



Healthy Eating

City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

Increasing healthy eating is one of four priorities identified for focus in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. A healthy diet is vital for optimal growth and preventing disease. People who are unable to access nutritional food on a regular basis are said to be experiencing 'food insecurity'. In 2020, local community organisations reported an increase in people experiencing food insecurity due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

What is healthy eating?

Healthy eating is eating a variety of foods that provide the nutrients required to maintain health.

Poor diet is a combination of dietary risks. It includes not consuming enough vegetables, nuts and seed, fruits, whole grains, milk, fibre, omega 3, calcium and PUFA sources. It also includes eating too much salt, processed and red meats, trans fat and sweetened beverages (Heart Foundation, 2019).

Food insecurity occurs when "the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain" (Radimer, 2002)

How do eating behaviours and nutritional outcomes affect the Port Phillip community?

Overall, the Port Phillip community engages in healthier eating behaviours than the Victorian population; however, 1) a significant proportion of residents do not consume enough fruit and vegetables and 2) reports from local agencies providing food relief show a substantial growth in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic that is likely to continue. In 2017:

- 39.5 per cent of residents were obese or pre-obese (this is lower than the Victorian average of 50.8 per cent)
- 2.8 per cent met fruit and vegetable consumption guidelines (this is slightly lower than the Victorian average of 3.6 per cent)
- 6.6 per cent consumed sugar-sweetened soft drinks daily (this is lower than the Victorian average of 10.1 per cent)
- 25.2 per cent never consume take-away meals or snacks (this is significantly higher than the Victorian average of 14.9 per cent) (DHHS 2017)

In Port Phillip local food production (through backyard vegetable gardens or community gardens) provides opportunities to increase food security and encourage healthy eating.



How does healthy eating affect some groups in our community?

Australians tend to eat too many discretionary foods that are high in kilojoules, saturated fat, added sugars and salt. They also don't eat enough healthy foods associated with a decreased risk of disease, such as vegetables, legumes, fruit, wholegrain cereals, and nuts (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012).

Diet quality is unequally distributed in Australia. **Aboriginal People, vulnerable cultural groups and those living in relative socio-economic disadvantage** are less likely than other Australians to consume a healthy diet. (Backholer, et al., 2016); (Turrell, et al., 2002); (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012), (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015)) Cardiovascular disease also disproportionately affects these groups with Aboriginal People and those with lower socio-economic status having increased hospitalisation rates for cardiovascular disease.

The Victorian Population Health Survey paints a similar picture in relation to food insecurity with 6.6% of the population indicating that they could not access the food required for health. Those within this group tended to:

- Identify as **Aboriginal** or Torres Strait Islander
- Be widowed, divorced, separated or never married
- Have experienced **discrimination** in the last year
- Not have completed high school
- Be **unemployed** or not in the labour force
- Have a total annual **household income of less than \$40,000** (Department of Health and Human Services, 2017).

There is also substantial evidence indicating the links between **homelessness**, unhealthy eating and food insecurity. In addition to the prohibitive cost of food for those living below the poverty line, being affected by homelessness or residing in inadequate housing often means limited access to 1) refrigeration to keep fresh food or 2) cooking facilities to prepare nutritional food.

The relationships between healthy eating patterns and socio-economic position highlight the importance of social determinants in the nutrition status and health of all Australians. Structural interventions are required to support healthy dietary behaviours across all socio-economic groups. Importantly, these must work across sectors and address the underlying physical, economic, social, and commercial determinants of health (Sharon Friel, 2015).

How has COVID-19 affected healthy eating?

- Media reports of increased demand for vegetable seeds and seedlings suggest a growing interest in home food production.
- Reports from local agencies providing food relief indicate a substantial growth in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic that is likely to continue.
- Whilst being one of the main sectors experiencing the negative impacts of COVID-19, a large number of businesses associated with the catering industry supplied free food to vulnerable communities. Many of these businesses used their own resources whilst others raised donations to cover costs involved.



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- Victorians affected by the first coronavirus lockdown of 2020 were at a greater risk of food insecurity and consumed more sugary drinks. That said, they also ate more home-cooked meals (VicHealth, 2020).

Why is healthy eating important for our community?

- A healthy diet is vital for optimal growth and helps prevent chronic diseases, cancer, and diabetes. Improving vegetable intake to meet the recommended 5 serves per day is estimated to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by 16% and could avoid \$1.4 billion of health expenditure based on 2015- 2016 estimates (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016)(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015).
- There is strong evidence that eating a healthy diet can also improve mental health outcomes. People who eat a diet that is rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains and fresh fish are up to 35 per cent less likely to experience depression (Schuch, et al., 2018). Conversely, a diet high in processed and nutritionally poor foods can increase the risk of developing depression by up to 60 per cent (Food and Mood Centre, Deakin University, 2020).
- Increasing healthy eating is one of the four priorities identified for focus in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023.
- Food insecurity may escalate during the COVID-19 pandemic. Food insecurity has a significant impact on physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing.

How are the State and Commonwealth Governments supporting healthy eating?

The Federal and state governments establish policy relevant to nutrition and food insecurity, develop rolling action plans and provide funding to peak community-based agencies that work to improve eating patterns across the general population and within specific populations. Government resources are also provided to community organisations providing access to food for vulnerable communities.

Organisations in receipt of government funding include the Heart Foundation and affiliate state Foundations, Cancer Council Australia and affiliated state Councils, Diabetes Australia and affiliated state organisations and community organisations addressing food insecurity such as the Food Bank. Together, with revenue raised via donations and campaigns, these organisations then resource the work of local communities or work in partnership with community organisations to achieve shared goals.

What is the role of the Port Phillip City Council in facilitating and encouraging healthy eating?

In addition to its mandated responsibility to ensure local food premises are safe and compliant, Council can contribute to encouraging healthy eating behaviours by:



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- Providing information about healthy food options available in our municipality
- Promoting healthy food and drink options in council-operated or leased premises and during Council-run or supported services, activities or events
- Encouraging and supporting communities to consume healthier food and drinks by embedding the Victorian Healthy Choices food and drink policy guidelines into council operations and food supply contracts
- Implementing initiatives and approaches supporting healthier lifestyles and habits such as increasing access to free tap water and markets that provide access to healthy food
- Understanding the issues that contribute to accessing nutritious, affordable foods, and address these through Council activities such as land use planning, advocacy and education
- Funding and supporting local community organisations to provide nutritious food for people experiencing food insecurity
- Providing healthy food options through our service provision at childcare and through the adventure playgrounds and associated programs.

Who are our partners?

In order to facilitate a comprehensive, consistent, and whole of community approach to addressing healthy eating, the Council is partnering with community organizations to deliver community interventions. Some of our key partners include:

- STAR Health
- Port Phillip Community Group
- Community garden groups
- Community and sporting organisations
- Community centres
- Neighbourhood houses
- Heart Foundation
- Cancer Council Victoria
- Port Phillip Urban Food Network
- The Eco Centre
- Food Bank
- Second Bite



What may change over the next five years?

- The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a dramatic increase in the request for emergency food relief. The long-term effect of this increase in food insecurity is difficult to determine.
- Job losses and reduced income may affect food, grocery and other household spending.

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