

Emergency Food Relief Storage & Distribution Report Latrobe, 2020



**Latrobe Health
Assembly**

∴ **Shaping
The Valley**

An Initiative of the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone



**CENTRAL WEST
GIPPSLAND**
Primary Care Partnership

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Summary

Latrobe City has a population of approximately 75,000 people with 6.6% of the community experiencing food insecurity.^{1,2} Food insecurity occurs when people do not have consistent access to the food they need to live. Food insecurity can be caused by many different factors including; lack of access to fresh food, or running out of food and not being able to afford to buy more.³

As a result of increasing numbers of people experiencing food insecurity, emergency food relief providers across Latrobe are faced with the challenge of growing community demand and limited resources. An online survey was distributed to member agencies of the Emergency Food Relief Network of Latrobe City (ERNLac) to understand the local barriers and identify potential solutions to help provide our community with the emergency food relief supports they need.

Many food relief agencies rely on donations and volunteer support to continue to provide emergency food provisions to vulnerable community members across the region. Discussions with ERNLac members together with survey responses identified a number of issues facing our food relief services, including:

- Geographical distances which the services need to cover due to the size of the municipality
- Ongoing high demand for food relief services
- Limited cold storage available
- Infrequent fresh produce delivery
- Reliance on volunteer workforce
- Limited awareness of shared storage opportunities

This report discusses the food storage and distribution barriers faced by emergency food relief providers across Latrobe and provides a number of recommendations for consideration by ERNLac and supporting agencies; with the aim to expand collaboration between service providers and increase the amount of food relief provisions to sustainably meet growing community demand.

Background

The City of Latrobe hosts a population of approximately 75,000 people and is spread over a large area of 1,422 square kilometres.¹ Food insecurity is a growing concern throughout the Latrobe Valley, where 6.6% of the population is considered to be food insecure.² This figure is significantly higher than the Victorian average of just 3.6%.²

The Emergency Food Relief Network of Latrobe City (ERNLac) is a network of agencies providing a range of emergency relief services including emergency food relief to vulnerable community members. A large number of these agencies rely on donations and volunteer support to continue to provide emergency food provisions to the community.

Purpose of this report

Food relief distribution organisations Foodbank, SecondBite, and in some circumstances FareShare support local agencies in combination with local Supermarkets (Coles, Woolworths and Aldi) to redistribute fresh and frozen goods in addition to dry goods to community members in need.

Through discussions during ERNLac meetings and individual consultation with Network members, it was identified that there was a knowledge gap in understanding what local resources were available. An online survey was distributed to ERNLac members to map the local capabilities regarding food storage and distribution across Latrobe Valley and assist in identifying barriers.

The results of these discussions and survey responses are discussed in this report to provide further understanding and insights into how food relief agencies store and redistribute food to those in need across Latrobe.

Results

Survey responses show that a number of local barriers exist for food relief agencies across Latrobe Valley. These barriers can lead to reduced efficiency to store and redistribute food relief to vulnerable community members. Local barriers identified include:

- Latrobe is situated over large distances meaning extra time and resources are required to for the services to be able to cover the geographical distances
- Ongoing high demand for food relief services
- Limited cold storage available
- Infrequent fresh produce delivery
- Reliance on volunteer workforce
- Limited awareness of shared storage opportunities

Distance

Distance presents a barrier for many agencies as volunteers are often required to travel greater distances to collect donations given the Latrobe municipality spans 1,422 square kilometers¹. In Latrobe Valley 4.48% of people do not own a car, and an additional 24.76% share one car per household.⁴ This means that distance is also a barrier for people seeking to access food relief if they do not own a private vehicle, as some food relief agencies are not located close to public transport or are only open during certain times of the day.

High demand

Food insecurity rates in Latrobe Valley (6.6%) are close to double that reported to be experienced by the Victorian State average (3.6%).² This figure represents a conservative average of the food security status across Latrobe, with many pockets experiencing higher rates of disadvantage and food insecurity; up to 43% in some areas.⁵

Foodbank is the most utilised food relief distributor in Latrobe, followed by SecondBite and FareShare. However the food delivered by these key organisations is not enough to meet the local demand and agencies need to source additional donations. All of the agencies surveyed have worked to establish relationships with multiple local large chain supermarkets including Woolworths, Coles and Aldi where they are able to collect donations at scheduled times throughout the week. These additional donation schedules vary from collections four to five days per week and range from 10kg to 100kgs of produce per day; depending on volunteer availability and quantity of excess food available from the retailer on any given day.

Cold storage availability

The ability to accept bulk donations on short notice, particularly involving fresh or frozen produce is limited. Though there is strong capacity to accept and store large quantities of dry goods; many agencies do not have the space or suitable appliances (fridges or freezers) on hand to store large amounts of fresh and/or frozen food. In some cases, smaller agencies may only have a large cupboard or small pantry; resulting in a significant limitation to the amount of fresh or frozen food that can be accepted, stored and re-distributed.

For many agencies, when unexpected bulk donations become available the inability to collect and/or store large quantities of food becomes an even greater barrier. In these instances many agencies are forced to accept only part of the donation, or refuse donations completely.

Overall, for many agencies to meet the current demand, they need to be able to stock larger quantities of chilled and frozen foods; but are limited by available space and suitable storage facilities. Only 25% of survey participants indicated that they are able to receive bulk deliveries of fresh or frozen goods due to limitations in suitable storage facilities.

Delivery Schedule

Many agencies offering emergency food relief currently rely on volunteers. This impacts on agencies ability to collect and transport donations which are often restricted to scheduled time slots by the retailer. Agencies are also further restricted in the types of donations they can receive due to vehicle size and limited access to chilled transport options. In the event

that excess produce donations are available, only 50% of respondents would be able to collect donations that fall outside of normal collection times. This is particularly relevant on weekends when many agencies do not have the capacity to collect from retailers.

Distribution agencies including Foodbank, SecondBite and FareShare are heavily utilised across Latrobe. The delivery frequency between distribution organisations varies; with agencies receiving Foodbank deliveries fortnightly, SecondBite every 3 weeks, and those connected with FareShare receiving bulk frozen meals on a monthly basis. Donations from local supermarkets supplement supply in between delivery schedules and are collected most weekdays. Donations collected from supermarkets depend on what is available, volunteer availability and transport options.

Available Resources

None of the agencies participating in the survey connect with local small-scale food producers or suppliers (such as farmers or greengrocers), instead reporting that they receive the majority of their additional produce from large chain supermarkets. While the Latrobe Valley comprises 74% rural land, only a small amount of this is utilised for farming practices. These practices predominantly involve dairy and beef production, making it difficult to source and connect with local growers to redistribute excess produce.⁶

75% of agencies participating in the survey reported that they would be happy to share storage facilities with other agencies; particularly in circumstances where large donations become available. This would result in those agencies with greater food storage capacity accepting bulk donations and then advising partnering providers on how they can collect smaller, more manageable quantities for their own distribution. The development of a shared information platform for ERNLac members would provide the ability to connect and exchange this type of information, and presents an opportunity to develop local partnerships to collectively improve the storage and distribution capacity of food relief across a number of agencies.

Recommendations

To sustainability meet the growing demand for food relief across Latrobe a number of strategies and initiatives that promote efficient storage and distribution, collaboration and capacity building are needed. Key recommendations include the following:

- Organisations identified as being in a position to accept and store bulk donations may be able to partner with other agencies to share and redistribute food in smaller quantities.
- Establish a shared online platform where food relief agencies can post information on excess bulk donations they are happy to share with other agencies.
- Negotiate increased frequency of fresh/frozen produce delivery so that agencies do not have to attempt to store large quantities of fresh/frozen produce.

- Connect with Volunteering Latrobe (HandsUp) to grow the volunteer workforce and improve agency capacity to collect food outside of scheduled times, such as weekends.
- Develop a central storage hub (such as the proposed Foodbank warehouse site) for bulk deliveries and storage within Latrobe to improve efficiency and provide increased accessibility for local agencies.
- Identify local producers and map the potential for excess produce to be redistributed through food relief agencies.
- Support local food agencies to apply for funding for improved food transport and storage such as refrigerators, freezers and a refrigerated vehicles.

Conclusion

Emergency relief agencies work tirelessly to meet the ongoing demand for food assistance throughout Latrobe Valley. These agencies are supported by a strong volunteer workforce, but often have a reduced capacity to distribute large quantities of fresh and/or frozen foods due to limited storage facilities and frequency of deliveries from food relief distributors (Foodbank, SecondBite and FareShare). Moving towards a collective partnership would enable the use of shared resources and increase the amount of food donations that could be accepted; resulting in greater efficiency in the redistribution of food to those in need. Working to increase the number of volunteers assisting agencies will further reduce the pressure on exiting volunteers, increase the number of donations that could be collected and transported from supermarkets, and reduce the amount of food waste going to landfill. Collectively this would provide a more efficient food relief support system, which is better able to sustainably meet ongoing demand for services into the future.

References

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