



# Food Insecurity in the Paediatric Emergency Department – is it a problem and can we help?

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## Objectives

Food insecurity (FI) is the lack of “safe and nutritious food for normal...development,”<sup>1</sup> and affects 25% of households<sup>2</sup>. Our emergency department (ED) plans to embed management of social determinants of health alongside urgent care needs, with Social Prescribers (SP) to support this. We aimed to identify patients experiencing FI, offer a brief intervention, and improve staff confidence to discuss FI with families.

## METHODS

A questionnaire, available in multiple languages, using the Hunger-Vital Sign™<sup>4</sup> FI tool was handed out in triage and collected via an anonymous drop-box over a four week period. After consent, an electronic SP referral was sent for those requesting support.

Staff education on social determinants of health was delivered.

Data was collected on the number of families screening positive, number consenting to SP referral, and outcome of referral.

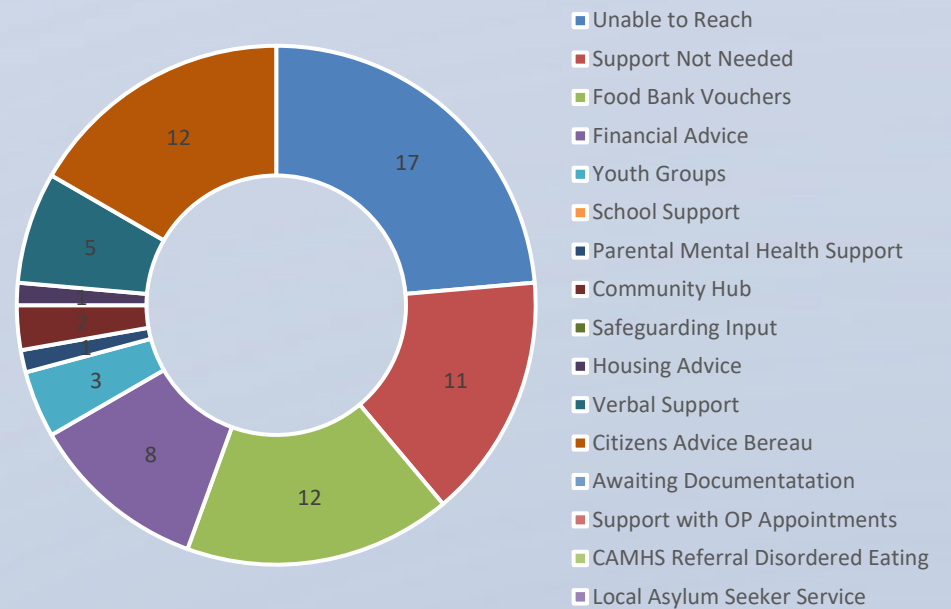
For each statement, please tick if it was often true, sometimes true, or never true.	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true
1. Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.			
1. Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.			

## RESULTS

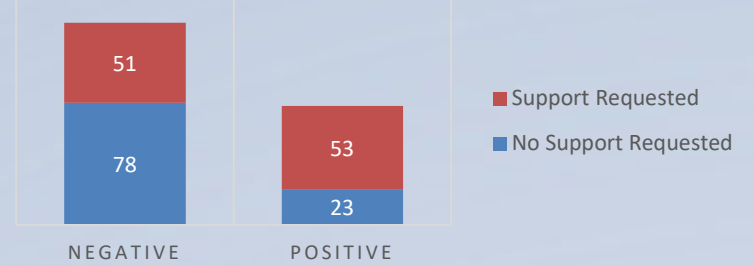
Of the 205 responses, 37% screened positive for FI of whom 70% (n=53) consented to referral to the SP. Support was varied, and included food bank vouchers, financial advice and mental health support.

A number of families were identified for SP review (n= 51) for other concerns.

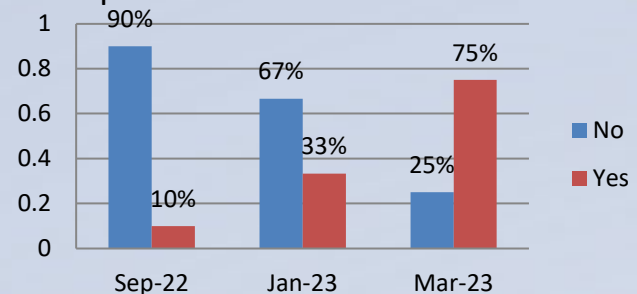
Food Insecure Referrals



Food Insecurity Screen



Staff awareness of who to refer to if patients are food insecure



## CONCLUSIONS

Significant numbers of families have FI concerns and if approached, are open to help whilst attending for other urgent care needs. The process enabled other health improvement concerns to be identified and supported.

Improved staff confidence in addressing food insecurity allows continued proactive support for families. Tackling FI is feasible from a busy ED and has wider benefits for health improvement if we can make every contact count, which supports the approach across primary care.

## REFERENCES

### References

- 1) Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Hunger and food insecurity, 2021. Available: <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/> [Accessed 28 December 2022].
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- 3) Hager, E. R., Quigg, A. M., Black, M. M., Coleman, S. M., Heeren, T., Rose-Jacobs, R., Cook, J. T., Ettinger de Cuba, S. E., Casey, P. H., Chilton, M., Cutts, D. B., Meyers A. F., Frank, D. A. (2010). Development and Validity of a 2-Item Screen to Identify Families at Risk for Food Insecurity. *Pediatrics*, 126(1), 26-32. doi:10.1542/peds.2009-3146.

