

Whitehorse Food Access Mapping Project: Phase 1 Report



WHITEHORSE
CITY COUNCIL



healthAbility

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that this work was undertaken on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nations. We recognise that they, and their Ancestors, have cared for and stewarded these lands and cultures sustainably for tens of thousands of years. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Background

‘Creating Change in the City of Whitehorse’ is a collaborative project between healthAbility and Whitehorse City Council. The aim of this project is to increase understanding of the distribution of food outlets across Whitehorse to advance the collective goal of strengthening local food systems. This report is the first of several steps in understanding the local food environment within the City of Whitehorse (referred to as Whitehorse hereafter) and is intended to inform the planning and implementation of actions that promote nourishing, inclusive, and sustainable local food systems. The second phase of research will be undertaken from February to April 2026.

Mapping the Local Food System

This work builds on local government food environment maps created by [Sustain: The Australian Food Network](#) (referred to as Sustain from here) and the North Eastern Public Health Unit (NEPHU). (1)

This report is designed to be used alongside an [interactive map](#) that illustrates the distribution of food outlets across the City of Whitehorse. The map includes toggle layers that allow users to explore multiple data sets and develop a deeper understanding of the Whitehorse food environment. Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), specifically the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD), were overlaid by suburb to show differences in socio-economic levels across the LGA.(2) These differences can influence how individuals access food, including the types of food outlets available and their financial capacity to purchase food. (3)

Food Outlet Classification

Food Store Types

The Sustain report classifies food outlets as either “healthy” or “unhealthy” (1). For this project, however, food outlets were categorised as grocery stores or ready-to-eat vendors. This alternative classification reflects the different ways in which people access and prepare food. Grocery stores, such as supermarkets, primarily provide ingredients intended for home preparation, whereas ready-to-eat vendors offer foods that require little to no preparation and can be consumed immediately, such as takeaway outlets or convenience stores.

Food outlets were classified into the following categories

- Supermarket
- Greengrocer
- Cultural Grocer
- Convenience Store
- Take-Away Local
- Take-Away Franchise

Excluded Food Outlets

Consistent with the Sustain report, the following food outlet types were excluded from the initial mapping phase. This reflects a focus on outlets with physical access, point-of-sale transactions, and where groceries for all or most of a meal can be purchased:

- Bakeries, confectionery stores, and specialty food retailers (e.g. ice-cream parlours)
- Online-only food providers without a physical storefront (e.g. HelloFresh)
- Food relief services (e.g. food pantries)

Categorising Food Outlets

Each food outlet was further grouped into one of two overarching categories: Grocery Store or Ready-to-eat. Food outlet type, classification and map label can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Food outlet classifications and map label

Outlet classification	Food Outlet Type	Description	Examples	Map label
Grocery store	Supermarket	Sells groceries (fresh, canned, and packaged foods); may contain a butcher and/or bakery; typically has five or more checkouts	Coles, Woolworths, ALDI	
	Greengrocer	Sells mostly fresh fruit and vegetables	Box Hill Fruit Market, Sacca's Fine Foods	
	Cultural Grocer	Specialty store that primarily serves specific cultural communities by offering a diverse range of products that reflect their culinary preferences, traditional diets, and cultural practices.	Hu Hui Supermarket, Perfect Indian Supermarket	
Ready-to-eat	Convenience Store	Sells limited grocery products; mainly sells products that require no preparation to eat	Shell Reddy Express, 7-Eleven	
	Takeaway Local	Sells foods/snacks prepared onsite and ready for immediate consumption; table service may be provided; not part of a franchise	Fish and chips, fried chicken, pizza stores	
	Takeaway Franchise	Sells foods/snacks prepared onsite and ready for immediate consumption; part of a franchise	McDonald's, KFC, Subway	

Distribution of Food Outlets

There are a total of 91 grocery stores and 93 ready-to-eat vendors in Whitehorse. A breakdown of food store by type can be found in Table 2. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of food outlets across Whitehorse; the interactive map can be accessed [here](#).

Table 2: Number of stores in Whitehorse by food store type and classification

Food store type	Number of stores	Food store classification	Number of stores
Supermarket	30	Grocery store	91
Greengrocer	48		
Cultural Grocer	13		
Convenience Store	12	Ready-to-eat vendor	93
Take-away local	54		
Take-away franchise	27		

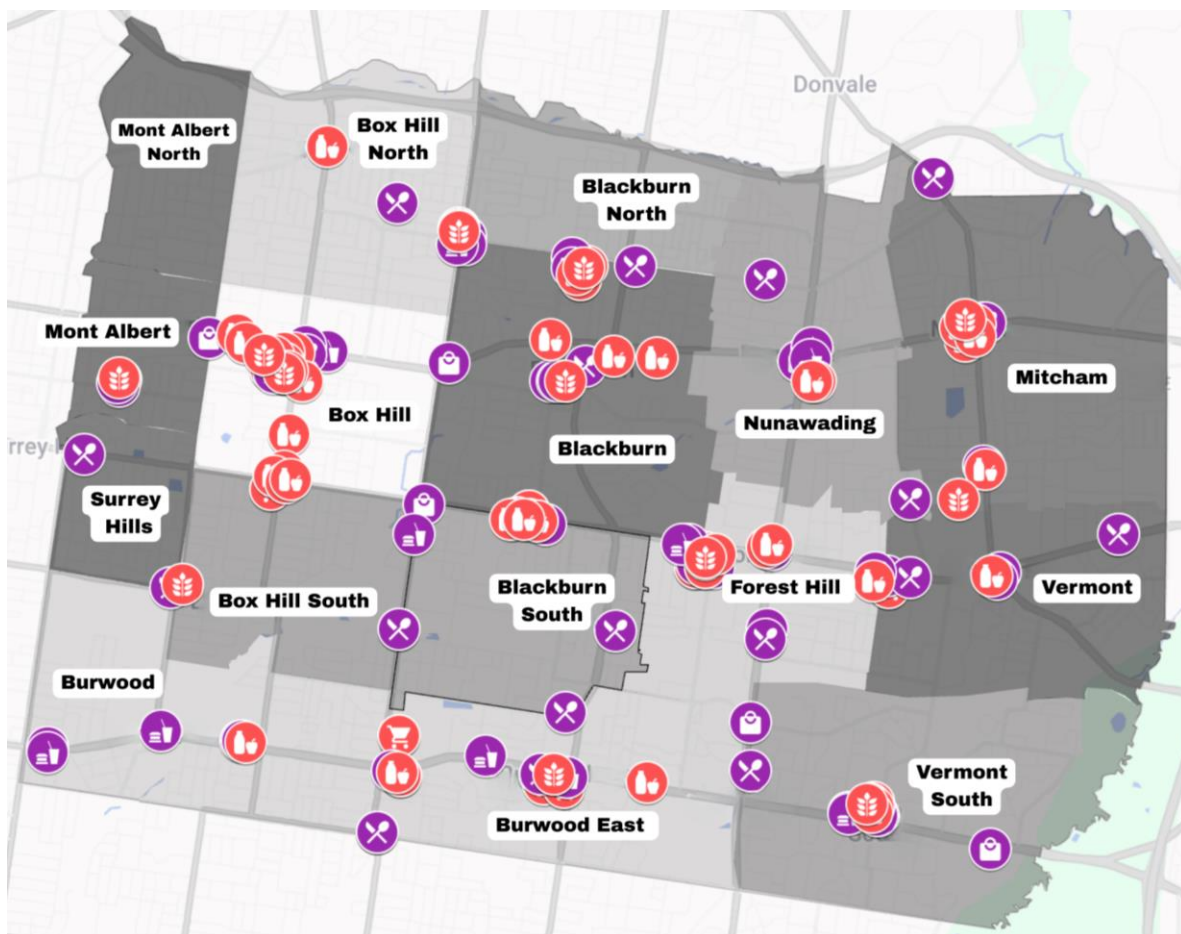


Figure 1: Distribution of food outlets in Whitehorse

Note: IRSD is classified using a quintile scale from 1 (most disadvantaged) to 5 (least disadvantaged). Quintiles are shown using varying shades of grey, with lighter shades representing higher levels of disadvantage within the LGA. (3)

Box Hill has the highest number of food outlets overall within Whitehorse. Clusters of grocery stores and ready-to-eat food outlets are present in Blackburn, Box Hill and Forest Hill, typically centred around shopping centres or established commercial precincts. This demonstrates that these hubs are key locations available to purchase both food ingredients and ready-to-eat meals. However, the concentration of outlets within these centres means food stores are not evenly dispersed within these suburbs and throughout surrounding suburbs, limiting access for residents who are unable to easily travel to these hubs.

In contrast, Burwood, Box Hill North, Blackburn North and Nunawading have no major supermarkets, fewer than two grocery stores each, and a limited number of ready-to-eat food outlets. This indicates relatively low access to a range of food options across these suburbs.

Surrey Hills, Mont Albert and Mont Albert North have relatively few grocery stores or ready-to-eat food outlets. However, these suburbs are located close to larger shopping centres in neighbouring municipalities outside the Whitehorse. Although food options within these suburbs are limited, they are also smaller in geographic size than most other suburbs in Whitehorse - approximately half the size. This smaller area may make it easier for residents to travel to nearby shopping precincts to access a broader range of food outlets.

Key insights

- Geographic food access is uneven across Whitehorse, with a high concentration of outlets in activity centres such as Box Hill, Blackburn, and Forest Hill, and limited access in several residential suburbs.
- Burwood, Box Hill North, Blackburn North, and Nunawading have only a small number of grocery stores and ready-to-eat food outlets. This may make it harder for people living in these suburbs to buy food close to home.
- Some suburbs rely on neighbouring LGAs for food geographical access (e.g. Surrey Hills, Mont Albert, Mont Albert North), highlighting the importance of considering cross-boundary food environments.

These findings indicate that targeted, place-based action to improve equitable access to food across Whitehorse is warranted. Coordinated action between council, health services, planners, and community partners can strengthen local food environments and support residents to access affordable, nourishing, and culturally appropriate food close to home.

Next steps

Phase two will explore other pathways to food access, including food relief services and community gardens, as well as how people can travel to and reach food outlets, such as public transport routes across Whitehorse.

Sources

1. North Eastern Public Health Unit, SUSTAIN. NEPHU Food Environment Maps: Whitehorse City Council (Final Report 2024). North Eastern Public Health Unit; 2024
2. IRSD. Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2021. Accessed November 13, 2025. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/32dcbb18c1d24f4aa89caf680413c741/page/IRSD/#data_s=id%3AdataSource_14-187da886916-layer-8%3A4517
3. Needham C, Strugnell C, Allender S, Orellana L. Beyond food swamps and food deserts: exploring urban Australian food retail environment typologies. Public Health Nutr. 2022 Jan 13;25(5):1-13. doi: 10.1017/S136898002200009X

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