

Policy Statement on Food Security

This Board endorsed Policy on Food Security commits Australian Red Cross to improving food security among vulnerable people and communities in Australia. Australian Red Cross believes that everyone should have reliable access to affordable, healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food, and have the skills and resources to utilise food in ways that enhance health and wellbeing.

Food security is a fundamental need and human right. It exists where people have regular, affordable and sustainable access to safe, nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable food from non-emergency sources. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that

"...everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [themselves] and [their] family, including food" (United Nations 1948).

Food security extends beyond individual hunger. It incorporates household and community level issues influenced by wider social, political and economic policies and conditions including income, gender, ethnicity and housing.

Food security requires a systemic perspective on the causes of hunger and inadequate nutrition within a community, in order to identify sustainable changes necessary to prevent its occurrence.

Three pillars of food security

Availability

Availability requires sufficient culturally appropriate, nutritious food to be consistently available to individuals, families and communities. At a national level, adequate food production is a key aspect of food security and requires ecologically sustainable food production. Availability is also affected by global trade and distribution arrangements.

Access

Countries have the responsibility to ensure that individuals, families and communities have the right and resources to obtain sufficient, appropriate food for a nutritious diet. These resources include food production, distribution, transport, and sufficient income.

Utilisation

Knowledge of basic nutrition, adequate skills and facilities for food preparation and storage as well as adequate housing, water supply and sanitation are required to ensure the best use of available food.



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Barriers to food security

Food insecurity prevails when barriers exist in any of the three pillars. Food insecurity can be episodic, due to family crisis, or natural disaster or can be long term and chronic as a result of issues affecting a whole country or community. It may have lifelong consequences for health, development, social participation, education and employment opportunities.

Food Insecurity in Australia

Australia currently produces sufficient food for its population, and plays a critical role in assisting other countries to meet their food production requirements. However, 5% of the Australian population experience food insecurity with primary causal factors including: issues of vulnerability; lack of resources; lack of access to nutritious food at affordable prices and food due to geographical isolation; and lack of knowledge about food preparation and nutrition.

Role of Australian Red Cross

In working to improve food security for vulnerable individuals, households and communities, Australian Red Cross adopts the approach of addressing the three pillars of food security, with the Australian Red Cross Ways of Working and voluntary service being fundamental in the delivery of food security programs and activities.

Further, Australian Red Cross gives priority to the following key directions:

To focus on vulnerable groups

Food insecurity affects many vulnerable individuals, households and communities within Australia, with up to 25% of people living in disadvantaged communities experiencing food insecurity. The impact of food insecurity is more acute for those people in more vulnerable situations including: people experiencing homelessness, those with chronic health conditions, people on low incomes, people with mental illness, younger and older people, those who are socially isolated, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Recently arrived refugees and people seeking asylum are also a high risk group, with the prevalence of household food insecurity in these circumstances shown to be as high as 71%.

To address food security issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Overall Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience food insecurity at 5 times the rate of the general population. Malnutrition and undernourishment are major contributors to chronic disease and high mortality rates experienced by people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged less than four years suffer from nutritional anaemia and malnutrition at nearly 30 times the rate of non-Indigenous children. Red Cross programs that address barriers to food security must form a part of the overall national sustainable response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, especially but not only in regional and remote areas.

To build capacity in food security

Australian Red Cross commits to build sustainable community capacity in food security. This includes programs that engage local volunteers; support initiatives that promote availability of sustainable, affordable, nutritious and culturally-appropriate food; identify local food production mechanisms and economies; access a diversity of local food supply networks; provide education and skills development regarding healthy eating and food preparation; and empower social networks to mobilise local support.

To work in partnership

Australian Red Cross is committed to working in partnership with families, communities, not-for-profit organisations, business and governments to address food insecurity among vulnerable individuals and communities.

To use evidence based research to advocate on food security issues

Australian Red Cross seeks to persuade decision makers and opinion leaders through humanitarian diplomacy to address the causes of food insecurity among vulnerable people. Advocacy should focus on the following as prerequisites for food security: factors impacting on food availability and access; food utilisation, including healthy meal preparation and storage; and adequate income and appropriate housing including access to reliable utilities and facilities.