Local government action on creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system

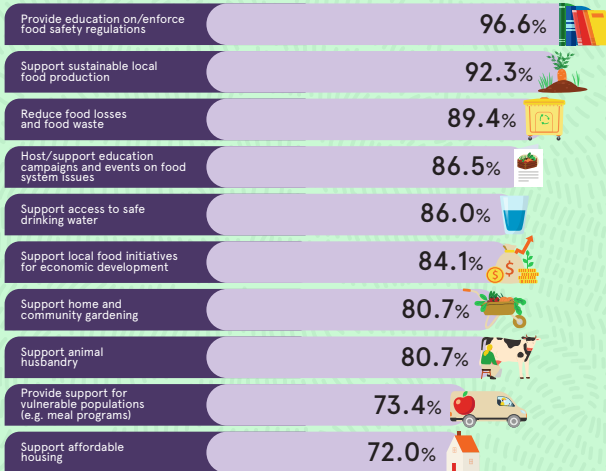THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY | UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA | William Angliss Institute

This study was the first to systematically map local government (LG) action on creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system in Australia, focusing on NSW and Victoria. We searched the websites of all LGs in NSW and Victoria for policy documents with actions related to a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system. We then analysed these documents against a framework of recommendations for LG action on addressing food system challenges.

Further information about the project: https://law-food-systems.sydney.edu.au/

Policy documents

2,266 total documents analysed

NSW
1,268 — 56% of total documents were from NSW
2 Dedicated food system policies
Both From metropolitan local governments

VIC
998 — 44% of total documents were from VIC
11 Dedicated food system policies
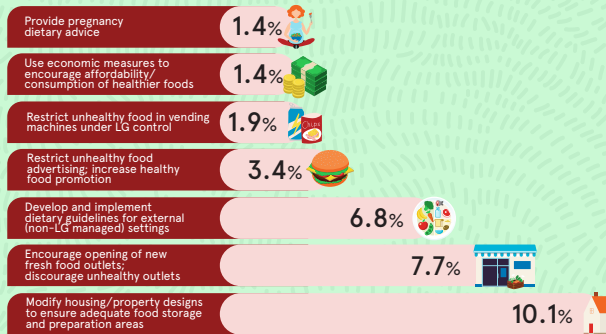**8** From metropolitan local governments

Commonly addressed framework recommendations

The most commonly addressed recommendation was food quality and safety, on which 96.6% of LGs were taking action. This chart shows the other framework recommendations for which the greatest number of LGs were acting.

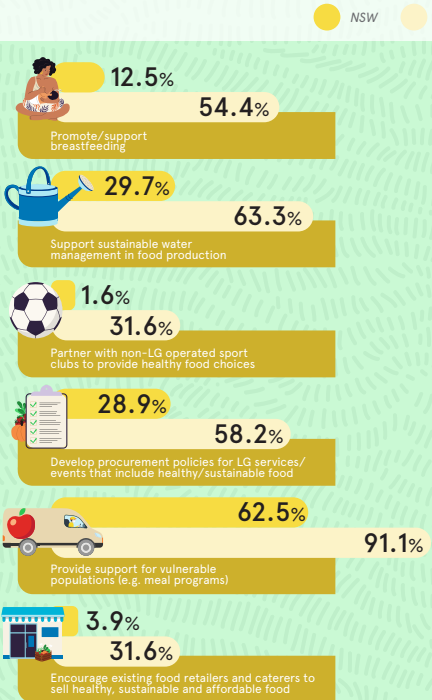| Recommendation	%
Provide education on/enforce food safety regulations	96.6%
Support sustainable local food production	92.3%
Reduce food losses and food waste	89.4%
Host/support education campaigns and events on food system issues	86.5%
Support access to safe drinking water	86.0%
Support local food initiatives for economic development	84.1%
Support home and community gardening	80.7%
Support animal husbandry	80.7%
Provide support for vulnerable populations (e.g. meal programs)	73.4%
Support affordable housing	72.0%

Framework recommendations less commonly addressed

Many of the recommendations on which the least number of LGs were acting relate to restricting the sale and marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages, e.g. restricting junk food in vending machines under LG control (1.9% of all LGs). Other actions least commonly taken are shown here.

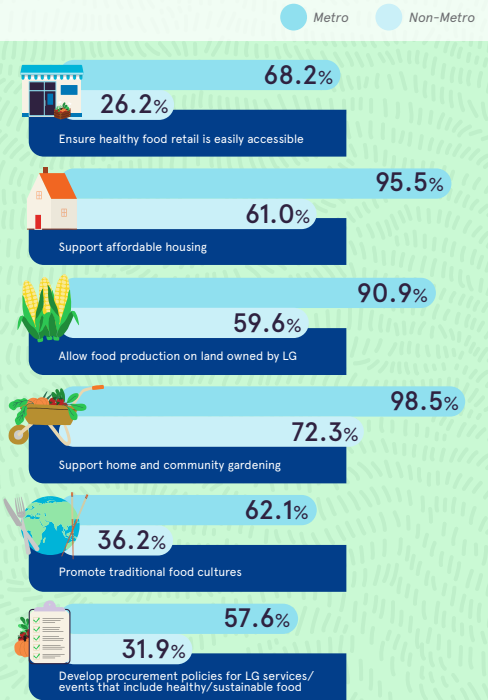| Recommendation	%
Provide pregnancy dietary advice	1.4%
Use economic measures to encourage affordability/consumption of healthier foods	1.4%
Restrict unhealthy food in vending machines under LG control	1.9%
Restrict unhealthy food advertising; increase healthy food promotion	3.4%
Develop and implement dietary guidelines for external (non-LG managed) settings	6.8%
Encourage opening of new fresh food outlets; discourage unhealthy outlets	7.7%
Modify housing/property designs to ensure adequate food storage and preparation areas	10.1%

Differences between states

For all but five of the 34 recommendations, Victorian LGs were more likely than NSW to be taking action. The largest differences are shown here.

● NSW ● VIC

Recommendation	NSW	VIC
Promote/support breastfeeding	12.5%	54.4%
Support sustainable water management in food production	29.7%	63.3%
Partner with non-LG operated sport clubs to provide healthy food choices	1.6%	31.6%
Develop procurement policies for LG services/events that include healthy/sustainable food	28.9%	58.2%
Provide support for vulnerable populations (e.g. meal programs)	62.5%	91.1%
Encourage existing food retailers and caterers to sell healthy, sustainable and affordable food	3.9%	31.6%

Differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan local governments

For 22 of the 34 recommendations, metropolitan LGs were more likely than non-metropolitan to be taking action. The largest differences are shown here.

● Metro ● Non-Metro

Recommendation	Metro	Non-Metro
Ensure healthy food retail is easily accessible	68.2%	26.2%
Support affordable housing	95.5%	61.0%
Allow food production on land owned by LG	90.9%	59.6%
Support home and community gardening	98.5%	72.3%
Promote traditional food cultures	62.1%	36.2%
Develop procurement policies for LG services/events that include healthy/sustainable food	57.6%	31.9%

So what?

More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish

Our research shows LGs are extensively involved in efforts to address food system challenges. State governments, advocates and other stakeholders should consider how they can further enable LGs' contribution to a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system.

For an extended summary of the results of the policy mapping study, visit https://cloudstor.aarnet.edu.au/plus/s/Ei5ymNuqCPIzY3M