



## Colac Otway Shire Community Food Security Needs Assessment 2013 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Introduction**

Food security is defined as the *'the state in which all persons obtain nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable, safe foods regularly through non-emergency sources'*<sup>i</sup>.

Population data for the Colac Otway Shire (COS) shows that eight in every one hundred people in the region ran out of food over a twelve month period and were unable to replace it<sup>ii</sup>. This figure is higher than both the Barwon South West Region and Victorian averages of food insecurity rates<sup>iii</sup>. This data is supported by findings that over half the COS population is not meeting the daily recommended fruit intake levels, and an even greater amount are not meeting the daily recommendations for vegetable consumption<sup>iv</sup>. In addition, over half of the COS population is classified as overweight or obese<sup>v</sup>. Population data also shows that rates of food-related chronic disease, such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes are following an increasing trend in Victoria<sup>vi</sup>. These statistics supported the initiation of health promotion activities around food security and healthy eating, which subsequently resulted in these issues being addressed through the public health and health promotion plans for Colac Area Health (CAH), Otway Health and Community Services (OHCS) and the COS.

In order to plan appropriate public health and health promotion directions for action to address food security and healthy eating within the COS, a greater understanding of the determinants of food security and how they affected our population was required. This led to the development and implementation of a comprehensive needs assessment for the COS.

### **Methodology and findings**

A partnership between CAH, COS and OHCS was formed in order to develop and implement the needs assessment for the region. The Colac Otway Shire Needs Assessment adopted strong research practice using a range of frameworks and best practice processes including; the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit; Southern Grampians and Glenelg (SG&G) Community Food Security Needs Assessment and Bellarine Community Health Centre (BCHC) Food Security Needs Assessment on the Bellarine Peninsula.

The COS Needs Assessment was conducted in 2012 – 2013 using a range of food security research methods including; problem definition; retail, food production and transport mapping, and consultation with both the community and with key stakeholders. The completion of Victorian Healthy Food Basket (VHFB) surveys and an assessment of primary, secondary and grey literature were also used to provide evidence for appropriate food security actions.

Research of existing evidence and data was undertaken, with a variety of population data sources accessed in order to assist in defining the issues and determinants of food insecurity in the COS. The main findings which build on existing data and knowledge around food security were uncovered by investigating primary data on the determinants of food insecurity.

The main findings in relation to the determinants of food insecurity found that the COS has the lowest Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) in the Barwon South West region<sup>vii</sup>, with all at risk population subgroups for food insecurity being represented in our catchment<sup>viii</sup>. Other key findings about the COS population include; forty per cent of the population earn an income less than four hundred dollars a week, formal education levels are low, less than half of the population are located near public transport and median income levels are below national averages<sup>ix</sup>.

Mapping of food outlets and public transport was completed within the COS. Food outlet mapping used Google Maps® to map food outlets using a list of registered food premises provided by the Environmental Health Department at the COS. Transport mapping was completed using timetables and routes available on the Public Transport Victoria website<sup>xi</sup>. The key findings from the food outlet mapping showed that only eight per cent of food outlets were supermarkets or fresh fruit and vegetable stores, and the majority were food outlets consisting of restaurants, cafes and takeaway stores. Public transport mapping found that the frequency and travel time of public transport routes did not appear to currently support easy access to fresh produce stores, particularly for areas of food deserts and those outside Colac Central.



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Victorian Healthy Food Basket<sup>xii</sup> is a standardised tool developed by Monash University to collect information on the cost, availability and accessibility of a healthy basket of food available at major supermarkets across Victoria. These results are then measured against the Centrelink benefits received by subpopulation groups more at risk of food insecurity; this measured the percentage of income spent on food over a fortnightly period. If the cost of the VHFB totals above thirty per cent of their benefits, they are considered more vulnerable to food insecurity. This tool categorises items listed in the VHFB into seven food categories, including cereals, vegetables, fruit and unhealthy items.

Five supermarkets were assessed using this tool in the COS in 2012. The main findings show that the average cost of shopping for a healthy food basket at supermarkets within the COS uses over thirty percent of the average government income benefits, with the exception of the two major supermarkets in Colac Central. Families, single parents and single adults are the most vulnerable to food insecurity as concluded in the results of the VHFB surveys.

The VHFB tool was also adapted to measure the availability of items in our smaller community General Stores, which is the main point of food for some populations in our rural setting. The main findings were that North Colac Otway Region has limited or no fruit and vegetables available, with a large range of the unhealthy items available. Both South Colac Otway and Forrest and Surrounds had a greater range of healthy food items available, but large amounts of unhealthy items available, consist with other findings for the COS.

Community consultations were conducted across the COS to investigate the question “*what barriers do you face getting the healthy food you need?*” The main method used to attain this information was a ‘sticky-dot consultation’ placed in 23 locations across the COS. Hard copies and online versions of the question were available. The survey was in multiple-choice format developed around the determinants of food insecurity and included a variety of plain language responses around cost, access and availability. The main findings of the community consultation identified *cost of food, availability of healthy food, and the perceived lack of time* to cook or prepare healthy food as the biggest barriers for our community in consuming the food they need to live a healthy lifestyle.

Stakeholder consultations were held with a number of health professionals and community leaders who support people who are vulnerable to food insecurity in our area. These consultations were in the form of either written or phone questionnaires adapted from previously developed food security surveys from the USDA, SG&G and BCHC. The surveys sought information on the prevalence of food insecurity within population groups and assessed the main determinants that professionals believe affected the community they worked with. Surveys also included questions around any food security programs currently being implemented by stakeholders in the COS. A total of 38 written interviews were completed across the COS, with a range of health professionals and community leaders from schools, healthcare, welfare and early year’s settings represented. The main findings were that stakeholders perceived *cost, transport and skill* as the main determinants affecting food security in our community.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The information collected from the COS Needs Assessment of food security provided a comprehensive report and starting point for solution generation around the determinants and causes of food insecurity in the COS. The main areas of focus that have emerged from the COS Needs Assessment are:

1. *Cost of food*
2. *Access to healthy food, and*
3. *Food skill and knowledge.*

These barriers affect food across the continuum starting at food production and finishing at food utilisation.

In order to improve food security in the COS, an effective and sustainable integrated plan will be developed in collaboration with organisational partners, stakeholders and the broader community.



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It is recognized that comprehensive, sustained strategies are more likely to be effective in plan development. It is important that our food security action plan reflects the COS' capacity to implement long term responses rather than short term, narrowly targeted single level strategies<sup>xiii</sup>.

In consideration to this, the following frameworks will be used in addition to, a literature review of existing evidence on best practice food security interventions, identification of the COS capacity, resources, and partnerships to address the priority areas identified.

- *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*
- *VicHealth - 10 Ways Local Government Can Act on Food Security*
- *Department of Health - Integrated Health Promotion Resource Kit*
- *Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) Municipal Food Scanning Tool.*
- *Heart Foundation - Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design Toolkit*
- *Environments for Health – Municipal Public Health Planning Framework*
- *Heart Foundation and Queensland Government: Healthy Activity Communities Framework*

This will provide the basis to develop an integrated food security action plan that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-focused (SMART). This will be achieved at the Colac Otway Food Forum in July 2013, as well as the identification of our working group to support action.

## References

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- <sup>iv</sup> Victorian Government Department of Health, (2012) Colac Otway Shires: Health Status Profile 2011 – Victorian Population Survey 2008.
- <sup>v</sup> Victorian Government Department of Health, (2012) Colac Otway Shires: Health Status Profile 2011 – Victorian Population Survey 2008.
- <sup>vi</sup> VicHealth 2007, Disease trends, retrieved 2012, [http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Knowledge/research\\_DiseaseTrends.ashx](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Knowledge/research_DiseaseTrends.ashx)
- <sup>vii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), 2006, retrieved 2012
- <sup>viii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Community Profile Colac Otway (S), 2011
- <sup>ix</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, Census data for Colac Otway South, retrieved 2012, [http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/210151755?opendocument&navpos=230](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/210151755?opendocument&navpos=230)
- <sup>x</sup> Google Maps, 2013, <https://maps.google.com.au/maps?hl=en>
- <sup>xi</sup> Public Transport Victoria Website, 2013, <http://ptv.vic.gov.au/>
- <sup>xii</sup> Monash University, 2012, Victorian Healthy Food Basket Survey
- <sup>xiii</sup> Local government and Food Security: An evidence review, Montague M 2011, Public Health Unit, retrieved 2012.