

Case Study

Understanding and responding to student food insecurity

Food insecurity has been a long-standing issue for students, along with the cost of tuition and living expenses, limited eligibility for government income support, and the privatisation of food provision on university campuses. COVID-19 accentuated these issues. To amplify awareness of the issue, [University researchers have been working on a project](#) to understand food insecurity among students. This research was funded by a University of Melbourne Student Services Amenities Fee Grant and supported by the Social Science Research Council and Melbourne Social Equity Institute.

The research showed that many students at the University of Melbourne currently experience food insecurity, and this is especially evident among international students.

Some students reported having to skip meals. More commonly, students reported having to compromise the diversity and nutritional quality of their diets because of a lack of money, time and information.

While for some international students, COVID-19 exacerbated food insecurity, others reported that the pandemic actually made it easier to access food, because of food relief measures introduced.

Programs initiated by the University during the COVID-19 pandemic to combat student food insecurity:

- Student Fresh Box, containing 5kgs – or a week’s supply – of fresh, locally sourced fruit and vegetables.
- SecondBite frozen meals, providing free meals to students in need across Parkville (2021) and Southbank (2022), in partnership with not-for-profit organisation, SecondBite.

Between May and December 2021, the University provided students at Parkville campus with 4,523 Student Fresh Boxes, an average of 141 boxes per week. Between March and December 2021, 27,319 food packs were distributed to in-need members of the University community, an average of 700 meals per week.

Demand for both services have seen an increase in 2022, with an average of 211 Student Fresh Boxes delivered per week, and an average of 1,530 SecondBite meals supplied per week.

University of Melbourne



Images

SecondBite visit at Parkville campus along with guests Matt Preston and Victorian Minister Martin Pakula to distribute food to students.