

**Submission
No 89**

INQUIRY INTO FOOD SECURITY IN VICTORIA

Organisation: Just Food Collective

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To the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee,

Just Food Collective's submission to the 'Inquiry into food security in Victoria'

Recommendations

As a small volunteer-run not for profit, Just Food Collective recognises that the work we do in preventing food insecurity is only the tip of the iceberg. Tertiary student food insecurity is a structural and systemic issue that is only increasing, and we believe the onus is on the State and Federal Government – governments who set the price of education, who choose debt over free education and who choose to keep income support payments below the poverty line. These policy decisions do little to tilt the scale for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and reinforce intergenerational wealth and conservative ideology. We see these policy decisions as choices that the government makes to keep the status quo and prevent the safety of our most marginalised communities.

Just Food Collective recommends that the State Government of Victoria:

Advocacy

1. Advocates to the Federal Government to wipe all student debt and make tertiary education free.
2. Advocates to the Federal Government that all income support payments are consistent with a living-wage and are indexed to wage-growth and consumer-price annually.

Food relief

1. Supplies food vouchers of adequate value available at the beginning of every semester for international students who are food insecure.
2. Works with universities and TAFEs on programs to develop students' food literacy in a meaningful and practical way.
3. Collaborates with students to create best-practice, place-based dignified models of food relief.
4. Funds projects and initiatives that provide dignified and community-centred food relief for students.
5. Mandates that all university and TAFE campuses have cheap and nutritious meals affordable for all students (under \$5), every day, during their semester period.

The impact of food insecurity on tertiary student population

In 2023, Just Food Collective released [Fed Up! Student Food Insecurity at William Angliss Institute](#), a research project exploring student food insecurity at William Angliss Institute in 2022. Our research found that 44% of Angliss student survey respondents are food insecure, with 20% of these reporting very low food security.

While there is no current published data on Victorian student food insecurity levels, the most recent research is from University of Tasmania who shows [“the prevalence of food insecurity among students has increased from two in five \(42%\) in 2022, to more than one in two \(53%\) students in 2024.”](#) The food insecurity statistic released by the Victorian Population Health Survey 2022 shows 8.1% of the general population is food insecure, suggesting tertiary students are 6.5 times more likely to be suffering.

Just Food Collective has continued to collect food insecurity data at our free student social dinners where up to 79% of our attendees present with levels of food insecurity. High levels of food insecurity are associated with poor academic achievement, including withdrawing entirely from study, in addition to low levels of mental and physical health. The stress and anxiety – as well as financial constraints – attached to food insecurity may make it difficult for students to create meaningful social relationships with peers, and may exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Please see Australia peer-reviewed articles on the harms of student food insecurity: [Bennet et al 2022](#), [Jeffery et al 2022](#) and [Kent et al 2022](#).

Below are some quotes from students who participated in the Fed Up! Research:

- “Usually I don’t have breakfast to save money.” 18-25 year old
- “Provide more food vouchers” 18-25 year old
- “The financial toll paying uni fees (\$90 per week, plus a \$15 overdraft fee when it emptied my account) was the top contributor to my food insecurity.” 18-25 year old
- “Food on campus is currently very poor quality and fully run (at the moment) by an uninspiring expensive food business. It is of shocking quality and also there is no opportunity to grow food or learn to grow food here.” 18-25 year old

Below is a reflection from a lecturer that participated in the Fed Up! Research:

- “There was a repeated pattern of students showing awareness about food insecurity amongst themselves. One group [of students] said... that they had all experienced it, however had never spoken about it and didn’t realise it was something a lot of people were going through.”

Below are quotes from students who attend our weekly food relief at William Angliss in 2023

- “When I have theory classes there is no food, I am so happy you are here so I can eat.”
- “This is saving my life.” [a frequently expressed sentiment]
- “I had to skip breakfast today. I am so happy you are here.”
- “This is the perfect breakfast, it’s so hard to buy good food and fruit now.”

Below are quotes from students who attend our weekly food relief RMIT in 2024:

- "If it wasn't for this I wouldn't have anything to eat."
- "Food at Uni is either expensive, or free food is very poor quality like stale ham sandwiches."
- "The healthiest thing I've eaten all week"

Barriers to food security as a tertiary student

Students experience financial strain due to low incomes, compounded by expensive tuition fees, especially for international students. The rising costs of rent, food, and fuel over the last three years have further exacerbated their challenges. As a result, students find it increasingly difficult to access nutritious and affordable food during this crucial period of their lives, which is vital for their learning, concentration, and overall development.

Evidence-based initiatives for promoting food security

Just Food Collective has been working on Well Fed: A student food project for the past 12 months. Well Fed aims to support students and reduce their food insecurity in Melbourne through an ongoing series of best-practice and evidence-based activities, advocacy, and food literacy.

The Well Fed model has four distinct components and key interventions:

- We supply students with free food that's joyful, nourishing and delicious
- We hire student interns and induct volunteers to create a network of friends who can gain work experience
- We raise awareness of student food security through localised university campaigns and state-wide advocacy
- We create free programs and educational tools for students to learn cooking, eating and growing skills

We believe that the Well Fed model could be expanded to every higher education institute in Victoria if it was appropriately resourced by the state government to enable access to dignified food relief and critical food skills.

What students say about the Well Fed project:

- "Don't know anywhere else like it."
- "Great tasting, always changing."
- "Calm, chilled, inclusive. Non-judgemental space and people, everyone included."
- "Dignified and welcoming. No lines, easy to access."
- "The recipes and food show students who may not be able to cook that cooking doesn't have to be intimidating."
- "Love the social element."
- "A place to meet and get tips from other international students."

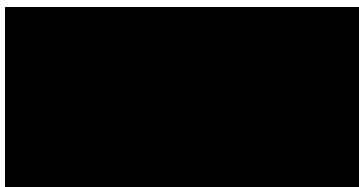
Please [click here](#) to see a series of videos and photos from our Well Fed project.

Final thoughts

For Australia to prosper through a global financial crisis, an environmental breaking point and the most politically insecure time in modern history, we will need voices from every economic, cultural and social background to provide fair and just answers to our most wicked problems. These voices will never be heard if their chosen higher education pathway remains out of reach.

Food, something that every person needs to survive, is a human right. We implore the Victorian Government to start treating food as a public good, provide much needed support to the food system and enact policy changes that ensure all Victorians can thrive.

Sincerely,



Savannah Supski

Co-founder and Vice President
Just Food Collective

