

Researchers survey food banks as pandemic bites

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A new study is seeking feedback from Australasian food banks on how they are coping with growing demand in the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The survey, led by University of Canterbury (UC) researchers, aims to find out more about the economic and social impacts of the virus.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for supplies from food banks has increased exponentially," says lead researcher Dr. Rosemarie Martin, who specializes in food, policy and wellbeing for UC's MacMillan Brown Center for Pacific Studies.

"Food banks around the world, including in New Zealand and Australia, have been stepping in to feed families and help people facing economic and social devastation triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. People who have never used a [food bank](#) before, and would usually see themselves as [middle class families](#), are now also needing their help. The increase in demand is putting food banks under pressure and potentially the situation could get even worse."

Dr. Martin says the aim of the survey, which is part of UC's Food, Policy and Wellbeing Research Cluster, aims to determine the best policies for addressing growing food security issues in times of crisis.

She is working on the study with Dr. Matthew Ruby from the La Trobe University, School of Psychology and Public Health (Australia) and UC Professor Steven Ratuva, Director of the Macmillan Brown Center for Pacific Studies.

The survey, which is underway now, asks managers of food banks and other community food organizations in New Zealand and Australia which sectors of society have been affected most by the pandemic, what supplies they have and how food banks are planning for the future.

Dr. Martin says many people have had a change in circumstances, including losing their jobs, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and border closures. After carrying out some initial interviews with food bank

managers in New Zealand she believes Māori and Pasifika are being disproportionately affected.

"The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing social and [economic inequality](#) and food security has become a major issue. We hope the results of this research will be used by Government agencies to contribute to more equitable and effective food policy as a matter of urgency. There is a real need to do something to address inequalities around [food security](#) in New Zealand. We are a [wealthy country](#) that produces plenty of food, so how can it be that so many people don't have enough to eat? This has been identified as a problem since the 1990s but it still hasn't been addressed. Now, with recent global events, it is getting worse."

Dr. Martin and her team encourage organizations who haven't been contacted, but would like to be involved, to get in touch. They plan to analyze the results later this month before making them public.

Provided by University of Canterbury

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