

Partner update



August 2021

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically increased the demand for food relief as varying degrees of lockdowns and restrictions have impacted business and people's ability to earn an income around the nation. For example, in July, when parts of South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales were experiencing various degrees of lockdowns, there were 13.7 million people (more than half of the population of Australia) in lockdown areas. At the time of writing, Melbourne is experiencing Lockdown 6, large swathes of NSW including regional areas are in lockdown, and the Greater Sydney outbreak, rapidly approaching its third month, has been declared a national emergency.

While the lockdowns are an important part of the overall public health response, for many people income has unexpectedly gone to zero overnight. The COVID Disaster Payment only recently became available for people who have lost work and receiving government support benefits. As a result, people are struggling, and Foodbank is experiencing a substantial increase in demand for food relief. While the lockdowns and restrictions have led to increased demand for food relief, it has also disrupted supply. Foodbank is working with charity partners and constantly updating operations to effectively get food to people in need.

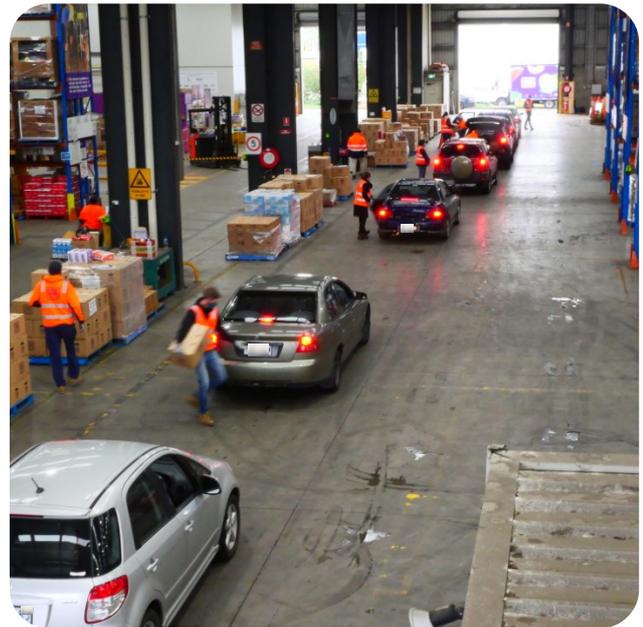
Lockdowns: The Impact on Food Insecurity

Foodbank is working hard to help alleviate one stressor for vulnerable people during these lockdowns by providing food relief. Over the last 8-9 weeks, Foodbank NSW & ACT (FBNA) have seen a 200% increase in demand. The rapid increase for food relief is alarming, with FBNA experiencing a backlog of over 10,000 food relief requests within the first fortnight of the latest lockdown. International students have made 20,000 requests for food hampers since 6 July 2021, revealing the depth of need among people in Australia not eligible to receive JobSeeker or Youth Allowance. Since the lockdown began in June, FBNA has distributed more than 35,500 emergency relief hampers. In the final week of July, FBNA shipped over 327,000kg of food and groceries, the highest weekly distribution in FBNA's history.

Furthermore, Victorians are now in their sixth lockdown and to put it simply, Victoria's charity sector is struggling to keep up with demand at a time when they are needed most. According to the data from Infoxchange hosts Ask Izzy show there was a 120% increase in searches for emergency relief, with almost one in four searches relating to food relief during the May-June Victorian lockdown.

May 2021, during lockdown 4, Foodbank Victoria (FBV) opened their warehouse doors to trial a Covid-safe drive-thru hamper collection. The safe, welcoming, and judgement-free zone was so successful they have offered it a total of six times to date, distributing hampers to around 1570 cars. The most recent drive-thru on August 20th was shut down by Police 90 minutes into operations after an overwhelming demand caused traffic to bank up to the point that it became a public safety issue. There were 520 cars through with 1482 hampers distributed and nearly 1,000 cars turned away. For context, their last drive-through had 406 cars through in 4 hours.

Additionally, the demand at FBV's International Student Pop Up increased to new levels. In 2020 their Student Pop Up store saw approximately 400 visiting for food relief each day. In August 2021, it is now the norm to see 600+ students accessing food relief. There have been two record-breaking days in August with 630+ students visiting the International Student Pop Up.



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Foodbank's Operational Challenges

There have been workforce challenges for Foodbank warehouses in hotspots, extreme pressures on food and grocery supply, balancing increased demand, disrupted supply chains and constraints on local agencies.

Hard lockdowns of local government areas surrounding the Foodbank NSW & ACT warehouse resulted in a dwindling workforce. Foodbank NSW & ACT warehouse had to cease all corporate volunteers, which accounted for 150 volunteers a week. Luckily, Foodbank NSW & ACT had a team of 8 from the SES helping pack hampers for two weeks and currently have a team of 12 from the Australian Defence Force for as long as needed. Foodbank NSW & ACT CEO [John Robertson](#) spoke with [ABC NewsRadio](#) regarding the increase of demand and how it is stretching resources such as the workforce.

Financial Situation of Vulnerable Australians

In previous lockdowns, JobSeeker and JobKeeper were available to mitigate some of the impacts of unpredictable and unstable employment patterns or loss of employment altogether. The most recent figures from the Department of Social Services show that 1.24 million people were on JobSeeker in January 2021 and another 135,540 received youth allowance. In comparison to before the pandemic, there were 684,138 people on JobSeeker. However, vulnerable cohorts now face the current lockdowns and consequent impacts on their financial situation without these essential assistance measures. The following data is from a report by ACOSS "[Financial distress in lockdown: The impact of lockdowns on demand for food relief and financial assistance](#)".

- "Online searches in NSW for emergency relief services on Ask Izzy increased by over 800% during the period from 26 June to 14 July 2021
- Searches for Financial Assistance in Ask Izzy have doubled in number during the 2021 Greater Sydney lockdown period, and increased by 50% in Victoria during the period of the May-June lockdown.
- During the May-June Victorian lockdown, there was a 120% increase in searches for emergency relief, with almost one in four searches relating to food relief."

July 2021, after the announcement that NSW will be in lockdown for another four weeks, the Prime Minister announced updates to the Federal Government COVID Disaster Payment. Previously the COVID Disaster Payment was not available to people receiving social security payments like JobSeeker and Youth Allowance, even though many have lost part-time paid work. People on social security payments that have lost eight or more hours of work have been promised an extra \$200 a week. There are still gaps in the social security net with people who have lost less than eight hours a week not receiving anything.

The maximum payment has been raised from \$600 to \$750 a week for workers who lost more than 20 hours, bringing it back to the value of JobKeeper. For people not on social security payments and have lost eight to 20 hours a week their payments have been raised by \$75, to \$375.

Financial Assistance (Non-Centrelink): Daily Searches (per 100,000 people) - 7 day rolling average

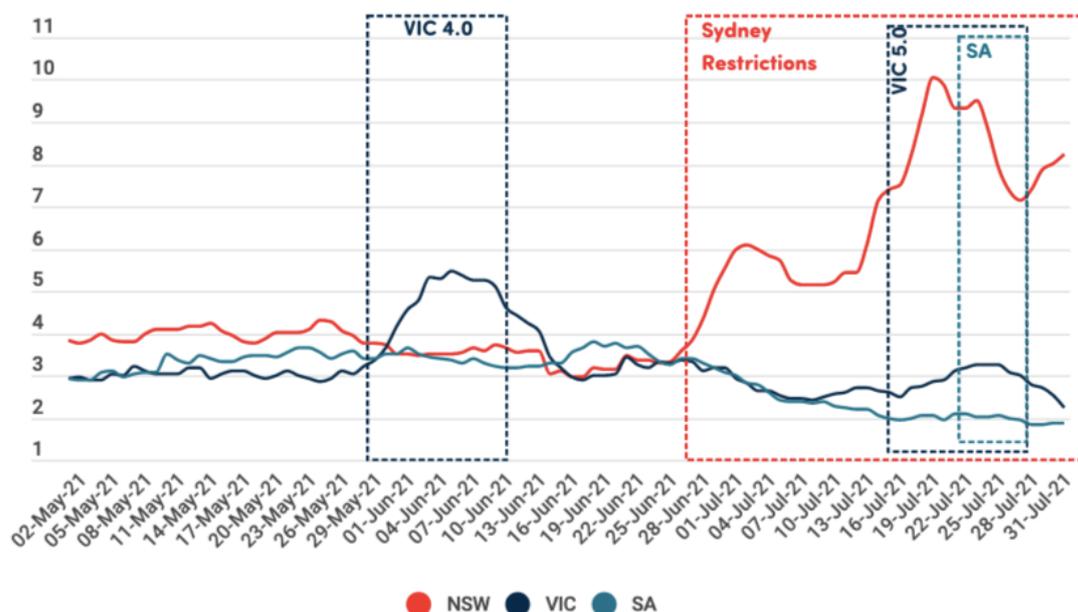


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The COVID Disaster Payment will give respite to those eligible for the payments and are living below the poverty line. The number of people financially struggling is alarming, and it's important not to forget the people behind those numbers. In an [ABC interview](#), a single mother of three from Hobart opens up about how the end of the Coronavirus Supplement in March meant she could no longer afford the basics for her family. She is attending university to try and get herself and her family into a better situation but is unsure if she can afford to continue studying.

"The extra payment for me and my three children was life-changing. It allowed me to leave an abusive relationship."

"When you're sitting on the toilet trying to work out how you can ration your tampons, then you hear your 12 year old tell your other two children off for using too much milk cause mum can't afford it... is heartbreaking."

The Year Ahead

Whilst much of our immediate workload is focused on responding to the increased pressure caused by lockdown, we also dedicate our continuing support to other people around the country affected by hunger.

Given current circumstances, it is clear that Foodbank will need to source more food and groceries than ever before to meet the continuing demand for food relief. Reliable funding will be required in order to achieve this, noting that food rescue and product donations will not be sufficient to meet the need. As such, on the advice of our state/territory Foodbanks, we have consolidated specific activities into three Pillars, namely Products, People and Programs. This development allows our partners to align their investment to an area of Foodbank that best matches their purpose, objectives and key audiences. Please get in touch with the Foodbank team to find out more.

The annual Foodbank Hunger Report is currently being developed and will be published on 18th October 2021. Recognised as a key snapshot on food insecurity in Australia, the report will focus on the long term impact of COVID on vulnerable people in the community as well as the specific challenges being faced by the food relief sector. This year's report will be digital and partners will have access to a range of assets in advance so you can share the story in that key week in the calendar.

Thanks again for your support, we can't do this without you.

♥ **THANK YOU** ♥



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