

Regional Food Donation Action Plan (2025 - 2027)



Executive Summary

Food insecurity and food waste are significant challenges in the Illawarra. Over one third of households in our region face food insecurity (*Let's Talk About Food 2024*) in a nation that throws out 7.6 million tonnes of food per year, 70% of which is perfectly edible (*OzHarvest*). At the same time, the Illawarra consists of over 40 community centres and food relief agencies committed to changing this reality. This Regional Food Donation Action Plan provides a coordinated framework to reduce edible food waste and increase community access to nutritious food across the region, in a tangible way that utilises resources as effectively as possible.

The plan has been created with insights from local stakeholders to:

- Streamline food rescue and redistribution through stronger collaboration between agencies, businesses, and government.
- Optimise food relief systems by reducing duplication, improving logistics, and sharing resources.
- Increase food donations from the hospitality sector with targeted engagement, tools, and forums that make donating easier.
- Support the development of a Regional Food Hub to centralise donations, improve storage and transport, and enable broader community access.
- Foster innovation and partnerships to trial new approaches and ensure long-term sustainability.

Implementation will be carried out by Healthy Cities Australia, as funded by the NSW EPA, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. We are heavily guided by the Illawarra's Food Rescue and Relief network and MOU project partners, as the sector this project serves.

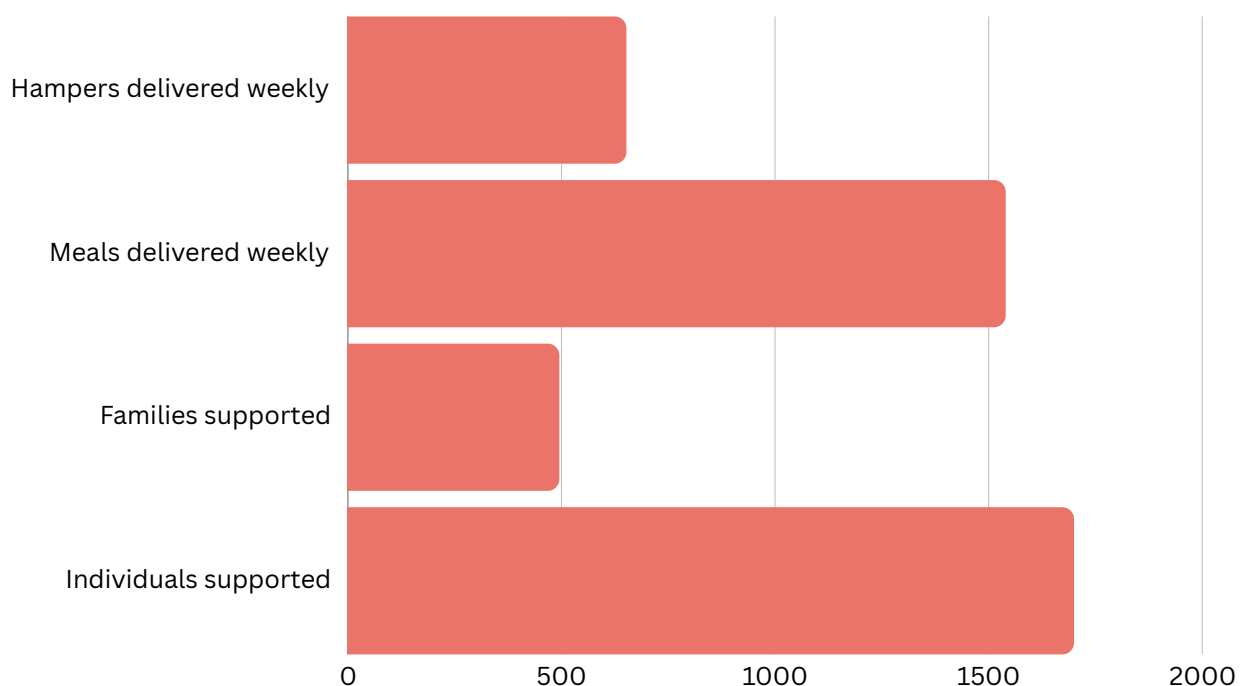
1. Context & Purpose

Food insecurity and food waste are urgent and growing challenges in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

- 38% of households in the region experience some form of food insecurity, including 30% of households with children.
- Only about 10% of these households access emergency food relief, often due to stigma, access issues, or service limitations.
- At the same time, thousands of kilograms of edible food are wasted every week by businesses, retailers, and households.

Food relief organisations in our region already play a vital role. Of 15 agencies surveyed, they are:

- Delivering 1,540 meals and 652 hampers weekly.
- Supporting more than 1,700 individuals and 495 families.

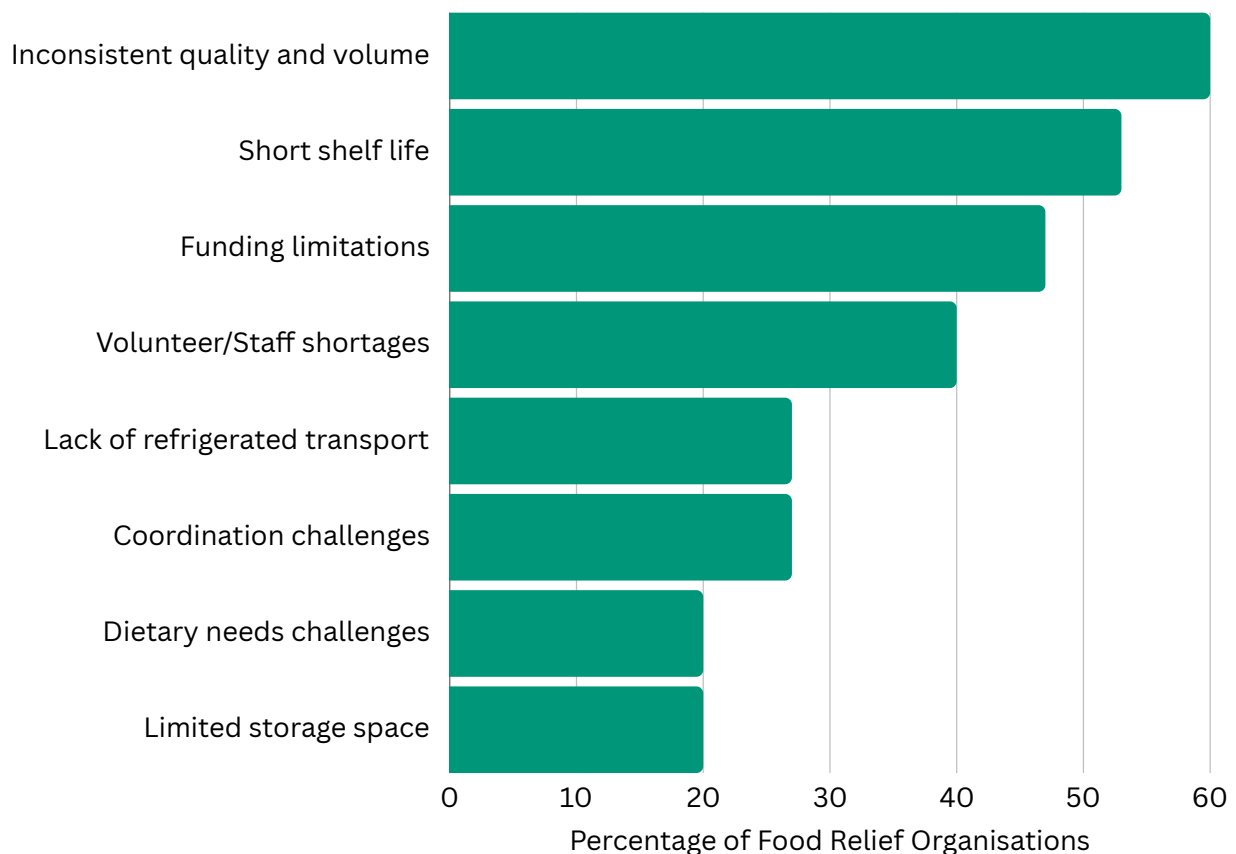


However, these services are stretched by inconsistent donations, limited storage, and reliance on volunteers. Community centres — where 73% of visitors report food insecurity — are particularly under pressure due to their size, funding and paid staff constrictions, despite food acting as a vital “gateway” to broader health and social support.

This Regional Food Donation Action Plan sets out an approach to:

- Streamline and optimise food rescue and redistribution.
- Support community organisations to focus on care, not logistics.
- Build a resilient, more sustainable regional food system that improves health and reduces waste.

Barriers for Food Relief Organisations



The Regional Food Donation Action Plan builds on the insights and groundwork already undertaken across the Illawarra. Over the past year, Healthy Cities Australia has worked with food rescue agencies and relief providers, as well as consulting the hospitality sector, to better understand challenges and opportunities in streamlining regional food donation.

Key activities informing this plan include:

Food Rescue & Relief Network

Convened bi-monthly meetings of local food relief and rescue organisations to share insights, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for collaboration. These sessions have been crucial in capturing the voices of frontline staff.

Hospitality Engagement

Consulted with hospitality businesses and network members to understand barriers to food donation. While there is willingness to give back and reduce waste, common challenges include staff time, resource constraints, and uncertainty about food safety legislation.

Pilot Initiatives

Supported a mini food hub pilot at local community centre Warrawong Residents Forum, assisting the centre to hire a Food Coordinator to oversee centralised collection and redistribution of surplus rescued food to food relief agencies one day each month.

Food Hub Scoping & Research

Conducted desktop research into national food hub models, including site visits to FareShare Brisbane and discussions with Bendigo Foodshare, to identify viable models for the Illawarra.

2. Vision & Guiding Principles

Vision

A connected regional food system where surplus food reaches those who need it, food relief agencies are empowered to meet demand, and Healthy Cities Australia plays a central role in supporting dignity, wellbeing, and environmental resilience across our community.

Principles

- Collaboration: Building strong partnerships across donors, food relief organisations and community centres that can sustain themselves in the future.
- Dignity & inclusion: Ensuring access to culturally appropriate, nutritious food in respectful ways.
- Efficiency & innovation: Using shared infrastructure and technology to reduce duplication and improve coordination.
- Sustainability: Preventing food waste and aligning with broader environmental goals.



3. Key Focus Areas

A. Infrastructure & Coordination

- Develop a Regional Food Hub as central infrastructure for intake, cold storage, and distribution.
- Reduce reliance on individual community centres managing food relief logistics.
- Explore shared vehicles, cold storage, and scheduling systems.

B. Hospitality & Business Engagement

- Expand donor base by engaging restaurants, producers, hotels, cafés, and caterers.
- Launch the Illawarra Hospitality Food Donation Guide.
- Deliver forums and workshops to clarify food safety, liability, and logistics.

C. Collaboration & Partnerships

- Maintain the Food Rescue & Relief Network, hosting meetings and skill-building workshops, sharing information and relevant opportunities (eg. funding), and encouraging resource pooling and interagency collaboration
- Create shared standards for donation (preferred food types, packaging, and quality).
- Partner with the University of Wollongong to enhance data validity and reach

D. Education & Visibility

- Share stories of community impact to inspire donors and reduce stigma.
- Promote food rescue via online subscribers and in-person events
- Support donor and community education around food waste reduction, donating, and volunteer opportunities

4. Implementation strategy

Action	Timeframe	Progress Indicators
Regional Food Hub business case	Q4 2025	Business case completed
Launch Hospitality Food Donation Guide	Q1 2026	No. guides distributed; No. businesses engaged
Host Hospitality Forums to engage food retail sector on donating food	Q1 & 3, 2026 & 2027	No. attendees; donor pledges
Maintain Food Rescue & Relief Network (bi-monthly online meetings)	Ongoing	Attendance; interagency collaborations formed
Sector workshops to build capacity and networks in the region	Twice annually	No. workshops delivered; member feedback
Partner with University of Wollongong for data collection	Ongoing	Collection and publication of rescued food data
Pilot Food Hub logistics (van and cold storage)	2026	Kg of rescued food; no. donors services
Create shared donation standards (food types, packaging, quality)	2026	Standards published; adoption rate across agencies
Expand donor base (restaurants, producers, hotels, caterers)	2025-2027	No. new donors onboarded
Paid social media & traditional media campaigns on food rescue and donation	2026 & 2027	Reach of campaign; donor enquiries
Promote food rescue at community events	2025-2027	Event reach; no. of new donors
Raise awareness and educate audiences about food relief and rescue in the Illawarra region, including volunteering opportunities and organisations accepting donations	Ongoing	Online account reach, post engagement, EDM subscribers, newsletter engagement

5. What success looks like

By 2027, this plan will achieve:

- More consistent supply of fresh, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for vulnerable households.
- Increased donor engagement, particularly from hospitality and retail.
- Reduced food waste entering landfill across the Illawarra–Shoalhaven.
- Increased community awareness and engagement about food relief services and organisations to donate surplus food to
- A fully operational Regional Food Hub, relieving community centres of food logistics pressures.
- Decreased food security, with community centres freed to focus on wrap-around services like health, housing, and employment.

6. Next steps

1. Secure commitment and funding for the Food Hub business case.
2. Continue to co-design with food relief organisations, community centres, and donors.
3. Plan engagement events for 2026 with food relief & rescue sector, and food business sector
4. Gather second allotment of data on rescued food kg's
5. Advocate regionally and state-wide for policies that support food donation and food security, eg. Feeding Australia