

Friday 18 May 2018

## Hidden hunger in Australia worse than first thought

New research has found one in three low- and middle-income Australian families struggle with food insecurity, or a lack of access to sufficient food – with diet quality taking a backseat to simply putting food on the table.

Within those families affected by food insecurity, six per cent of children are going hungry at least once a fortnight.

These alarming new figures, from Queensland University of Technology food insecurity researcher Professor Danielle Gallegos, are higher than previous reports from the Australian Health Survey (2011-2013), which found only four per cent of households to be food insecure<sup>1</sup>.

Professor Gallegos, an Accredited Practising Dietitian, will present her findings at the [Dietitians Association of Australia National Conference](#) in Sydney this week.

Professor Gallegos surveyed 1,010 households with children using a newly-developed Australian measurement tool, which assesses four pillars of food insecurity:

- **Availability:** Is food, including nutritious food, available to buy in local shops?
- **Access:** Is there enough money for food, including nutritious food? And do families have the ability to get to the shops, considering issues like transport and physical health?
- **Utilisation:** Do families have the ability to transform food into meals, including the necessary skills and equipment?
- **Stability:** Do families have all of the above on a consistent basis?

According to Professor Gallegos, previous attempts to measure food insecurity in Australia have just focussed on whether people have enough money for food.

“Hidden hunger in a country like Australia is shocking, and any child going hungry is one child too many. It’s unacceptable that we have no National Poverty Strategy to help those living in poverty. Families on middle incomes are struggling to put food on the table and charities are left to help bridge the gap,” said Professor Gallegos.

She is calling for annual monitoring of food insecurity in Australia assessing all four pillars, a serious open discussion on a guaranteed basic living wage, solutions to make healthy food more affordable, and improved food literacy in schools to stop the reliance on cheap, fast food.

“Food insecurity is not just a problem for the ‘working poor’. It occurs in families with a median income of \$40,000-\$60,000 a year, single and dual-parent families, working multiple jobs to pay off the essentials, including rent, utility bills and school needs. Food is the only flexible item in the budget.

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“These families are adept at squeezing the most out of every dollar. In a bid to stretch food further, we’ve had mums reporting they won’t eat with the family but wait to eat everyone’s leftovers. Their children are protected for as long as possible,” said Professor Gallegos.

She said families typically only turn to emergency food relief as the last resort.

“There is a stigma to not being able to provide your family with the basic right to regular healthy food, but we also have a duty to maintain human dignity and not expect families to go begging to charities,” said Professor Gallegos.

Her call for a better approach to food insecurity is echoed by the Dietitians Association of Australia, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Heart Foundation and Nutrition Australia, which want the Australian Government to update, fund and implement a [new National Nutrition Policy](#), which includes a food security focus.

**ENDS**

**For further information or to organise an interview with Professor Danielle Gallegos, contact Maree Hall on 0408 482 581 or Sally Moloney on 0428 916 425.**

## Background

### About the Dietitians Association of Australia National Conference

The DAA National Conference is being held from 17-19 May 2018 at the Sydney International Convention Centre. For more information and program details, visit: [www.daa2018.com.au](http://www.daa2018.com.au) and follow us on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/DAA\\_feed](https://www.twitter.com/DAA_feed) (and use #DAA2018).

Press passes can be made available for interested media (including Australian-based journalists from print, radio, television and online media outlets) to attend sessions at the conference. To request a press pass, please contact Maree Hall on 0408 482 581.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014). Australian Health Survey 2011-13. Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1F1C9AF1C156EA24CA257B8E001707B5?opendocument>