

Food insecurity increases in Australia amid cost-of-living crisis

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Late last month, charity organisation Foodbank released its annual Hunger Report, showing that 3.7 million Australian households experienced moderate to severe food insecurity over the past year, a 10 percent increase over the 2022 figure.

The report, based on a national online survey of 4,342 people, paints an alarming picture. Two and a half million households across the country—23 percent of the population—were “severely food insecure,” meaning that a lack of money had at times forced them to reduce food intake, skip meals and even go entire days without eating.

A further 13 percent were “moderately food insecure,” meaning they had been compelled to reduce the “quality, variety and desirability of their diets” and the size of some meals. Another 12 percent were “marginally food secure,” meaning they sometimes worried that food would run out before they could afford to buy more.

In total, the report concluded, “48 percent of the general population now feels anxious or struggles to consistently access adequate food,” up from 45 percent in 2022.

The survey showed that a broadening section of the population is being impacted, with 77 percent of food insecure households having experienced this for the first time within the past 12 months.

More than 60 percent of food insecure households had someone in paid employment. Thirty-six percent of households with total annual earnings of between \$95,000 and \$130,000 and 17 percent of households earning more than \$130,000 reported moderate or severe food insecurity.

Younger people are most affected, with 53 percent of 18–24-year-olds and 48 percent of 25–44-year-olds reporting some level of food insecurity. But in 2023,

severe food insecurity rose by 6 percentage points to 23 percent among those aged 45–54.

High inflation, far outstripping nominal wage rises, has intensified financial pressures on the working class. The report reveals that the biggest driver of food insecurity was the cost-of-living crisis, with 77 percent of households listing it as the main factor, up from 64 percent in 2022. Sixty-nine percent said increased food and grocery cost contributed to their food insecurity, while 56 percent cited rising energy costs.

While Treasurer Jim Chalmers has claimed that “peak inflation is behind us,” recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that consumer prices rose 5.6 percent over the 12 months ending September, up from 5.2 percent in August. Electricity prices soared 18 percent, while food and non-alcoholic beverages increased by 4.7 percent.

People are also being squeezed by rising housing costs. After 13 interest rate increases since May 2022, more than 30 percent of Australian mortgage holders are at risk of mortgage stress, the highest level since the 2008 global financial crisis, according to analysts Roy Morgan. At the same time, average rents have increased by 11 percent in the last 12 months.

Almost half of all renters and more than one third of mortgage holders suffered moderate or severe food insecurity in 2023.

The Foodbank report reveals that a growing number of Australians view having a healthy diet as an unaffordable luxury. Comments from some of the survey participants indicate the extent of the crisis:

“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.

“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.

While more Australians across all demographics are finding it increasingly difficult to afford basic essential groceries, massive profits have been recorded by the two major supermarket chains in Australia, Coles (\$1.1 billion) and Woolworths (\$1.6 billion).

As the social crisis deepens, the Albanese Labor government is facing increasing disaffection. Its 18 months in power have been marked by deepening austerity measures, as well as the expansion of callous “let-it-rip” COVID policies resulting in mass death.

After campaigning on the slogans “a better future,” and “no one left behind,” Labor has done the opposite, slashing social spending and imposing real wage cuts. At the same time, vast sums have been poured into military expenditure, including \$368 billion for the AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines.

Described as a “hidden problem” in Australia, increasing food insecurity is a symptom of the inability of the capitalist system to provide even the most basic needs of the people, who have to sacrifice, while the financial elite continue to reap massive profits.



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