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FOOD FOR ALL

Identifying the challenges for older
people in accessing nutritious food in
Melton Shire

Project team

- RMIT and Monash Universities
- Melton Shire Council
- Funded by VicHealth



What is food security?



Definition of food security

The state in which all persons obtain nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable safe food regularly through local non-emergency sources.

(VicHealth, 2006)

Why food security?

- **A human rights issue**
- **A public health issue – malnutrition, disease, longevity** (*Frongillo & Horan 2004; Quine & Morrell 2006; Torres-Gil 1996; Wolfe et al. 1998*)
- **Promotes social inclusion** (*Hamelin et al 1998*)

Some food for thought...

- ~3% of community-dwelling Australians >55yrs are food insecure – based on financial barriers (*National Health Survey 1995; Temple, 2006*)
- For older people, poor health, limited mobility, and lack of social support also hinder food security (*Food Security Institute, 2007; Frongillo & Horan, 2004*)
- Food Security Survey Module (22 items) - focus on affordability as well as having the physical ability and motivation to cook and prepare food (*Wolfe et al, 2003*)
- Quantitative measures may underestimate prevalence of food insecurity (*Quandt et al, 2001*) – Qualitative investigation may promote deeper understanding of issues

Purpose of the study

To investigate food security amongst targeted groups of older people living in Melton Shire:

- To identify barriers to accessing *nutritious* food, and how they may be overcome;
- To consider future trends in food security in this locality; and
- To identify strategies to improve food security for older people in this locality.

Nutritious food...



Methods

- **Qualitative and quantitative**
 - Essential combination
- **Interviewer administered surveys with meals-on-wheels users (n=37)**
- **6 Focus group discussions with non-meals-on-wheels users (n=44)**
 - Self-administered surveys completed prior to focus group
 - Location – seniors dining room, Melton
 - Transport and lunch provided
 - Bilingual facilitators and translators provided for CALD groups

Recruitment

Melton Council workers coordinated recruitment

Strategic recruitment to ensure representation of target groups

- CALD
- Service users
- Community transport bus
- Accommodation
- Age
- Gender

Participants

- **81 community dwelling older people (32 men; 49 women):**
 - Macedonian (n=6)
 - Maltese (n=8)
 - Serbian (n=8)
 - Anglo-Celtic (n=59)
- **Age range 56 – 94 yrs (mean 76 ± 9 yrs)**
 - CALD mean 68 yrs
 - Anglo mean 77 yrs

*Note: Age a factor in the different responses.
Increased prevalence of widowhood and living alone in older groups.*

Participant profile

- **54% Married (91% CALD; 40% Anglo)**
- **34% Lived alone (9% CALD; 43% Anglo)**
- **54% Lived with spouse/partner (86% CALD; 43% Anglo)**
- **12% Lived with family/friends (5% CALD; 14% Anglo)**
- **84% Pension primary source of income (73% CALD; 91% Anglo)**
- **58% Received HACC services (9% CALD; 77% Anglo)**

Study findings

Of the 60 participants who responded to a question concerning the amount of food in their household:

- 52 reported to have enough of the kinds of food they wanted
- 8 reported to not get enough or enough of the kinds of food they wanted. Reasons included:
 - Too hard to get to shops
 - Not able to cook or eat because of health problems
 - On a special diet

Study findings - Financial barriers

- No one reported a lack of money to buy food - but money sometimes restricted choice

However,

- 23% had sought assistance from food relief agencies in times of emergency

“Well if you’ve got a lot of bills coming in, the money goes. You just go down there [food bank] and you tell them and you give them your pension card and they put it down on record. You can’t go very often, about every three months. You can’t go every day type of thing but you can pick out one of everything. They’ve got all this food there and you can have one of everything. You can make up meals when you get home.”

Study findings – Health related barriers

- 19 (25%) respondents reported ‘yes’ to the question ‘In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because you didn’t feel up to cooking?’ (**Food Security Survey Module**)
- 35% had at least some difficulty in preparing meals

“I found with the pumpkin I started leaving the skin on it... The pumpkin is too hard on my hand I have a dislocated thumb so I can’t cut pumpkin and my hands they bruise very easily now so I just get the meat cleaver, if I can’t cut it I get it and press on that and split it open, throw the pieces in and the same with carrots, I can’t cut them up I cook them and then cut them up.”

Too hard to get to the shops - Health

- 43% reported having either fair or poor health

“I found it hard because three years ago I had a bad accident, and [injured] my left ankle, and I found it hard to go to the local shop which is only say 400-500 metres away from my house. If you can't walk, even the front gate seems a long way.”



Too hard to get to the shops - Safety

“I did go up to High Street the first year I was here, and crossing over to go to the post office with the lights, a truck missed me by about a yard, no more, and he laughed and said ha ha, I missed you.”



Too hard to get to the shops - Transport

Mode of transport used to get to shops:

- Private transport (72%)
- Walk (20%)
- Community bus (12%)
- Public transport (5%)

“In ten years time - maybe even earlier than that - I think some of them won't be able to drive anymore and if there isn't public transport close to where they live, what are they going to do then? “

Too hard to get to the shops - Location

- 35% reported not having shops within walking distance of their home

“Can’t go for a walk. Nowhere to walk. There are buses nearby but 1km from my house.”

Culturally inappropriate food

14% of participants reported insufficient culturally appropriate food available in the local area

- Specific sources identified
- Sometimes go great distances to acquire specific foods

Key themes include...

- **Transport**
- **Geographic location**
- **Deteriorating health, frailty and disability**
- **Financial considerations**
- **Personal safety**
- **Illiteracy and English proficiency**
- **Family**

Over to Susan...

