

Mortgage versus a meal. Rent versus groceries. Skipping a meal so children don't miss out. These are the realities that tens of thousands of Tasmanian households have faced over the past 12 months.

While many of us may experience hunger at any given time during the day, there is confidence in knowing that we can meet this need by opening a cupboard, going to fridge or stopping by the supermarket or takeaway store. Food security, defined as "a lack of secure access to sufficient amount of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and health life" is now being experienced in homes it has never touched before.

The latest FoodBank Hunger Report states that 84,000 Tasmanians households are facing food insecurity this year, 18,000 more than the year prior. These are our neighbours, the parents and children we may pass at the school gate, the couple we say hello to on our morning walk or the young person making our coffee.

From the discussions I have had on the ground with local organisations including the Benevolent Society to Salvation Army and City Mission, there is a significant increase in middle-class income earners needing their services as they are forced to sacrifice their food budget to meet their increased mortgage or rent payment. These anecdotal conversations are supported by hard statistics with around 33% of food insecure households in Tasmania holding a mortgage.

While there is a way to go, there is movement on the ground here in Tasmania. The Tasmania Project Food Team, comprised of staff across multiple UTAS faculties have conducted in-depth research into cost-of-living pressures and food insecurity, providing great insight and recommendations to government and key stakeholders.

As the federal elected representative in the northern Tasmanian region, I continue to advocate for funding to be put into place-based programs and put pressure on the Labor government to meet the challenges facing our communities, particularly in my role as Co-Chair of Parliamentary Friends of Ending Poverty. A focus on moving from food relief to food resilience, a strategy supported by the Tasmanian Liberal government with significant investment will also play a key role.

Over past three and a half years, I have supported a local co-op through donations of weekly fruit and vegetables and annual donations to winter and Christmas food drives, and breakfast programs at local schools, but am always looking to what else I can do to support our community.

As individuals, we can also look to provide support if we are able to do so. While we can't change interest rates or fuel prices, we may be able to look at providing a monthly donation of non-perishable goods to a local organisation or cook up a nutritious meal for a neighbour we know may

be struggling or volunteering at a local community garden. A collective of small actions combine to make a powerful difference to those in need.

Bridget Archer – Federal Member for Bass

**Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations*