. The need for higher nutrition levels at night is lower than morning or lunch. (Male, 45-54, regional VIC, self-employed)*



*I worked Uber Eats to earn more money and get paid the same day [for food]. (Male, 25-34, regional QLD, self-employed)*



*I just didn't eat for 3 days and when I did eat, I'd try to only eat small amounts to do my best to make the food last (Female, 25-34, metro VIC, employed full-time)*

*Made sure my wife and son had enough to eat I choose to go without I didn't let them know. I also picked up more hours at work. (Male, 25-34, regional NSW, employed full-time)*



*I got help from parents, they had me over for dinner more and gave me some food. I Afterpay groceries through DoorDash. I pre-make bulk batches of soup when I can afford the extra ingredients. (Female, 25-34, metro NSW, employed full-time)*



*Focused on feeding the children and pets because although uncomfortable the adults could wait/ eat less and by doing so the children and pets are unaware of the stressful situation (Female, 25-34, metro SA, home duties)*



*I went hungry which caused an insulin overdose and had to be rushed to hospital. Luckily, I was able to get some food in hospital. (Male, 25-34, metro NSW, employed full-time)*

*My wife and I just shared meals so there was plenty for the kids and we would only eat once a day (Male, 45-54, metro NSW, employed full-time)*

*Skipped meals, making large amounts in bulk when I do have enough for groceries and eating a large amount when I can to make up for skipped meals (Female, 18-24, metro NSW, employed full-time)*



**People are not  
getting the help  
they need**



**24%**



24% of food insecure households received help from formal food relief services.

**Formal food relief**

**31%**



31% of food insecure households received help from family and friends.

**Family and friends**

**56%**



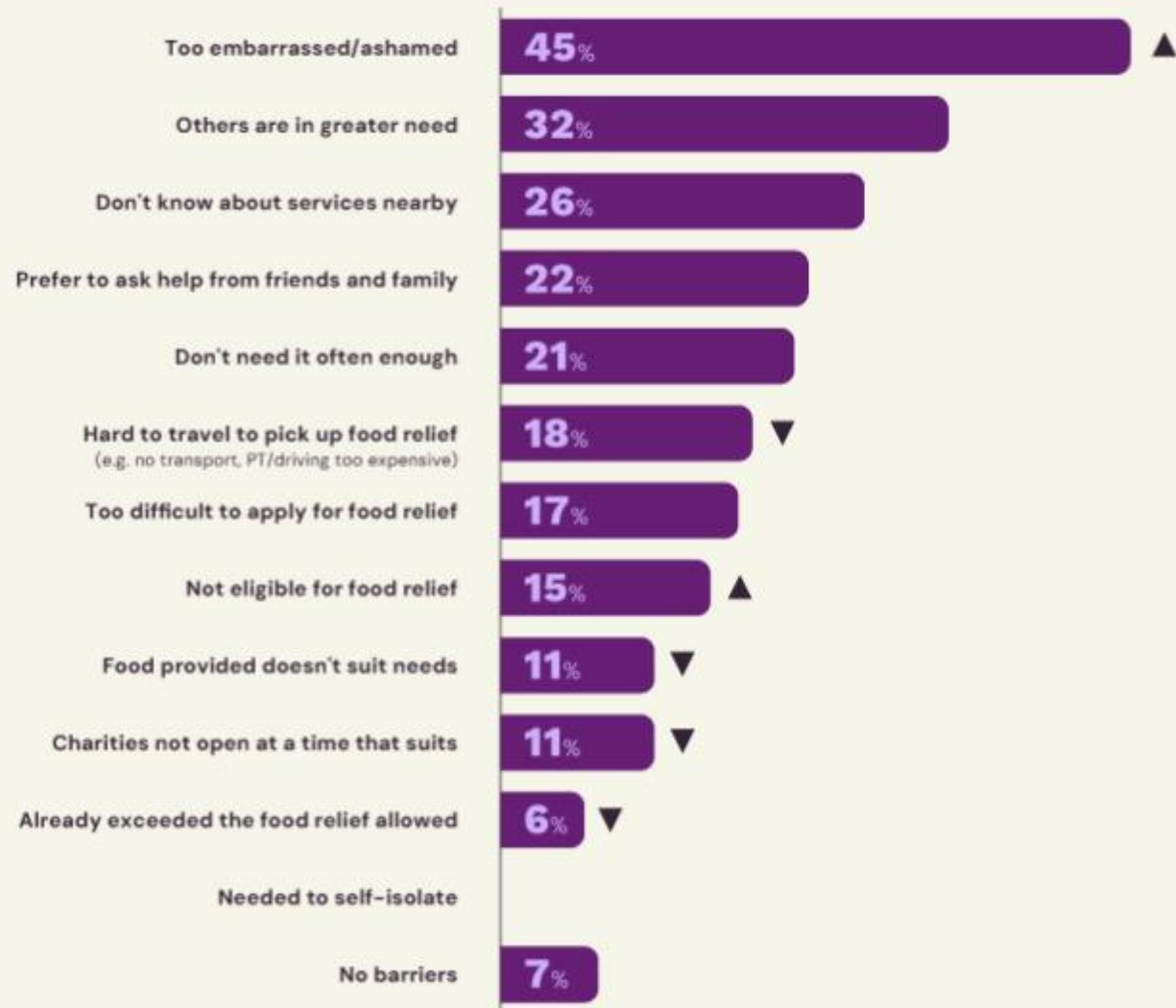
56% of food insecure households didn't get help this year.

**No help**

## People accessing food relief in 2023

- Despite the significant increase in the number of households experiencing food insecurity in the last 12 months, the proportion of those seeking help from formal food relief services (24%) or family and friends (31%) actually reduced (overall down 44% from 58% in 2022). This is not altogether surprising given how many are experiencing food insecurity for the first time and, therefore, are not aware of the range of services available to them (65%) or feel embarrassed or ashamed of asking for help (45% vs 40% in 2022).

## Barriers to people seeking formal food relief



▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower than previous year

Source: FHR 2022-2023 Research; Q54 Which of the following are barriers for you in seeking food relief from a charity or community organisation?

Q55a In your own words, what kind of things would make it easier for you to get food relief when you need it?

Base: Total Food Insecure Households, 2022 n=1248, 2023 n=1514

# Methodology

- » 4,342 Australians respondents, representative of the Australian population.
- » Assessed to determine the food security of their **household** using the United States Department of Agriculture Household Food Security Survey Module.
- » 1514 respondents (36%), identified through the Module as being from moderately and severely food insecure households, answer additional questions about their experiences over the last 12 months.



# Acknowledgements

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