Australia is in the dark on the depths of our household food insecurity crisis

As this year of soaring cost of living comes to an end, in Australia, we remain in the dark on understanding the true extent of our national household food insecurity crisis, Accredited Practising Dietitians warn.

Millions of Australians rely on food relief and donations year-round as their main source of nutrition, and there is increasing anecdotal evidence showing the number of people and families making cuts to their household food budgets appears to be burgeoning.

“We know there are many faces of household food insecurity in Australia. But we do not routinely monitor and collect data that paints the detailed picture,” Dietitians Australia Acting Chief Executive Officer Natalie Stapleton said.

“All Australians deserve access to affordable, nutritious foods, regardless of their income or postcode, and our members are telling us that this is not the reality for many of the people they work with.

“More and more individuals and families are choosing to change the food they eat, skip meals or cut down their serving sizes, and what our members are reporting is food is often the first sacrifice made to manage household budgets,” Ms Stapleton said.

“We know 2023 has seen high cost of living challenges, but when it comes to access to population-level data on household food insecurity in this country, we’re working in the

dark," Curtin University's Associate Professor of Public Health Priorities Christina Pollard said.

"Several OECD countries collect population-level data to monitor the levels of food insecurity every year – in Australia, we don't.

"In Australia, national food and nutrition survey data is collected infrequently - it's not good enough.

"Australia is unique as it suffers from a tyranny of distance; we know people living in remote areas pay more for food and have lower incomes, but food insecurity does not stop there; in every suburb, families are facing food stress," Dr Pollard said.

"We know that data is a major driver for decision making, and without rigorous data on the true extent of household food insecurity in this country, policymakers find it hard to make informed decisions that drive meaningful change for Australians in need," Dietitians Australia Acting CEO Natalie Stapleton said.

"We need a firm commitment from the Government to a national food and nutrition monitoring and surveillance system that includes producing at a minimum annual report on the severity of household food insecurity in the country.

"It's promising the Parliament's Standing Agriculture Committee's Inquiry into Food Security in Australia report has recommended measuring household food insecurity at least every *three* years.

"We will continue to advocate for the introduction of regular household food insecurity data collection to lift us out of the data darkness and build frameworks that support Australians with affordable and accessible nutritious food," Ms Stapleton said.

For media enquiries contact Amy Phillips Media Manager on 0409 661 920

Note to Editors: Dietitians Australia is the leading voice in nutrition and dietetics, representing dietitians nationally and advocating for healthier communities. Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) is the only national credential recognised by the Australian Government as the quality standard for nutrition and dietetics services in Australia.