



JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Further information

Inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty

Poverty needs a long-term solution – but hungry kids need help now

The Committee recognises that poverty impacts on more than just access to food. We also acknowledge that food insecurity could be solved by tackling the drivers of poverty, such as low pay, unemployment and lack of housing. Reducing poverty is a long-term proposition that relies primarily on Federal government action. This is important. But as a state-based committee, we are particularly interested in what can be done at the state level to help children who are going without nutritious food now.

What might be the impacts of poor nutrition?

We have some evidence that poor nutrition impacts physical and mental health, educational outcomes and social wellbeing. Children are sometimes forced to steal to feed themselves, which could lead to further involvement with the criminal justice system. The effects of childhood hunger can continue into adulthood. We are interested in knowing more about the impacts and how many children, and which children, are affected in Western Australia.

What do we mean by food insecurity?

Food insecurity is when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. (This is the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation definition.)

Put simply, it happens when people cannot be sure of finding enough food to keep them from feeling hungry, or when they can't get enough of the right foods to stay healthy.

It may happen sometimes or most of the time, or it may have only happened once. We are interested in all of these experiences.

What do we mean by food relief?

Food relief (sometimes called food assistance or food aid) is food provided to people in need. It includes food parcels, food vans/soup kitchens, meal delivery, food provided to schools for breakfast clubs, community pantries, supermarket vouchers, and subsidised food items.

It is usually provided by charitable organisations, sometimes with government support. Food which would have gone to waste is often donated by supermarkets and restaurants to food rescue organisations, who redistribute it to people in need.

What do we mean by food literacy programs?

Food literacy programs aim to give people a better understanding of nutrition, cooking and other aspects of food management such as budgeting and shopping. They might be designed for parents and carers of children in early childhood, children at school, or vulnerable groups such as migrants and refugees.

Most food literacy programs are run by non-government agencies.

What does Term of Reference 7 cover?

This term of reference invites commentary on responsibilities and obligations that Australia and Western Australia have to international agreements related to food security and poverty (e.g. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

It also invites consideration of strategies and policies to monitor food insecurity in the state. Suggestions the Committee is already aware of include:

- development of a Food Stress Index
- a state Child Wellbeing Strategy. This was recommended by the (previous) Commissioner for Children and Young People as a key way of addressing child poverty.

We invite commentary on these and any other propositions.