

In December 2021, United Workers Union conducted a survey of workers in early childhood education about the food budget and nutritional value in individual centres.

Parents would be appalled to find out that some children are “going hungry”, with food budgets of as low as 65 cents per day not enough to provide the nutritional value that growing children need.

Results of the survey show that many educators are desperate for more funding for food in their centres. Every day early childhood educators work hard to do the impossible: provide healthy nutritious food for the children in their care without enough funds.

- 1 in 5 educators said the food budget at their centre was ‘never’ enough.
- Almost half (47%) of educators overall think that children at their centre are not provided with enough high-quality food to eat.
- Food budgets ranged widely between \$0.65 – \$5 per day per child. The average overall for food budgets was \$2.15 per day per child.
- Over a third of educators overall said that the food budget at their centre causes them stress. This was much higher amongst cooks, of whom over half (55%) said this was the case.
- Almost 40% of educators and 60% of cooks say that they have bought food for the children they educate and care for out of their own pocket.
- Educators at for-profit providers are more likely to:
 - Experience stress because of the food budget (40%), compared to those at not-for-profits (35%).
 - Buy food out of their own pocket for the children under their care (43%), compared to those at not-for-profits (34%).
 - Report a lower amount spent on food.
 - More likely to agree that the children at their centre do not receive enough high-quality food (51%), compared to those at not-for-profits (44%).



What educators said across Australia:

“As a parent, I would be disgusted to know what was served each day taking into consideration the daily fees that are paid.”

“Children are being offered rice and pasta every meal due to cost, not nutritional value.”

“Given the guidelines that need to be followed by Nutrition Australia there is not enough money to go around. We swap out quality meat for cheaper cuts and get vegetables and fruits as seconds, not to mention trying to ensure children with special dietary requirements and allergy have what they need. How is it fair to charge a family so much then only allow \$1.80 a day for food?”

“It needs to be adapted to each age appropriately, not just a one size fits all. Infant nutrition is a huge missed area. Highly processed and salty foods are being served to infants despite their nutritional needs.”

“It’s ridiculous. The children are always still hungry and this in turn affects their beh[a]viour negatively.”

“Parents pay a lot of money, they’d be mortified to see how much the food budget is and how we have to ration portions sometimes.”

“Less money per child means children are getting cheap food with lots of additives which is not good for them.”

“Some days we are told that because we don’t have enough food, we should give the kids crackers with their food to fill them up.”

“There is not enough, and if parents were made aware of children eating food off the floor because they were hungry, they would remove them from the centre.”

Note: Out of a total 388 survey responses, about half came from not-for-profit centres and half from for-profit centres. 51 directors and 42 cooks participated.