A working toolkit for addressing food insecurity at Australian universities

Version 1. March 2022

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As Australian institutions seek to regain their edge in the global market for international education after two years of disruptions, innovating around student experience is more important than ever.

Exactly what constitutes the student experience in 2022 and beyond is rapidly evolving. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised questions of how universities might better serve its diverse student cohort, with matters of equity in mind, as well as the importance of student health and wellbeing. Food should be central to this effort. The accessibility and provision of food on campus are integral to the student experience and issues of equity, inclusion and diversity.

As living laboratories for innovation, universities can implement food programs that build on the social and cultural wealth of their campuses and precincts. This could be done in a manner that promotes sustainability, (especially the Sustainable Development Goals), supports and renews their focus on engagement with communities, and asserts their place as institutions committed to equity and excellence.

What is food insecurity?

Prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, between 30-40% of university students in Australia were food insecure, experiencing insufficient or unstable access to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.[1] Students were much more likely to be food insecure than people in the general population.[2]

The pandemic may have widened the gap between students and the general population. The lockdowns associated with Covid-19 had a particular impact on students, who are disproportionately dependent on casual and part-time work, for example in the hospitality sector, and many of whom lack access to state schemes, as temporary residents.[3]

Notwithstanding the seriousness of these issues, the 'hungry student' stereotype has been pervasive within Australian discourse and discussions of university student welfare for decades. Food insecurity remains largely a 'silent issue'.[4]

There are different severities of food insecurity experienced by students. Chronic food insecurity occurs across a significant period with little reprieve from insufficient food access. It is highly intertwined with structural poverty. Periodic food insecurity may occur in waves – students lack access to food at specific times that correspond with the payment of bills, tuition, holiday periods,

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[1] Megan C. Whatnall, Melinda J. Hutchesson, and Amanda J. Patterson, "Predictors of Food Insecurity among Australian University Students: A Cross-Sectional Study," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 1 (January 2020): 60, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17010060.
[2] Roger Hughes et al., "Student Food Insecurity: The Skeleton in the University Closet," *Nutrition & Dietetics* 68, no. 1 (2011): 27–32, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-0080.2010.01496.x; Dee A. Micevski, Lukar E. Thornton, and Sonia Brockington, "Food Insecurity among University Students in Victoria: A Pilot Study," *Nutrition & Dietetics* 71, no. 4 (2014): 258–64, https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12097.
[3] Katherine Kent et al., "Prevalence and Socio-Demographic Predictors of Food Insecurity in Australia during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Nutrients* 12, no. 9 (September 2020): 2682, https://doi.org/10.3390/nu12092682.
[4] Lisa Henry, "Understanding Food Insecurity Among College Students: Experience, Motivation, and Local Solutions," *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 41, no. 1 (2017): 6–19, https://doi.org/10.1111/napa.12108.

temporary loss of employment and/or unexpected events.[5] Both chronic and periodic food insecurity are related to financial precarity.

About the Talking Hunger Project

Between October 2020 and April 2021, we interviewed 94 undergraduate and graduate students from a range of Victorian higher education institutions about their experiences of food insecurity. Half of those interviewed were enrolled at the University of Melbourne. The interviews were mainly carried out by student co-researchers who themselves had experienced food insecurity and were trained in qualitative methods.

We are very grateful to the University of Melbourne, Faculty of Science at the University of Melbourne, Melbourne Social Equity Institute and USA's Social Science Research Council for funding different aspects of the research. Resources for the production of this toolkit were kindly provided by the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Science.

Key Findings

Our research pointed to persistent food insecurity among students and high levels of hardship and frustration within the student body across Victorian universities. Students noted that the primary cause of food insecurity was a lack of income, especially for students living away from the family home and for international students. This was largely connected to poor access to adequate paid employment.

Some students reported having to skip meals to save money. Several discussed losing or gaining weight or feeling physically exhausted because they lacked access to healthy food. Students reported having to compromise on the quality, diversity, healthfulness of food, and of being denied their preferred food choices. One student stated that they had become "vegetarian out of necessity", another noted: "God I miss fruit".

Students also talked about the mental health implications of food insecurity. Many experienced feelings of shame, embarrassment, and social isolation, which impacted negatively on their ability to study and build relationships on and off campus.

Most students reported that the food choices on campuses were very limited given their tight budgets, and that there was a lack of affordable and healthy foods. International students, in particular, expressed disappointment about the lack of healthy campus food environments, and several compared their Australian university negatively with universities in their home countries. Both domestic and international students often bring a prepared lunch from home to save money, though this was not always practical and was dependent on adequate preparation time and home cooking facilities.

Students considered the cost of food at many private food outlets on campus to be far too high, particularly for the healthier options. This was exacerbated for students with specific dietary restrictions or preferences, such as vegetarian, halal or with food intolerances. There was instead a dependence on cheaper and more filling foods, such as pizza and fast/fried foods.

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[5] Lisa Henry, *Experiences of Hunger and Food Insecurity in College* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31818-5.

Why tackle food insecurity on university campuses?

Institutions' choices shape the prevalence and severity of food insecurity. There are many reasons why mitigating food insecurity on campus through improved accessibility and provisioning is critical. Some of the key reasons include:

1. Student experience
   - Our research has shown that a lack of affordable and nutritious food on campus poses a major barrier to the amount of time students spend on campus with flow on effects for their social relationships, opportunities for networking, and engagement with extra-curricular activities.
2. Health & Wellbeing
   - Much research suggests links between **poor nutrition and poor mental** health outcomes, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, international students, LGBTQI students, those with disabilities and students from low SES backgrounds.[6]
3. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
   - Studies from North America have identified that non-traditional students and students from diverse backgrounds are more at risk of food insecurity.[7] These are students who already experience barriers to university entry and degree completion for example, mature aged students and parents as well as students from low SES backgrounds.
   - Australian studies have identified students living in rental/shared accommodation outside of the parental home, students with low income and those receiving government assistance to be particularly at risk.[8]
   - Food insecurity is associated with poorer academic achievement with students also more likely to defer their studies.[9]
   - Qualitative studies undertaken in North America as well as our research has found that food insecurity is associated with struggles related to other basic needs such as housing and finances.[10]

[6] Orygen, "Australian University Mental Health Framework" (Melbourne: Orygen, 2020), https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/University-Mental-Health-Framework/Framework/.

[7] Suzanna M. Martinez et al., "Food Insecurity in California's Public University System: What Are the Risk Factors?," *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2017.1374901; Katharine M. Broton, Kari E. Weaver, and Minhtuyen Mai, "Hunger in Higher Education: Experiences and Correlates of Food Insecurity among Wisconsin Undergraduates from Low-Income Families," *Social Sciences* 7, no. 10 (October 2018): 179, https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7100179; Maria Beam, "Nontraditional Students' Experiences With Food Insecurity: A Qualitative Study of Undergraduate Students," *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education* 68, no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 141–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2020.1792254.

[8] Hughes et al., "Student Food Insecurity"; Danielle Gallegos, Rebecca Ramsey, and Kai Wen Ong, "Food Insecurity: Is It an Issue among Tertiary Students?," *Higher Education* 67, no. 5 (2014): 497–510; Whatnall, Hutchesson, and Patterson, "Predictors of Food Insecurity among Australian University Students."

[9] Suzanna M Martinez et al., "No Food for Thought: Food Insecurity Is Related to Poor Mental Health and Lower Academic Performance among Students in California's Public University System," *Journal of Health Psychology* 25, no. 12 (October 1, 2020): 1930–39, https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105318783028; Anthony Meza et al., "'It's a Feeling That One Is Not Worth Food': A Qualitative Study Exploring the Psychosocial Experience and Academic Consequences of Food Insecurity Among College Students," *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 119, no. 10 (October 1, 2019): 1713-1721.e1, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.09.006.

[10] Sara Goldrick-Rab, Jed Richardson, and Anthony Hernandez, "Hungry And Homeless In College: Results From A National Study Of Basic Needs Insecurity In Higher Education," Report (Wisconsin Hope Lab, March 1, 2017),
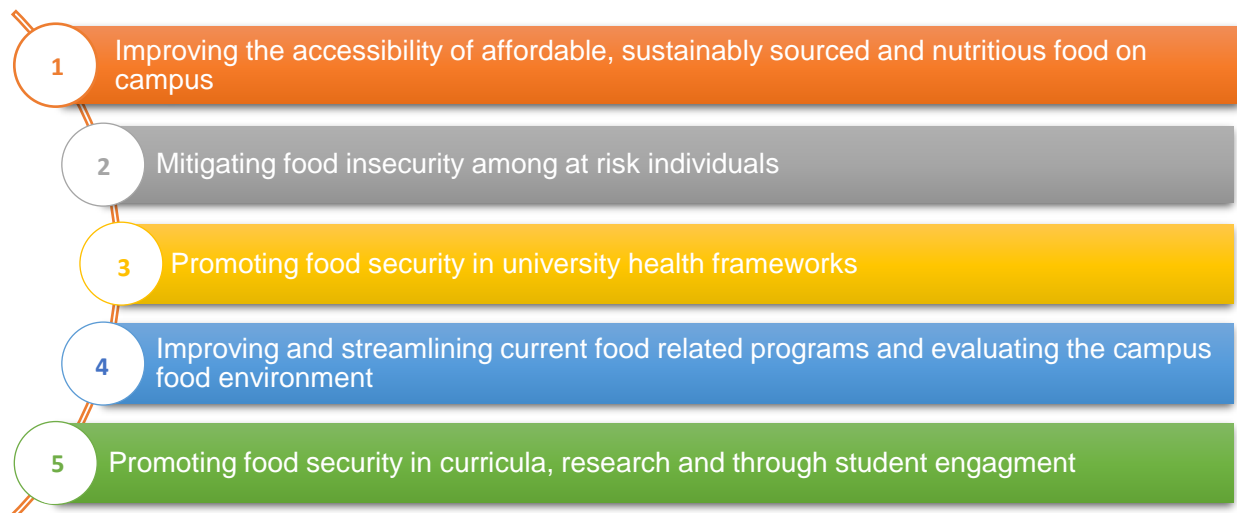
> ➢ Universities' commitment to diversity and inclusion calls for greater attention to food insecurity among student bodies.

Strategies & Tools for Mitigating Food Insecurity on Campus

This toolkit brings together these findings along with examples of best-practice from around the world to think about how Australian universities might achieve a hunger-free campus in 2022 and beyond.

What does this toolkit offer?

This document outlines a range of strategies and steps that would enhance food security. The toolkit provides recommendations and initiatives in the following five areas:

1	Improving the accessibility of affordable, sustainably sourced and nutritious food on campus
2	Mitigating food insecurity among at risk individuals
3	Promoting food security in university health frameworks
4	Improving and streamlining current food related programs and evaluating the campus food environment
5	Promoting food security in curricula, research and through student engagment

1. Improving the accessibility of affordable and nutritious food on campus

University Canteen

Overview: A university campus canteen funded and run by the university (and potentially student union organisations) could provide affordable and nutritious meals for both students and staff.

Examples of best practice: To our knowledge there are no universities in Australia equipped with a widely accessible university run canteen. Canteens are commonplace across universities in many parts of the world including Asia, Africa, South America and Europe. There are some examples of universities moving away from market-based approaches to food provision on campus towards delivering food in-house, as recently done at King's College London.

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https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/83028; Katharine M. Broton and Sara Goldrick-Rab, "Going Without: An Exploration of Food and Housing Insecurity Among Undergraduates," *Educational Researcher* 47, no. 2 (March 1, 2018): 121–33, https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17741303.

Many students in our research referred to university canteens when asked about their experiences of accessing affordable and nutritious food whilst studying at other institutions around the world.

> "We have like a thing called canteen system in India and so over **90% of students eat at uni**. No one really brings food from home. The canteen is extremely subsidized. So it just makes it easier to **not worry about being food insecure**. It is priced in a way that students from **all socioeconomic backgrounds** have equal access to that kind of food, which is what makes it really good." – University of Melbourne student

When asked about how universities might improve food access, many expressed a desire for a university-run canteen providing subsidized food.

Benefits of canteens (as suggested by students):

➢ Provide food insecure students with a convenient and accessible option to eat on campus.

➢ Offer potential employment to students. This could be especially beneficial for international students. Food insecure students often express a preference for 'working' for/ 'earning' food rather than receiving free food.[11]

➢ Encourage healthy eating on campus by limiting the range of food on offer and giving students access to nutritious foods in a convenient manner.

➢ Act as a social space for students. International students, in particular, expressed a strong desire for more social interaction on campus.

➢ Offer cooking demonstrations, classes and seminars for students.

➢ Trial sustainable food practices particularly around waste and circular economy practices.

➢ Act as a hub for other food assistance programs and financial programs.

➢ Enhance the food security and experiences of other sections of the campus population, including staff and faculty. A canteen could also provide a space for students. Faculty and staff to mix.

Pop Up, Mobile Free meals on Campus

Overview: "Pop-up" free meals could be provided on campus. Many students referred to the value of such an initiative.

Examples of best practice:

New York University (NYU): Love, NYU Eats - Pop up complimentary meals around the NYU campus run by the university dining services.

University of California, Santa Cruz: Mobile food hub (16-foot food van/trailer) with rotating menu serving lunch, distributing produce, holding events and workshops.

Benefits:

➢ Our research indicates that most students have difficulty accessing healthy and affordable food when on campus.[12] Although many students accessed free food available through

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[11]See also Henry, "Understanding Food Insecurity Among College Students."

[12] See also Sandra Murray et al., "Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Satisfaction with On-Campus Food Choices among Australian University Students," *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 22, no. 4 (January 1, 2021): 731–46, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-09-2020-0348.

university and student events, students noted that food offered was often not nutritious (e.g. poor-quality sausage sizzles). This program would counteract some of these issues.

Addressing food insecurity: Discrete, non-discriminatory and universal access to free food for students. The meal stalls avoid paperwork for food insecure students potentially associated with pantry use, emergency financial aid, and food vouchers and programs like SecondBite (at the University of Melbourne, for example). In the United States, studies have shown that the time and resources needed to 'sign up' or formally register for programs may discourage student use of food relief.

Free Produce & Snack Program in Student Spaces

Overview: Extending current or introducing new initiatives that provide fresh fruit and vegetables in key locations such as university libraries during exam season. There is a need to ensure that these programs are accessible in a variety of locations on campus and run all year round, not only during exam season. In addition, universities may look to providing students with free fresh produce that can be collected at university and taken home.

Examples of best practice:

University of Melbourne: free student fresh boxes are available weekly for students who self-register. The boxes contain 5kg of fresh produce.

Benefits:

> ➢ Low start up and running costs by utilising pre-existing resources for set up such as university health promotion programs.
> ➢ There are a variety of organisations/companies that sell fresh produce at wholesale prices that could be used for a produce box program. In Victoria for example, there is The Community Grocer.
> ➢ There is an opportunity to promote student led urban/regional growing schemes on and around campuses, or to link with current student farm groups.

Addressing food insecurity: Improving the provision and accessibility of nutritious food on campus.

Student Meal Prices and Discounts

Overview: Ensuring that every food outlet on campus has a healthy $5 meal available for students and staff (show their university ID).

Examples of best practice:

University of the Sunshine Coast: Utilises part of the Student Services Amenities Fee through the Student Food Subsidy to offer a $5.50 main hot meal for students available at two campus food outlets.

Benefits:

> ➢ Utilises pre-existing infrastructure and resources ie. would not require setting up a university cafeteria or canteen.

- If implemented in conjunction with the *Pop up/Mobile free meals on campus* initiative, $3-$5 student meals would ensure the accessibility of food on campus throughout the day and into the evening.
- May encourage students to spend more time on campus with potential flow on for student engagement. Our research suggests a reason why some food insecure students do not spend time on campus is because of the lack of affordable and nutritious food available – they must travel off-campus or return home to eat throughout the day. Furthermore, a lack of affordable food was also a barrier to socialising and networking with peers and faculty.
- Opportunity to promote healthy eating habits and diet.

Addressing food insecurity: Improves students' ability access to one hot and nutritious meal per day regardless of time pressures and constraints.

Food Preparation Hubs

Overview: Self-catered student food hubs/kitchenettes located in several places across a university campus in easy to reach places for *all* students (or spaces that students tend to congregate in), particularly undergraduate students who do not necessarily have access to the facilities offered by a School or Department. It is critical that there are numerous hubs around campus. This might require retrofitting old buildings.

Kitchenettes would contain microwaves, a hot and cold-water tap, fridge and sink as well as accessible cleaning products to promote food safety and should be cleaned daily. It might also include toasters and toastie makers. More extensive kitchens would include stove tops, ovens, cookware and crockery. The hubs should be included on campus maps and should have ample signage directing students to their location.

Examples of best practice:

Deakin University: 7 self-catering Microwave Hubs across its 4 campuses as a part of their Food Charter. The Melbourne Burwood Campus has a 24-hour microwave hub along with a student lounge.

University of Melbourne: Level four of the New Student Precinct has a kitchen set up for student use as well as several microwave and food preparation hubs across the entire building.

Benefits:

- Easier for students to manage their own diets and food consumption.[13] Specifically, it allows those students with cultural and dietary requirements to meet their food needs on campus.
- If well placed around campus, the hubs can be more convenient for generally time poor students than purchasing food on campus from spatially limited retail food outlets.
- Kitchenettes may serve as spaces of interaction and foster belonging as students do not need to travel off campus for more affordable options.[14]

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[13] See Microwave and Refill Stations (berkeley.edu)

[14] Amy Shaw et al., "The Cost of Sustainability in Higher Education: Staff and Student Views of a Campus Food Culture," *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 19, no. 2 (January 1, 2017): 376–92, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-12-2016-0225.

Addressing Food Insecurity: Food hubs - when combined with other initiatives - can mitigate students' difficulties accessing sufficient quantities of affordable and nutritious food whilst on campus.

2. Mitigating food insecurity among at risk individuals

Initiatives that target food insecure, or students at risk of food insecurity. This signals a move away from universal food provision and health promotion towards targeted student wellbeing and support.

Campus Pantry

Overview: Pantries have emerged across a number of Australian institutions in response to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis. However, there is a need to establish a campus pantry as a permanent fixture of student life and support.

Although the promotion and usage of the pantry would target students and staff experiencing or at risk of food insecurity, the pantry would provide universal access to non-perishable staples (eg. canned goods, cereal, rice, grains, oats, snacks), fresh produce (fruit and vegetables), and other perishables (eg. milk, bread).

Pantry items would be sourced through donations from the university community, local businesses and established charitable pantry networks in the area with positive flow on effects for the reduction of food waste.

Examples of Best Practice: Pantries are widely used across many campuses in the United States. The U.S. College and University Food Bank Alliance has over 700 member institutions and organisations. The University of California System has a well-established pantry system at all of its schools, especially at UC Berkeley & Davis.

Benefits:

➢ Low initial input and resource costs. It is possible to utilise pre-existing foodbank networks.
➢ Adds an important social dimension to food provisions, reducing stigma and encouraging discussions about wellbeing, food struggles and other basic needs.
➢ May also provide students with other items such as hygiene products and toiletries.
➢ Strong potential to partner with existing pantries in universities.
➢ Opportunities for student leadership and engagement through experiential learning, volunteers and internships eg. At the University of Melbourne: University of Melbourne Leaders in Communities Award or MULT20012 Arts internship: Not for Profit.

Addressing food insecurity: Accessing information about community food relief organisations can be difficult for students, especially those newly arrived at university and those who are experiencing food struggles for the first time. A pantry is a convenient and non-threatening resource for students when publicised as a student wellbeing service. This approach may also help to reduce the significant stigma attached to the use of charitable food organisations.

Moreover, our research suggests that young people value the ability to choose the food they access, as well as the freedom to cook meals for themselves with ingredients that suit their cultural needs and preferences. An issue with some emergency food assistance schemes (e.g. SecondBite) is that a lack of control over one's diet can work to undermine students' sense of autonomy and self-esteem. In this regard, the food insecure students we spoke with would prefer a scheme that provides them with ingredients and produce. A food pantry would address these considerations and provide food insecure students with greater autonomy over their diets and food choices.

Food Assistance Program

Overview Targeted debit cards and/or vouchers for food insecure and low-income students. Students can use these cards to purchase fresh food and produce from grocery stores, farmers' markets (on campus) or food vendors on campus.

This program would target three groups. First, students who might be most 'at risk' of experiencing food insecurity as they begin their degree. This includes those that are: first in the family, low SES, refugee/migrant background, Indigenous, regional/rural and/or receiving government assistance. Second, students who require emergency assistance for the sudden onset of food insecurity due to unexpected events. Third, those students experiencing chronic food insecurity. Each different group would require slightly different approaches to support.

Examples of best practice:

CalFresh and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (United States) are both run by government, the former being state and the latter being federal. Each of these programs provide eligible individuals and households with EBT cards to use to purchase produce and food.

[City of Melbourne and Queen Victoria Market](): The 'Our Shout' program during the COVID-19 pandemic provided international students with vouchers to use at Queen Vic markets. Many students we interviewed mentioned how beneficial the program was. They spoke fondly of the autonomy and choice afforded to them through the voucher system, which allowed them to buy and prepare food to their liking and taste. Several spoke of how this program helped maintained their dignity versus standing in line to receive free food.

Benefits:

➢ Ideally, this program would require minimal paperwork or an application process. Moreover, it would also allow faculty and other staff to refer students for fast assistance. This sort of access may also work to encourage students to seek assistance knowing that little and few resources are required to apply.

➢ This program is discrete in the sense that it does not involve receiving free food – students are able to spend their vouchers and cards at the point of sale without having to go out of their way or visit a food bank. This is important given that there are often other stressors associated students' inability to access food, connected to other significant challenges such as housing, family and employment.

Addressing food insecurity: Targeted food assistance to students in need, mitigating chronic and periodic bouts of food insecurity.

3. Promoting food security in university health frameworks

Student Basic Needs Framework, Program and Centre

Background: Our research has highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to student food insecurity that takes into account the way that food access is interconnected with other basic needs such as stable housing, mental wellbeing, hygiene, transportation and financial security. This would require a paradigmatic shift in how universities think about student and staff wellbeing as co-constituted and connected to issues of diversity, inclusion and equity, student learning and outcomes, and the overall student and staff experience at university.

The Covid-19 pandemic has already demonstrated the potential of universities to implement programs that take into consideration the welfare needs of students; a basic needs framework would provide an avenue to expand, institutionalise and incorporate university assistance into wider avenues of student and staff life. In Australia, there are currently no higher education institutions that have implemented such a framework. Universities have the capacity to pioneer the approach and its implementation in the Australian context, to deliver programs that *truly* centre students.

Overview: There are two primary parts to this approach. The first part entails centralising student wellbeing and support services, logistically and location wise. This would mean bringing together current support services available to students in 'one place' (Basic Needs Centre) with several locations across campus. For example, students using a food pantry or collecting SecondBite meals could also easily access mental health resources or housing assistance. In sum, fostering initiatives that bring together all of the elements that affect student life. The second part involves expanding current university support services for students, thereby extending the boundaries of institutional responsibility.

Examples of best practice: Many higher education institutions in the United States (4-year universities and 2-year community colleges) have a dedicated basic needs program for students. The University of California System has a well-documented and pioneering Basic Needs system first initiated in 2014 which started with the President of the UC system and then 10 chancellors announcing the UC Global Food Initiative. The Basic Needs program is sponsored by the University Regents and is of special concern in the office of the Chancellor. It consists of 4 arms: Research, Sustainability, Prevention and Advocacy.

UC Irvine: "FRESH Hub" a centre on campus centralising all students' food related needs and services including the food pantry, cost of university accommodation, graduate researcher stipends, as well as advocacy for better federal policy.

Addresses food insecurity: A student basic needs framework takes into consideration the interlocking and interconnected factors that produce food insecurity such as housing, employment and financial precarity.[15] This initiative begins to tackle one of the root causes of food insecurity: poverty. Such an approach requires a radical rethinking of student welfare in the current education system.

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[15] The Hope Centre run by Dr Sarah Goldrick-Rab has many resources on the topic of "Basic Needs".

Ongoing measurement and evaluation of food insecurity on campus

Overview: There is a need for initial and ongoing measurement and evaluation of the levels and severity of food insecurity within the student body. At most Australian institutions, there has been no research that directly measures the prevalence of food insecurity.[16] A baseline measurement is essential to track the progress of the initiatives and programs outlined in this toolkit as well as to better scope out the extent of the issue within the student body. Moreover, a food insecurity survey administered to the student body would provide University specific demographic information to identify and support students most at risk.

Examples of best practice: The University of Tasmania, Queensland University of Technology, Deakin University

As a part of the UC Global Food Initiative, since 2015 the University of California has conducted a survey of student basic needs, including levels of food insecurity, every 2 years. The findings from these surveys direct University funding towards support services and formed the foundation for many of the UC System's current initiatives on student basic needs. Questions about student food security are also part of the annual University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES).

4. Improving and streamlining current food related programs and evaluating the campus food environment

Implementing changes to current food programs is a convenient way for universities to begin to tackle student food insecurity on campus. However, improving current initiatives alone will not have a sufficient effect on the prevalence of food insecurity among the student body.

Free meal packs for students

Overview: Free meal packs and kits for students to collect on campus and take home.

Examples of best practice:

University of Melbourne and SecondBite: Free frozen pre-prepared meals for students through the non-profit SecondBite.

Student Voice: Students indicated that emergency food programs were a valuable source of support during the hardship of the Covid-19 pandemic, noting their convenience. Many students, however, particularly international students, mentioned that food offered was often limited in terms of diversity. They struggled to access culturally appropriate and familiar foods. Others with dietary requirements expressed a similar sentiment. This meant that some students made use of programs initially but failed to return. Furthermore, the feeling that students were receiving 'leftovers' (though they were prepared freshly) also acted as a barrier to participation, highlighting the need for programs that centre student agency and choice. Finally, several students raised concerns over the

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[16] For exceptions see: Martinez et al., "Food Insecurity in California's Public University System"; Gallegos, Ramsey, and Ong, "Food Insecurity"; Murray et al., "Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Satisfaction with On-Campus Food Choices among Australian University Students"; Hughes et al., "Student Food Insecurity"; Micevski, Thornton, and Brockington, "Food Insecurity among University Students in Victoria."

accessibility of programs running out of campus for students living far away and not within the inner suburbs.

Recommendations:

- Expand pick up locations to better promote student access and use of emergency programs.
- Guarantee programs as a permanent fixture of university student health and wellbeing services.
- Complement the program through initiatives such as a campus pantry to provide students with choice and promotes autonomy.

Uni-Food Environment Tool

Overview: To assess the healthiness, equity, and environmental sustainability of the campus food environment across three domains through a campus audit of: university systems and governance, campus facilities and environment, food retail outlets.

Offers a tool for continuous assessment to identify areas of improvement and track progress as well as to compare the performance of institutions across the indicators. More information about the UniFood tool can be found [here](#).[17]

Examples of best practice: The tool has been piloted at three Australian campuses. In 2022 the creators of the UniFood toolkit are looking to expand the assessment to other Australian institutions.

Benefits:

- Can be implemented with relatively low start-up costs requiring a small project team ideally consisting of a lead faculty member, staff from campus and facility management, a small number of assessors. Assessors will receive training from external research members at Deakin. There is an opportunity for student involvement in the project assessment as an internship or credit towards study.
- Aligns with the sustainability goals of many universities in Australia.
- Provides useful data for health promotion programs.

Addresses food insecurity: A part of the UniFood tool is to measure the affordability and accessibility of healthy food available on campus by examining the nutritional value and price-range of food on offer at private outlets.

Streamlining information about food on campus

Overview: Information about food support services and resources available to students and staff are often spread across several pages of university websites.

Examples of best practice: [Monash](#) have cheap eats, daily special and an end of day deals guide for all of their campuses (all meals below $6). This web page allows students to filter by price.

Recommendations: Current systems could be improved by collating information regarding food on campus under one section ie. 'food and nutrition'. It may also be useful to include information about

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[17] Davina Mann et al., "Development of the University Food Environment Assessment (Uni-Food) Tool and Process to Benchmark the Healthiness, Equity, and Environmental Sustainability of University Food Environments," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 2 (2021): 11895.

community food organisations also available to students locally. Moreover, creating an additional page outlining the food available on campus (price, location, range, opening hours) as well as a corresponding interactive map which also contains the locations of student food preparation hubs.

5. Promoting food security in curricula, research and through student engagement

Opportunities to engage students in issues related to food insecurity through leadership, interactive programs, experiential learning and communication with faculty.

Wellbeing Syllabus Statement and Welcome Survey

Overview: Including a basic needs statement in a subject guide/syllabus that welcomes students, normalises some of the challenges they may be facing outside of the classroom and outlines where they are able to find help and support within the University.[18] For example, the statement may direct them to counselling services, emergency food programs or a pantry if they are struggling with food or student programs for any other concerns, including financial concerns. A basic statement would be included in every subject syllabus – whether that be on the LMS or paper copy provided to students. Teaching staff would be afforded the opportunity to make personalised additions to the statement.

An additional measure would be to provide students with the opportunity to fill in a brief wellbeing welcome survey at the beginning of the subject. This is an optional survey which asks a few open-ended questions regarding the students' wider circumstances like their responsibilities outside of the classroom, the challenges they are facing, concerns with accessing technology, and anything else the student might want to share with their teacher. Ideally, teaching staff would produce individualised responses to the survey.

Examples of best practice:

Over 50 institutions in the U.S. have implemented a basic needs syllabus statement since Dr Sarah Goldrick-Rab from *The Hope Centre* shared and popularised the strategy.

Oregon State University

California Polytechnic State University

Virginia Tech

Benefits:

- Little to no costs associated with the implementation as it uses pre-existing resources.
- Subject statement provides a starting point to have conversations and begins to normalise students' challenges and hardships.
- Important for raising awareness among teaching staff and faculty who often have little contact with the student wellbeing and support staff at the University.

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[18] Sara Goldrick-Rab, "Beyond the Food Pantry: Spreading the Word- Supporting Students' Basic Needs with a Syllabus Statement and Welcome Survey" (Philadelphia: The Hope Center, Temple University, 2020), https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/BTFP_SyllabusStatement_WelcomeSurvey.pdf.

- Begins to create a 'caring' approach to student experience and wellbeing. Our research has shown that establishing relationships with faculty is key to student belonging, engagement, and outcomes. Making students feel like they are supported inside the classroom and that their circumstances as humans are recognised may have flow on equity impacts considering that the experiences of non-traditional and diverse students outside the classroom often have an impact on learning.
- Faculty and teaching support are able to implement the statement and survey as much or as little as they like. If a subject group decides that they would like to reach out to their students more, they are able to do so.
- Provides another way to drive awareness among the student body about the support services available through the university rather than just at orientation. Continuous awareness throughout students' degrees may be preferable to 'bombarding' students at the beginning of their courses. This is especially important given that students' circumstances shift and change over the course of their degrees. Our research, for example, shows that unpredictable events with family and employment can trigger episodes of food insecurity among students.
- Could further support university mental health and wellbeing approaches.

Targets food insecurity: Indirectly by normalising and creating awareness among the student and staff body about student welfare issues including issues of food access. It also improves communication streams regarding the support available from universities among students experiencing difficulty accessing food.

Food Rescue App developed by students

Overview: Food rescue app and/or notification via the student LMS.

Examples of best practice: Many institutions in the United States have implemented a food rescue app for students to use.

La Salle University, Philadelphia: Students can sign up to receive a notification when and where additional/left over food is available after campus events within a 30-minute post-event window. The *Free Food on Campus!* initiative utilises a food rescue/sustainability angle rather than an anti-hunger stance to encourage usage by actively avoiding words associated with food insecurity.[19]

University of Pittsburgh: See *PittGrub App*

California State Fullerton: See *Titan Bites*

Benefits:

- Can be a student led initiative involving students in the creation and implementation of the app through student internship, co-curricular streams (e.g. through UoM's Arts and Science Discovery subjects), and capstone subjects across a range of faculties.

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[19] Laura B. Frank, "'Free Food on Campus!': Using Instructional Technology to Reduce University Food Waste and Student Food Insecurity," *Journal of American College Health*, December 1, 2020, 1–5, https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1846042.

- Easily implemented with low to no start-up costs (if using existing technology via LMS).
- Overlaps with university sustainability drives and the drive to reduce food waste on campus (e.g. as identified in UoM's *2020 Sustainability Community Consultation Report)*.

Student Community Garden: farm to table initiative

Overview: Urban agriculture initiative on campus at the intersection of education and curriculum, student engagement and leadership, sustainability and food security. The initiative would aim to produce fresh food to be distributed to students in need for free through mechanisms such as the student unions, student pantry, social enterprises on campus, and student kitchens. In Victoria, it may be possible to partner with organisation such as 3000 acres, Cultivating Community or Melbourne Food Hub and to engage student organisations already functioning on campus like student garden groups.

Examples of best practice:

UC Berkeley: The Student Farm Coalition is a student led and community-based organisation of 8 farms around the UC Berkeley campus comprising of 150 volunteers. The organisation centres land and food sovereignty, food justice, indigenous knowledge and experiential learning. There is a focus on cultivating resilient and sustainable local food systems. Most of the produce from the gardens is donated to the UC Berkeley pantry through an established partnership between the organisation and the UC Basic Needs Centre. The organisation is affiliated with various faculty, departments and institutes of the university, notably the UC Berkeley food institute.

UC Davis: The Community Table Project (a student initiative) connects the Student Farm run by the Agricultural Sustainability Institute to food security programs happening on campus and aimed at the student body. There is a focus on producing fruits and vegetables at the farm that are subsequently distributed for free at the UC Davis student pantry and at various pop-up produce give aways. The Community Table Project also encompasses a range of education and learning initiatives to engage students in the campus food system, spark discussions around food and culture, and foster awareness about food security and equity, as well as sustainability. This arm of the project engages students and faculty with the overall aim to discuss and take action at the intersection of place, people and food.

Awareness Campaign

Student voice: Many students we spoke with identified a need for greater awareness and de-stigmatisation of food insecurity on campus. Students drew attention to the feelings of shame, embarrassment, and isolation that food insecurity fostered. They highlighted connections between university campaigns related to mental health awareness and the potential for a similar approach to start conversations among students about food access and struggles. One student suggested staging the equivalent of an RU OK day but focused on hunger instead.

Recommendations:

- Increase discussion and promotion of food insecurity on university social media platforms especially within university health promotion programs.
- Ensuring that awareness of food insecurity, and the programs in place to mitigate it, is part of first year and new student orientation.

- Posters advertising resources/support services available to students struggling with food access.
- Consider holding art and visual exhibitions that foreground student voice through photo competitions related to the student experience.
- Awareness week in partnership with student organisations.
- Partnering with other institutions in each state and across Australia.

Addresses food insecurity: Destigmatizing food insecurity is a critical step to ensure students feel confident to reach out for help when they are struggling with accessing food. Much like mental health, ensuring that students know that they are not alone in their difficulties and that here is help available is key to tackling food insecurity.

Conclusions and next steps

If four key areas of university focus were imagined as circles – the student experience, reactivating campuses after covid, student well-being, and sustainability – food insecurity occupies the zone where the four circles intersect. There are therefore multiple reasons for the substantial investment of resources in countering the problem of food insecurity on campuses. But, even if this argument does not obtain traction, many of the steps outlined above could be achieved at minimal cost.

This toolkit is intended as a "living document" and we would be very grateful for any comments, which could be sent to craig.jeffrey@unimelb.edu.au.