

Advice for CDEM Groups working with Foodbanks and Community Food Services

- from the Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective.¹

Background

New Zealand is currently in a nationwide lockdown in an attempt to eradicate COVID-19. This has affected many New Zealanders who have experienced reduced income through job loss or wage reductions. COVID conditions have removed many community driven ways of enable people on low incomes to remain food secure, such as food in schools and community meals. This has created and intensified food insecurity for some of our most vulnerable people. The Kore Hiakai Zero Collective estimate the number of people experiencing food insecurity has increased from 500, 000 to over 1 million.

Foodbanks are usually seen as a 'last resort' option for families and individuals facing food insecurity. They provide crucial food support for vulnerable people and families who could otherwise go hungry. There are many community food organisations working alongside foodbanks, such as food rescue and community kitchens, who have adapted and are distributing food to vulnerable members of their community during the COVID-19 lockdown. Community organisations have told us that they are experiencing a significant rise of demand for food and that they also face logistical pressures to meet this demand due to COVID-19 response restrictions. As we move to 'Alert' level 3 we do not expect the number of food insecure to drop, in fact it is likely to increase.

Recent changes to the Guide to the National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan 2015 enable Local Authorities to recover from Government the welfare costs they incur when supporting people required to self-isolate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has further widened this provision to include:

- local authority/Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Group support to people who have immediate welfare needs attributable to the impact of COVID-19, and where these needs cannot be met by other sources of support
- local authority / CDEM Group support to non-government and community-based organisations (including foodbanks) to provide household goods and supplies to people who have immediate needs attributable to the impact of COVID-19, and where these needs cannot be met by other sources of support

MSD does not usually support the BAU operations of foodbanks and community food services but have offered interim financial support as demand began increasing due to COVID-19 restrictions. Following conversations with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), MSD then directed foodbanks to seek support from CDEM Groups as of the 3 April 2020. MSD, NEMA and other agencies are undertaking work to identify how best to support foodbanks and other community food providers after CDEM Groups are stepped down, and are also working on a longer term food security strategy.

Context

- While a number of foodbanks (about 40%) have had to close due to logistical issues there are still around 350 foodbanks and community food services as well as Whanau Ora service providers still operating across New Zealand.
- Many foodbanks are operating above normal capacity as they are experiencing on average at least a 200% increase in demand. Some have experienced over a 400% increase. Foodbanks indicate that this includes many new clients. Demand is particularly high in low socio-economic urban areas. In rural areas although many traditional foodbanks have had to shut, communities have found new ways to distribute food. Community Food organisations expect that this increased demand is the tip of the iceberg, and will continue well beyond the lockdown.
- Each foodbank is unique and will therefore have unique needs, for example Salvation Army foodbanks are organised centrally whereas other foodbanks are administered by local trusts or charities. Some service a very small geographic area whereas others cover whole regions.
- The Alert Level 4 requirements have resulted in many changes in operating models for foodbanks, for example some have moved from a pick-up service to a delivery model, some have moved from allowing clients to take food from open shelves to now only offering packaged food parcels. Foodbanks have pivoted quickly to adapt to the new operating environment but some will be still working through new logistical challenges.
- Some other constraints that foodbanks may face during lockdown is an inability to utilise their usual volunteers (especially if they are over 60 years or have underlying health conditions), pressure on space (staff and volunteers must be two meters apart at all times), inability to access PPE and sanitisers, inability to quickly replenish stock etc.
- Many rural foodbanks are struggling to restock their foodbank through local supermarkets and have no access to other supply chains.
- Foodbanks have stopped receiving donations direct from the public (recommended best practice in COVID 19 conditions) and some contributions from food rescue services has also decreased where those organisations have had to curb their service due to Alert Level 4 & 3 restrictions.
- Larger foodbanks have had to make huge logistical changes to meet demand and work collaboratively. This includes increasing storage, especially chilled storage and chilled transport (of bulk goods and goods that require refrigeration during distribution). The other additional resource has been security. With heightened anxiety of those struggling, and a disruption to the system they are familiar with, we have seen more physical and verbal abuse so most larger foodbanks have had to engage security guards.

Recommendations for CDEM Groups

- Please be pro-active in reaching out to your local foodbanks and community food organisations, to work with and support them. They are well-connected to their communities, particularly those most in need, and they:
 - Have access to strong networks which can complement and support what you are doing and reach those who are need
 - May have useful local knowledge and resources on how support could be provided most effectively
- It would be helpful to align CDEM distribution of food to be consistent with how other food organisations are distributing food. Being aware of the pastoral needs that sit behind seeking a food parcel and the shame that often comes with asking is helpful. Your staff may need support for being on the receiving end of requests.

- Establish agreements with foodbanks and community food organisations on expectations and process for reimbursement – many foodbanks will not be aware of the process for working in support of CDEM Groups and that they are able to receive funding or reimbursement through CDEM Groups, so please support them in understanding your arrangements and processes. A standardised approach within each region would be ideal. Many foodbanks don't hold large cash reserves and so a reimbursement model of support could be difficult for them. In the context of COVID-19, CDEM Groups can provide upfront funding to enable foodbanks and community food organisations to re-stock, or to meet additional temporary costs associated with meeting demand attributable to COVID-19, and which cannot be met through other sources of support.
- Foodbanks may appreciate a direct line of communication with the Welfare function in each Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) or Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)
- It could also be helpful to have regular (weekly) coordination meetings between CDEM and foodbanks & community food organisations in the area to ensure that there is consistency of services, minimise overlap, identify capacity concerns or opportunities, and ensure that the needs assessment process is consistent.
- Please note that foodbanks and community food organisations cannot share the personal information of clients for privacy and ethical reasons.

Thank you for partnering with us to bring wellness and welfare to our communities in ways that not only meet their need but uplift their mana. We know that what we are currently experiencing around food insecurity is not a temporary situation. The solutions we find will have lasting effects. Thank you for working with us as part of our team of 5 million to bring food security to all.

Together we've got this. He waka eke noa!

Tric Malcolm

Pou Ārahi / Executive Office

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ⁱ **The Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective** is made up of a group of social service organisations working together to eliminate food insecurity in Aotearoa New Zealand. In November 2019 we began a partnership with the Ministry for Social Development advising on Food Insecurity for the Community Food Distribution sector. We are currently connected to around 200 foodbanks and community food organisations across Aotearoa New Zealand.