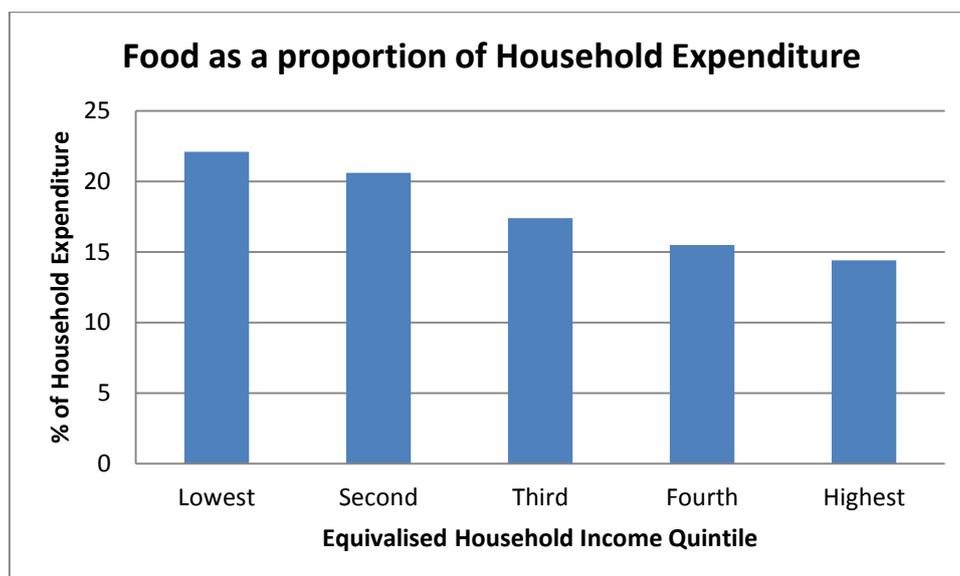


## Food, Food (In)Security, and Poverty – 2014

While most of us could do more to ‘make a little go a long way’ for some people in our community, budgeting and stretching resources is not in itself adequate to allow them to meet their food needs. Research shows that people in our community on low incomes report missing out on regular meals as well as food-based social events. 3.5% of South Australian households went without meals in the 12 month period leading up to the last *Household Expenditure Survey* (2009/10) and 15% of households surveyed reported that they could not afford a special meal once a week.

**South Australian households spend on average \$191 per week on food, accounting for 17.2% of current household expenditure.**<sup>1</sup> Food is the second biggest household expenditure item (behind housing). Individuals on low incomes pay a significantly higher percentage of their weekly income on their weekly grocery shopping.



Source: Derived from ABS HES, SA Summary, Table 5.

As a percentage of daily income the picture is even starker. If an individual on the base level Newstart Allowance spent the same proportion of their income on food as the general population (ie. 17.2%), they would have just **\$6.40 a day to spend on food**.

The high cost of healthy food exacerbates food insecurity. In fact, researchers are beginning to identify a relationship between poverty and obesity in affluent countries.<sup>2</sup> This relationship occurs because it is often cheaper to quell hunger with energy-dense fast-food than it is to acquire the same amount of calories from healthy foods that are purchased raw and prepared at home.

<sup>1</sup> From the ABS Household Expenditure Survey, updated using CPI Adelaide All Food Index.

<sup>2</sup> Cate Burns (2004) ‘A review of the literature describing the link between poverty, food insecurity and obesity with specific reference to Australia.’ VicHealth Literature Review, April 2004.

## The Cost of Healthy Food

Researchers have calculated the cost of a basket of healthy food for a variety of different households.

Cost of a Healthy Food Basket for Family Type	\$ per week
For a Family of 4 (2 Adults, 1 x 18y.o, 1 x 8y.o)	222.43
For a Single Parent with 2 children (18y.o + 8y.o)	153.00
For a Single Adult	69.74

Source: Figures from Wong et al, updated by SACOSS using CPI Adelaide Food Index.<sup>3</sup>

Compare the costs of healthy food with the purchasing power of low income earners:

- For a single person receiving the base level of Newstart Allowance, a healthy food basket would take 27% of their weekly income.
- For a person on the minimum wage supporting a partner and 2 children, a healthy food basket would take 34% of their weekly income.
- For a single parent working half-time on the SA average wage (and receiving base level Family Tax Benefit Part A), a healthy food basket would take 21% of their weekly income.

## Food Insecurity and vulnerable groups

Research demonstrates that individuals who fit certain social categories are more likely to experience food insecurity and food deprivation than other.<sup>4</sup> Financial restrictions are often a key factor with one research participant in a study simply saying: “We don’t eat nearly as much fruit, but I can’t afford the bloody fruit.”<sup>5</sup>

Food insecurity is particularly significant in remote Aboriginal communities and is recognised as contributing to the unequal health and mortality outcomes of Indigenous Australians as compared to non-Indigenous Australians. Drawing on a survey undertaken in 2007, the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) acknowledges that in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia food prices are around 42 per cent higher than they are in Adelaide.<sup>6</sup> The 2009 COAG Report also notes that: ‘Nationally, Indigenous children aged less than four years suffer from nutritional anaemia and malnutrition at 29.6 times the rate for non-Indigenous children.’<sup>7</sup>

## Food Choice

Access to food is not only about good health, food has cultural and social meaning. We celebrate and sometimes commiserate with food. We offer ourselves food as reward and incentive. We express ethical and religious values through the foods we will, and won’t, eat. In all of these ways consuming food involves the expression of choice and identity – when we can afford to make those choices.

Importantly, not all people who are defined as poor experience food insecurity – and the solution to poverty is not simply to provide more food to people on low incomes. Poverty is complex and multi-dimensional: it has myriad causes and these are not necessarily consistent across place and time. But ensuring access to sustainable, healthy, and affordable food is fundamental to ending food insecurity and income-related food deprivation.

<sup>3</sup> Kwan Chiu, John Coveney, Paul Ward, Robert Miller, Patricia Carter, Fiona Verity & George Tsourtos, (2011) ‘Availability, affordability and quality of a healthy food basket in Adelaide, South Australia’, *Nutrition & Dietetics*, 68: 8-14.

<sup>4</sup> Iain Law, Paul Ward and John Coveney (2011) ‘Food insecurity in South Australian single parents: an assessment of the livelihoods framework approach’ *Critical Public Health* 21: 4.

<sup>5</sup> Law, Ward and Coveney (2011) p.460.

<sup>6</sup> Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (2009) ‘National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities’ p.3: [http://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/nat\\_strat\\_food\\_security.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/nat_strat_food_security.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> COAG (2009) p.5.

**You can help ensure food security and fight poverty!**  
Go to [www.antipoverty.org.au](http://www.antipoverty.org.au) or  
contact [sacoss@sacoss.org.au](mailto:sacoss@sacoss.org.au)