



Foodbank

Hunger Report 2026™

foodbank.org.au



A message from our CEO

We call Australia the lucky country. Yet the Foodbank Hunger Report™ 2026 confronts us with a reality no prosperous nation should accept: that hunger has become a defining feature of life for far too many households.

Concerningly, this year's Hunger Report found one in three households, or the equivalent to 3.6 million homes across the country, experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months. Behind this figure are parents skipping meals so their children can eat, renters choosing between groceries and medication, and people in regional areas choosing fuel over food. Quite simply the wages of working families no longer stretch far enough to cover the essentials.

Disturbingly, the data indicates food insecurity is no longer a temporary consequence of economic disruption. Food insecurity has become entrenched. While the national rate remained stable at one in three households, in truth this represented a real increase because the total number of households in Australia grew. In 2025, 3.5 million households experienced food insecurity; in 2026, the figure rose to 3.6 million, meaning that approximately 100,000 more households were affected.

In this context, stability must not be mistaken for success.

Persistent hardship now affects millions of households not typically considered to be living on the margins. This is a profound social and economic failure.

With that said, the overarching burden continues to fall disproportionately on those least able to absorb it: renters, low-income households, single-parent families, people living in regional areas, households affected by disability or ill health, younger Australians and First Nations communities.

The drivers of food insecurity are clear. Rising food, housing, fuel and energy costs, combined with broader cost-of-living pressures, continue to place extraordinary strain on household budgets. Employment challenges are further compounding hardship with increasing numbers of Australians reporting difficulty finding work or experiencing job losses.

As pressure mounts, households are making sacrifices that extend far beyond food. People are reducing energy use, cancelling social activities, cutting back on personal care and withdrawing from community life to put food on the table.

Hunger is not just about empty cupboards. It impacts health, education, workforce participation, mental wellbeing and social connection.

Perhaps most concerning is the growing sense of pessimism. More Australians believe their financial situation will worsen in the year ahead rather than improve. For many households, there is little confidence that relief is on the horizon.

Yet there are reasons for optimism. This report demonstrates that targeted interventions work. School Breakfast Programs are reaching more children than ever before, reducing barriers to participation and ensuring students can begin the day nourished, focused and ready to learn. Where support is available, families use it. Where investment is made, outcomes improve.

The findings of this year's Foodbank Hunger Report™ demand more than concern: they demand leadership



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We made sure the kids ALWAYS eat even if it's just spaghetti bolognese. We can survive on bread and butter.

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and action. The challenge before us is not whether we know what works, but whether we are prepared to act at the scale required.

Food relief organisations cannot solve this crisis alone.

Government, businesses, philanthropists and communities all have a role to play. Together, we must invest in immediate relief while addressing the structural causes of food insecurity.

In a nation as prosperous as Australia, nobody should wonder where their next meal will come from. The findings in this report demand more than concern. They demand action.



Kylea Tink

Foodbank Australia CEO

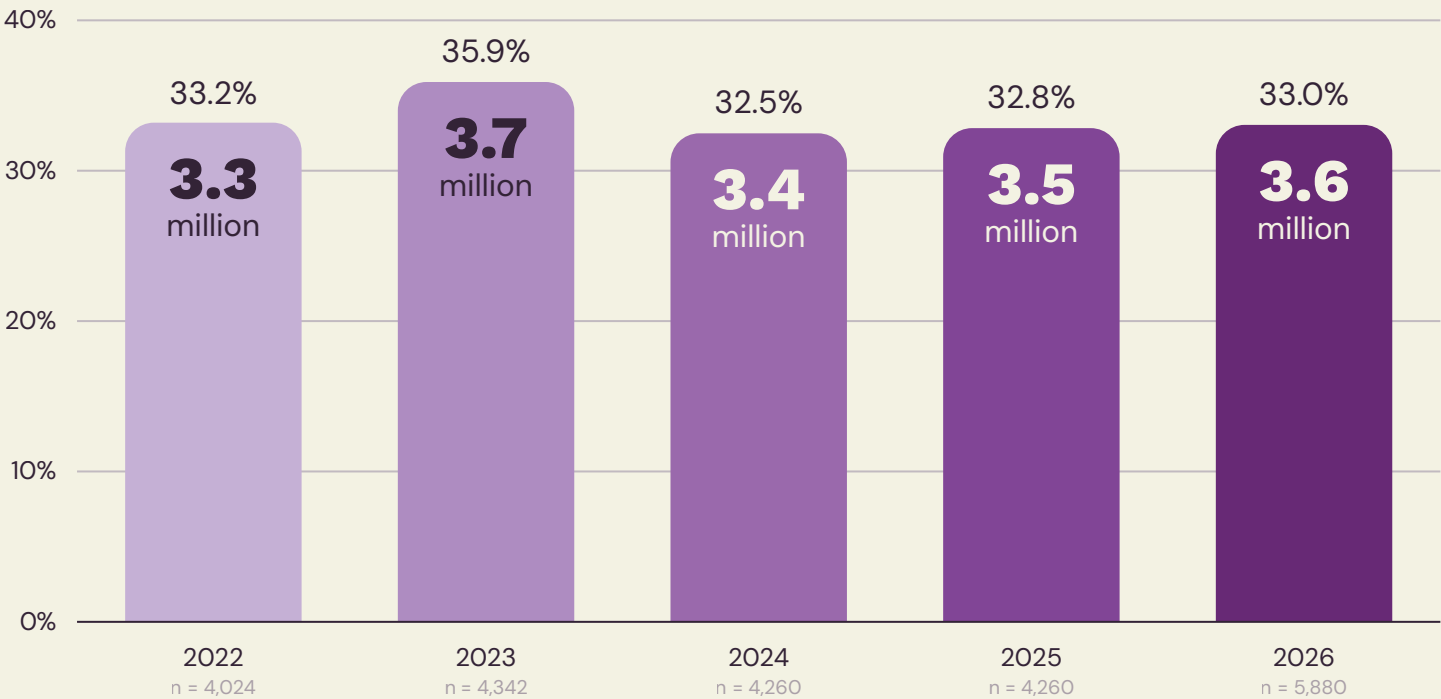
A nation under pressure

This year’s report shows Australia’s food crisis has become a persistent reality for millions of households.

In 2026, 3.6 million households experienced food insecurity, continuing a troubling pattern that has remained unacceptably high since tracking began. Behind these figures are families making impossible choices between paying rent or energy bills and putting food on the table.

When one in three households cannot consistently access enough nutritious and culturally appropriate food, hunger can no longer be viewed as an issue affecting only a small group of vulnerable Australians. It has become a national challenge requiring a national response.

Number of food insecure households



Total sample. Weight: Final_hhld_wt. Base n = 22,766; effective sample size = 15,470 (68%).



3.6 million hungry households would make a line from Perth to Sydney

The cost-of-living crisis is driving food insecurity

For the overwhelming majority of food insecure households, the cause is clear. Rising living costs continue to place extraordinary pressure on household budgets, with 92% of food insecure households identifying the cost-of-living as a top concern over the last 12 months. Food prices remain elevated, housing costs continue to increase, fuel costs are on the rise, and utility bills consume a greater share of the household budget. Even small financial shocks can push households into crisis. What was once financial stress is increasingly becoming food insecurity.

Financial pessimism is at its peak

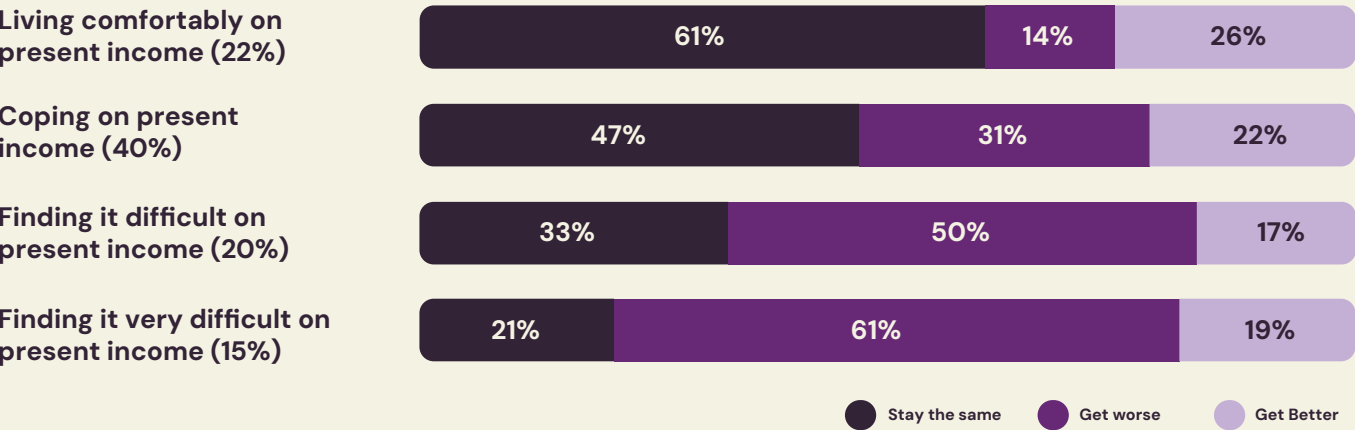
Food insecurity is not only changing how Australians live; it is also reshaping how they view the future. More than one-third (35%) of Australians expect their financial situation to deteriorate over the next 12 months. Expectations about the future are closely linked to households' current financial circumstances, with pessimism greatest among those already under pressure. Unsurprisingly, confidence declines as financial

pressure intensifies. Half of households struggling to manage on their current income expect their circumstances to worsen (50%), rising significantly to 61% among those finding it very difficult to get by.

This pessimistic outlook is reflected in broader economic indicators. The [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)¹ reported that living costs increased by between 3.7% and 4.7% across household types in the year to the June 2026 quarter, with age pensioner households experiencing the largest rise. Over the year to July 2026, consumer prices increased by 3.5%, driven primarily by housing costs (5.0%) and food and non-alcoholic beverages (3.2%). Consumer confidence also weakened, with the [Westpac–Melbourne Institute Consumer Sentiment Index](#)² falling 5.2% to 84.4 in September, returning towards deeply pessimistic territory as higher fuel prices and concerns about further interest rate increases placed additional pressure on household budgets.

This growing pessimism reflects a wider reality – many households can no longer see a path back to financial stability.

Australian household financial circumstances



F1. Which of these descriptions comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?
F2. Do you think your household financial circumstances will get better, worse or stay the same over the next year? Base: [Total] 2026 n = 5,880
Due to rounding, figures may not add up to 100%

1 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/selected-living-cost-indexes-australia/latest-release>
2 <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/research/macroeconomics/latest-news/index-of-consumer-sentiment>

Hunger does not affect everyone equally

Beneath Australia's overall food insecurity rate lies a widening divide between households with resources and those without. Where people live, how they are housed, whether they are healthy and the income available to them, all determine whether they can afford enough food.

Only 12% of households that own their home outright experience food insecurity. Among renters that figure rises to 51%.

Among households earning less than \$33,799 annually, more than half reported experiencing food insecurity

(53%), with more than one in three (37%) of these reporting they experience severe food insecurity. This is the highest level recorded for this group since data collection began, reflecting a worsening trend for low-income households.

Meanwhile, two-thirds (65%) of households affected by disability or health issues experienced disproportionately high levels of food insecurity. This was significantly higher than households not affected by disability or health issues (28%).



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I am the sole income earner for my family, which includes my partner and our toddler. I work full-time across two jobs to support us. My partner is on the Disability Support Pension but, due to my income, only receives around \$100 per fortnight. Living on a single income while supporting a family has become extremely difficult.

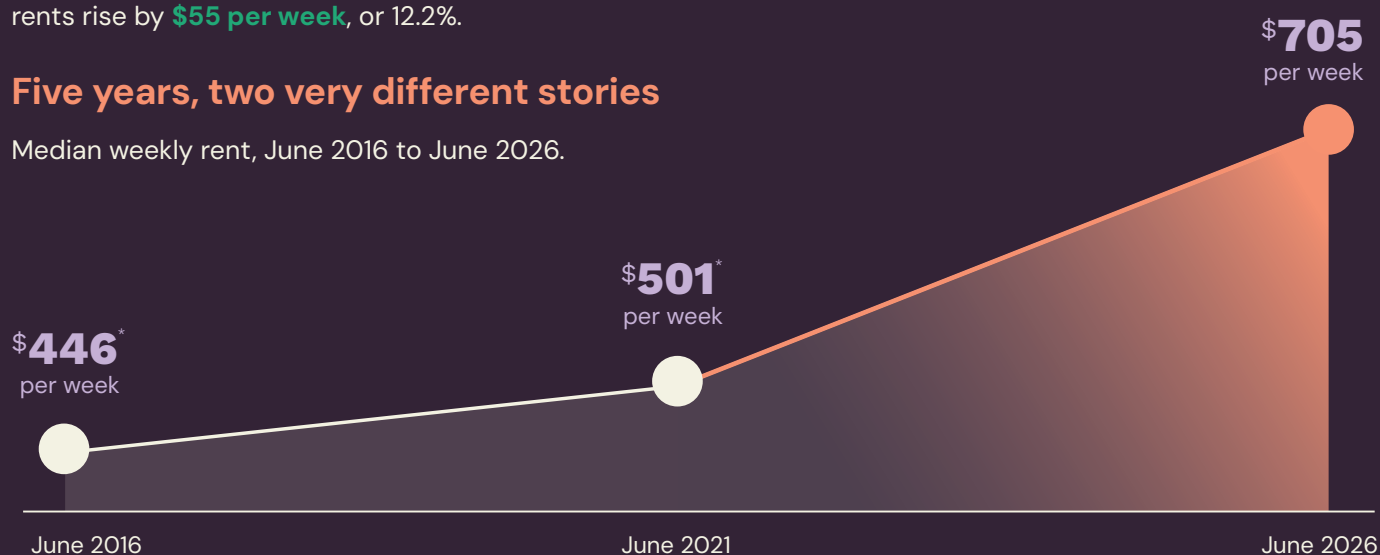
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National rents have increased **40.6%** over the past five years due to the sustained cumulative increases. Renters are paying an **additional \$204** per week in rent.

The previous five-year period (June 2016 to June 2021) only saw median rents rise by **\$55 per week**, or 12.2%.

Five years, two very different stories

Median weekly rent, June 2016 to June 2026.



Data source: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/total-value-dwellings/latest-release>

For First Nations households, food insecurity remains significantly above the national average. In 2026, 57% of these households experienced food insecurity, including 40% experiencing severe food insecurity.

Notably, in a trend also seen in the data from 2025, food insecurity was significantly higher among households with children than households without in 2026 – at 45% compared with 28% respectively. Within the same cohort, single-parent households experienced particularly high levels of food insecurity, with 60% affected. Of these, nearly two in five (or 38%) reported experiencing severe food insecurity.

Food insecurity was most prevalent among younger households in 2026, affecting almost half (48%) of those represented by Australians aged 18 to 34. More than one in four (28%) experienced severe food insecurity.

Food insecurity rates were lower among households represented by Australians aged 35 to 54 (37%) and those aged 55 and over (19%), although severe food insecurity still affected almost a quarter (23%) of households in the 35 to 54 age group and more than one in ten (11%) older households.

Food insecurity was significantly more prevalent in regional Australia than in metropolitan areas, affecting 36% of regional households compared with 32% of metropolitan households. Severe food insecurity was particularly acute in regional communities, impacting almost one in four households (23%), significantly higher than the rate recorded in metropolitan areas (18%).

Employment-related pressures are also intensifying. The proportion of food insecure households reporting difficulty finding work as a contributing factor increased significantly from 11% in 2025 to 15% in 2026, while the proportion citing job loss rose from 10% to 13%. These findings highlight the growing role of labour market challenges in driving household food insecurity alongside ongoing cost-of-living pressures.

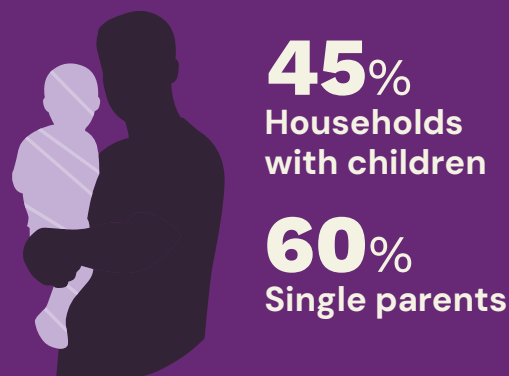
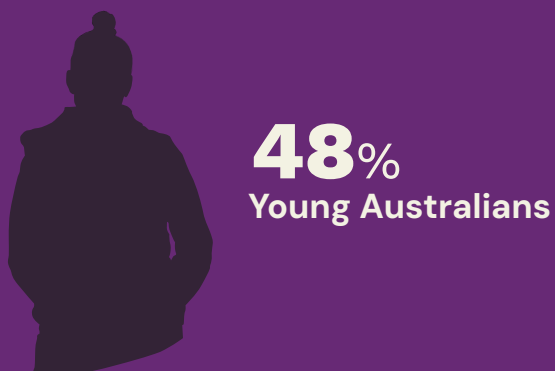
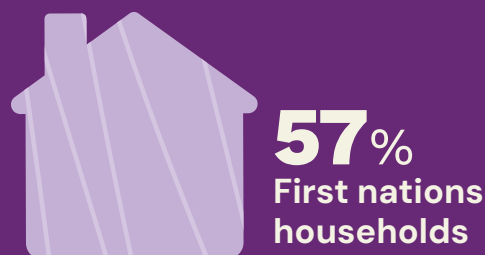
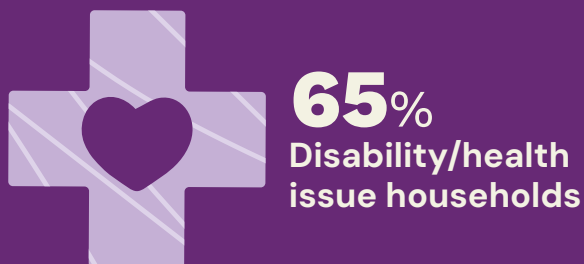
These are not marginal differences. They represent profound inequalities in Australia's ability to meet one of life's most basic needs.

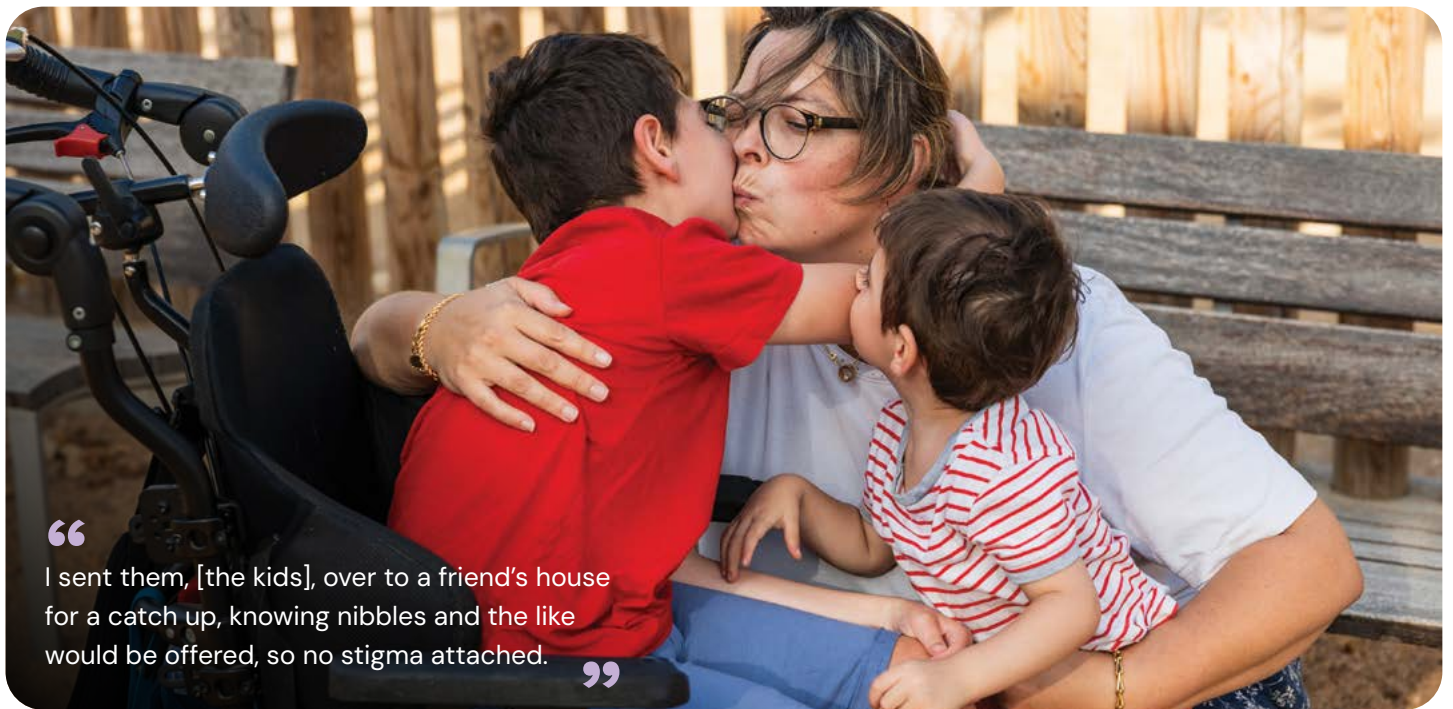
The new face of hunger

For generations, hunger was largely associated with chronic disadvantage. That is no longer the case.

Nearly seven in ten (69%) food insecure households first experienced food insecurity within the past year. Many are working households, families raising children and people who have never previously sought assistance.

The profile of hunger in Australia is changing. Hunger is no longer confined to society's margins. It is moving into the mainstream.





“

I sent them, [the kids], over to a friend's house for a catch up, knowing nibbles and the like would be offered, so no stigma attached.

”

Leila's story

For Leila, life has been a balancing act over the past year.

But when her husband injured his leg four months ago and was unable to work, everything changed. Leila, still breastfeeding her youngest, had already been struggling on a single income, but her husband's accident meant she no longer had access to even that. *“I tried shopping around between supermarkets, but we just weren't managing,”* Leila shared.

Rising grocery costs and limited options made even the basics feel out of reach. That's when a family friend introduced her to Foodbank.

Getting a referral was a turning point. *“It's helped me so much. Especially the free fruit and vegetables, bread and all the other bits and pieces,”* Leila said.

The cost-of-living crisis has hit hard, especially when it comes to meat. *“Prices have gone up so much, and we only eat Halal meat, which is more expensive at supermarkets.”*

Even simple things like fresh fruit have become a luxury. *“An apple used to be cheap, but now it's so expensive. I want to see my kids eat what other kids eat and not be left out.”*

Families like Leila's are struggling to afford even the basics. Foodbank is bridging the gap, but demand is soaring. Every apple, loaf and box of cereal provides more than food; it offers hope.

“An apple used to be cheap, but now it's so expensive. I want to see my kids eat what other kids eat and not be left out.”

When hunger becomes chronic

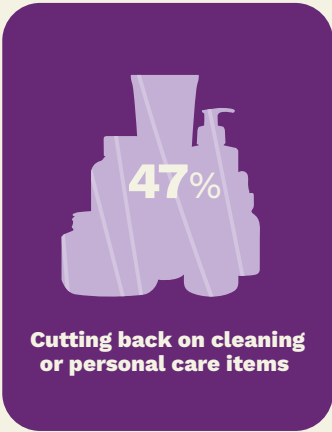
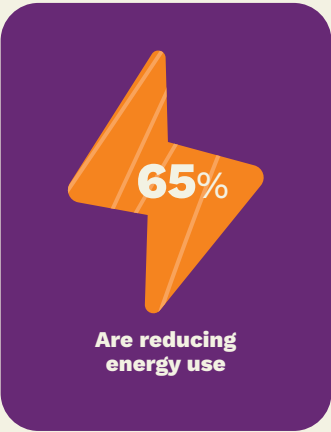
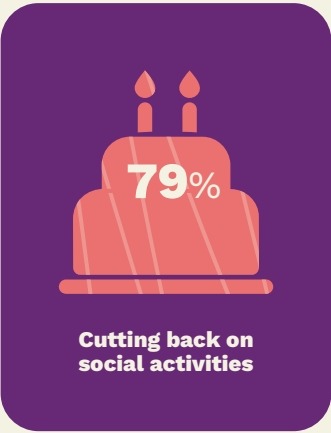
Receipt of government benefit payments was associated with substantially higher levels of food insecurity in 2026. Food insecurity affected 41% of households represented by respondents receiving government benefits, including 27% experiencing severe food insecurity. These findings highlight the ongoing food security challenges faced by households reliant on income support and echo the findings of the [ACOSS Poverty in Australia 2026: Who is Affected report](https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty-in-australia-2026-who-is-affected/)³, which found three in four people in households relying on Jobseeker and Youth Allowance were below the poverty line.

Food insecurity also remained disproportionately high among households with part-time or casual workers, affecting 42% in 2026 compared with 33% of Australian households nationally. This suggests that insecure forms of employment continue to leave many households vulnerable to financial strain and difficulty accessing adequate food.

3 <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty-in-australia-2026-who-is-affected/>

Financial pressure reshaping everyday life

Food insecurity affects every aspect of daily life. Households are adapting to cost-of-living pressures as their coping behaviours evolve.



“We couldn’t afford to purchase food till next pension but we did have 4 pieces of bread and vegemite, so we had that.”

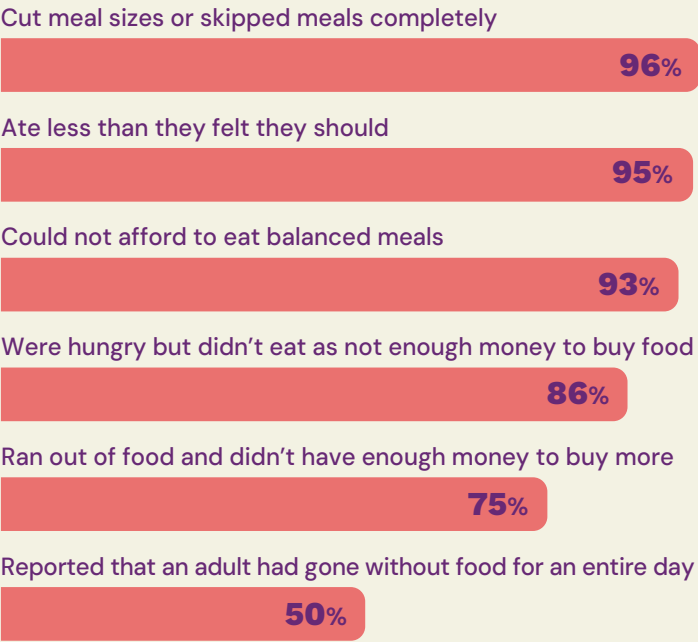
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These measures include driving less or relying on cheaper transport, reducing energy use, cancelling social activities, cutting back on personal care items and moving to more affordable housing.

Concerningly, families are not trimming luxuries; they are surrendering essentials and withdrawing from everyday life simply to keep food on the table. The consequences extend well beyond food.

For households experiencing severe food insecurity, 97% worried that food would run out before they could afford more. Many regularly skip meals, eat less than they need, forgo balanced nutrition and spend entire days without eating because they cannot afford food.

Households that are severely food insecure 2026



Thinking of the last 12 months, which, if any, of the following have you used to manage the cost of living for yourself and/or your household?

	Food secure households	Food insecure households
Drove less or used cheaper alternatives (e.g. cycling, public transport)	41%	70%
Cut back on paid personal care/grooming services (e.g. haircuts/barber, salon, nails, beauty treatments)	32%	66%
Looked for sales/discounts on food and grocery items	49%	66%
Reduced home energy use (e.g. cutting back on heating or cooling)	39%	65%
Cut back on taking part in social events and celebrations (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, cultural/religious holidays)	31%	65%
Cut back on eating/drinking in restaurants, cafes and bars	42%	61%
Swapped food for cheaper alternatives (e.g. frozen/tinned instead of fresh food, buying imperfect food)	25%	56%
Cut back on hosting social events and celebrations (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, cultural/religious holidays)	26%	51%
Portioned meals and/or ingredients to reduce food waste	21%	50%
Cut back on other household supermarket items (e.g. aluminium foil, plastic wrap, trash bags, food storage bags, and light bulbs)	17%	49%
Cut back on cleaning or personal care products (e.g. detergent, cleaning sprays, soap, shampoo, toothpaste)	14%	47%
Planned meals ahead of time (e.g. planning lunch, dinner and/or snacks on a weekly basis)	35%	47%
Dipped into personal/household savings	25%	45%
Cut back on other food and grocery items (e.g. oils, sauces/dressings, condiments, cereals, soups, canned goods)	13%	42%
Cut back on paid fitness or sport activities (e.g. gym memberships, exercise classes, team/club fees)	18%	40%
Reduced purchasing of fresh produce (e.g. fruits, vegetables)	8%	38%
Reduced purchasing of protein (e.g. meat, fish, plant-based protein)	10%	37%
Deferred payment by spending more on credit cards or Buy-Now-Pay-Later apps	8%	29%
Bought food and groceries in bulk	21%	28%
Reduced purchasing of dairy products (e.g. milk, cheese, yoghurt, butter)	5%	28%
Switched energy plans or providers	16%	20%
Grown fresh produce at home (e.g. herbs, fruits, vegetables)	14%	19%
Moved to lower-cost accommodation	3%	14%
Refinanced loans	3%	9%
Other ways to manage	5%	7%
No, I haven't had to change anything to manage the cost-of-living for myself/our household	22%	4%

The hidden cost of hunger: shame and stigma

One of the most troubling findings in this year's report is that many Australians continue to struggle alone.

While food insecurity is widespread, shame remains one of the greatest barriers to seeking support. Nearly half (48%) of food insecure households report embarrassment as a reason for not accessing assistance and only half know where help is available. 26% received assistance from a formal organisation in the past year while informal support from family and friends increased from 25% to 29%.

Hunger often remains hidden because those experiencing it fear judgement. The result is that people wait until circumstances become critical before seeking support.

Reducing hunger requires more than providing food; it requires creating systems of support that are visible, accessible and free from stigma.

“I’d rather go hungry”

“I’d have to be dying from hunger”

“There is deep shame”

“I wouldn’t ask for assistance”



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I am unable to afford increased rent, specialist fees for my daughter, her medications and food. I have been forced to attend a foodbank in the past few months to get food for my daughter and me.

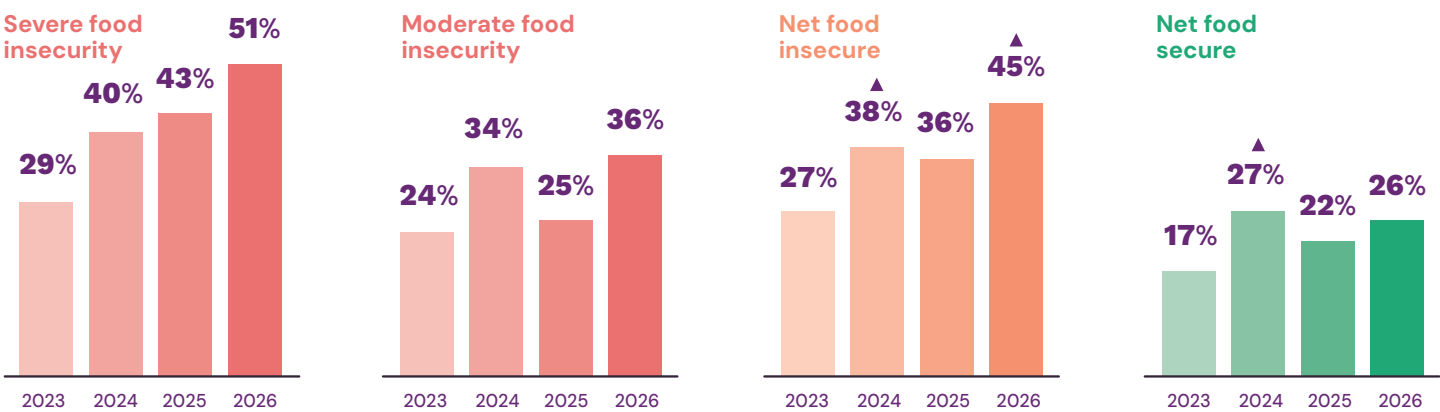
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School Breakfast Programs: support that works

As the largest provider of School Breakfast Programs in the country, Foodbank is pleased to see these programs continue to expand, demonstrating what effective, inclusive support can achieve.

Participation in School Breakfast Program by household food security level



▲▼ Represents a significant change when comparing results from the previous year. (Base 2023 n=790; 2024 n=940; 2025 n=913; 2026 n=1,243).

Encouragingly, participation in School Breakfast Programs among food insecure households with school-aged children increased significantly, rising from 36% to 45%. Participation was highest among households experiencing severe food insecurity, with more than half (51%) accessing programs. Uptake also increased among moderately food insecure households, climbing from 25% to 36%.

Meanwhile, the proportion of non-participating, food insecure households, who believed other children needed the support more, fell significantly from 27% to 14%.

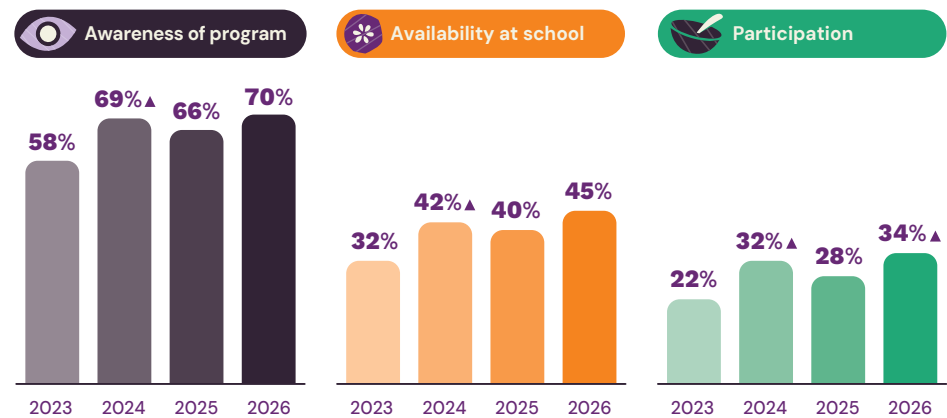
The increase in School Breakfast Program participation among food insecure households provides compelling evidence that investment in preventative food security initiatives can deliver significant social returns. When practical support is available,

accessible and free from stigma, families engage with it.

Foodbank’s experience shows that these programs do more than provide a meal. They improve attendance, concentration, classroom participation and family wellbeing, while helping to

alleviate the immediate impacts of food insecurity. The findings underscore the need for continued and expanded investment in school-based nutrition programs to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn and thrive, regardless of their family’s financial circumstances.

School Breakfast Program awareness, availability and participation among Australian households with children of school age



▲▼ Represents a significant change when comparing with previous year. (Base 2023 n=790; 2024 n=940; 2025 n=913; 2026 n=1,243).



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The educators have noticed an increase in children accessing the program due to family affordability and working demands.

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School Breakfast Program in South Australia

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Students not only are appreciative of the food available but are racing to school for the opportunity to help serve breakfast to their fellow classmates. This has been a great, unexpected incentive to help bring students to school on time.

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School Breakfast Program in the Northern Territory



What Australia must do next

Food insecurity has become something we have unfortunately become used to.

It is the result of policy choices, economic conditions and societal priorities, however it can be reduced through collective action and sustained investment. Food relief organisations are providing essential support, but they cannot meet rising demand alone.

To meaningfully reduce food insecurity, Australia must:

1. Set a national baseline for School Breakfast Programs

Establish a national minimum standard for school breakfast programs, ensuring every Australian child has access to a nutritious breakfast at school by 2030.

2. Increase investment in food relief

Ensure food relief organisations have the resources required to meet growing demand and respond rapidly during periods of heightened economic hardship.

3. Improve access to food relief

Increase awareness, availability and accessibility of support services, particularly in regional Australia.

4. Address income inadequacy

Strengthen the financial safety net to ensure social security payments and household incomes better reflect the true cost of living.

5. Support renters and vulnerable households

Develop targeted measures for renters, low-income households, people living with disability and other groups facing disproportionate risk.

6. Reduce stigma

Create a national conversation that normalises seeking assistance and recognises that food insecurity can affect anyone.

7. Treat food security as a national priority

Recognise access to adequate food as a foundational social and economic issue that affects health, education, productivity and community wellbeing.

8. Make it as easy as possible for producers and manufacturers to supply surplus produce to charities for redistribution

Introduce incentives that help farmers and manufacturers donate surplus produce and support food relief organisations to recover it.

Australia has the resources, the knowledge and the capability to address hunger. What is needed now is collective determination.

In a country as prosperous as ours, one in three households experiencing food insecurity should never be accepted as normal.

Methodology

The Foodbank Hunger Report 2026 research was conducted between 9th July – 4th August 2026, through an online survey of 4,000 Australians aged 18 years or older (main sample) and a booster of 1,880 Australians aged 18 years or older from TAS (n=470), NT (n=110), WA (n=700) and SA (n=600). The main sample was nationally representative with interlocking quotas by age, gender and location.

The data was weighted to nationally representative proportions of age, gender, state and location as

summarised in Table 1 below. The detailed methodology can be found on Foodbank’s website.

All 5,880 Australians answered the core HFSSM for measurement of the prevalence of household food security over the past 12 months. A total of 1,797 respondents (33%) were identified through the HFSSM as being from moderately and severely food insecure households. This group continued to answer a deep dive module about their experience living with food insecurity over the last 12 months.

		Sample size (n=5,880)	Total weighted (%)
Gender	Male	2,679	46%
	Female	3,201	54%
Age	18–24	547	9%
	25–44	2,047	35%
	45–54	923	16%
	55–74	1,758	30%
	75 or above	605	10%
State	NSW	1,257	31%
	VIC	1,035	26%
	QLD	812	20%
	SA	281	7%
	WA	428	11%
	TAS	276	2%
	NT	102	1%
	ACT	69	2%
Location	Capital city	4,125	70%
	Rest of state/territory	1,755	30%
Remoteness area	Major cities of Australia	3,680	63%
	Inner regional Australia	1,714	29%
	Outer regional Australia	394	7%
	Remote Australia	73	1%
	Very remote Australia	10	0%

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