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A RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) CRISIS ON BEHALF OF AUSTRALIA'S RIGHT TO FOOD COALITION

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Australia's Right to Food Coalition exists to advocate for improved public policy to ensure the right to food for all. Even before the crisis arrived, there were millions of Australians everyday who did not have access to healthy food. As a voluntary, nation-wide Coalition of organisations, practitioners, community workers and researchers, we have been working to change this by advocating for the right to food to be respected, protected and fulfilled in Australia.

Now the emerging COVID-19 crisis has caused unprecedented pressure on food systems across Australia, and is seriously impacting the ability of all Australians to achieve food and nutrition security.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines food and nutrition security as:

“Food and nutrition security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life.” (WHO 2012, pp. 1-14).

Some of the already observed impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the Australian food system and its citizens include:

- Panic-buying has depleted food and other essentials at retail outlets, restricting supplies and increasing prices. This disproportionately affects vulnerable community groups (such as the elderly, the unemployed and people with disability) who do not have the ability to bulk buy and will have even less money than usual for food and essential items.
- Home delivery services through major food retailers have also been disrupted and compromised, further impacting food access for vulnerable individuals and those in self-isolation.
- The hospitality industry has had a major downturn as social isolation measures are enforced. A reduction in patronage in restaurants, cafes, and other food outlets has seen (and will continue to see) food workers lose their jobs and severely impact their ability to pay for food, essential items and utilities. Workers in other industries (such as aviation and transport industries) also need support in accessing food when out of employment.
- Australia's major food relief and food rescue charities' resources are severely strained. They are having issues sourcing food from their supermarket partners due to panic-buying, and their lack of ability to raise funds means that many may not survive long-term.
- The shutdown of community and neighbourhood centres, and other community food programs, has further restricted the access of emergency food relief to vulnerable clients in local communities and increases their risk of hunger and food insecurity.



- Given that schools and other educational institutions (such as universities) are moving towards online learning, students may be isolated from programs that are providing short-term, immediate relief of hunger and food insecurity.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness are unable to enact government advice regarding self-isolation practices and are therefore at greater risk of contracting and spreading the coronavirus, adding to their acute health and nutrition requirements at this time.

These impacts will only worsen as the virus peaks, further preventative lockdown measures are implemented, and a potential economic recession occurs.

EFFECTIVELY RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Australia's Right to Food Coalition calls on all levels of government, business, community and individuals to prioritise the right to food of all Australians during the COVID-19 crisis through the following actions:

Federal and State/Territory Governments

- The Coalition supports the stimulus packages proposed by Australian and state/territory governments to support vulnerable Australians (including pensioners and Newstart recipients) and small to medium businesses.
- The Coalition supports the continuity of funding, and flexibility of funding requirements, for not for profit organisations that specialise in emergency relief, food rescue and food security. Where required, similar stimulus measures that have been provided to the business sector should be provided for the community sector.
- The Coalition calls for federal and state/territory governments to commit resources that recognise and enhance the resilience of Australia's food system in disaster preparedness and emergency management strategies.

Local Governments

- The Coalition calls for local governments to take the lead in coordinating, and providing up to date information about local emergency relief services so that they can continue to innovate and create effective and dignified service delivery, while adhering to social distancing advice.

Business

- The Coalition encourages food retailers to continue supporting the charitable food sector by providing items they need to assist vulnerable Australians through this crisis. Other initiatives, such as dedicated shopping hours for the elderly and people with a disability, should also continue.

Civil Society Organisations

- The Coalition supports the advocacy initiatives by peak bodies, such as ACOSS, major food relief and food rescue charities, and unions that call for continued funding of community services so that they survive in the long term.



Individuals

- Individuals who are in a position to help those around them in the community can consider:
 - Reaching out to vulnerable friends and family, and offering to help them obtain food and essential items (for example, through a neighbourhood letterbox drop or social media post).
 - Connect with social media groups, such as Viral Kindness, to find ways on how you can help those struggling in your local community.
 - Fully utilising the food that you buy or grow, and reducing their food waste where possible.

LOOKING BEYOND CORONAVIRUS – OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A MORE EQUITABLE FOOD SYSTEM

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the flaws in many Australian systems and is testing their resilience. Even before the crisis, many Australians and their communities were vulnerable to economic shocks through reliance on casual labour with few protections, inadequate social welfare support and a food system that was geared towards profit and not meeting health needs.

Australia's Right to Food Coalition believes the crisis could provide the impetus for a fundamental re-evaluation of our food system, and will work to support policy which focuses on providing access to healthy food for all.

RESOURCES

- ACOSS media releases, <https://www.acoss.org.au/media-releases/>
- Dietitians Association of Australia, *Media Release: Dietitians call for sensible shopping at the supermarket, 20 March 2020*, https://daa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Dietitians-call-for-sensible-shopping-at-the-supermarket_FINAL-.pdf
- Dietitians Association of Australia, *Planning your pantry during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020)*, <https://daa.asn.au/voice-of-daa/hot-topics/>
- NCOSS 2020, *COVID-19 Community Sector Resource*, <https://www.ncoss.org.au/capacity-building/sector-support/templates-and-resources/covid-19-community-sector-resource>
- Public Health Association of Australia Coronavirus Updates, <https://www.phaa.net.au/advocacy-policy/coronavirus-updates>
- OzHarvest Food Rescue Covid-19 Updates, <https://www.ozharvest.org/food-rescue-covid-19-updates/>
- Foodbank Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update, <https://www.foodbank.org.au/covid-19-nswact/?state=nsw-act>
- USDA Choose My Plate (US based meal planning resource for those on a modest income), <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/eathealthy/budget/budget-sample-two-week-menus>
- Your local council may also be able to provide up to date information on the status of local emergency food relief services.



REFERENCES

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