

# Food Security in the Northern Territory

Consultation analysis and discussion paper

April 2021

---

## Food Summit Project

Food security is explicitly linked to our health and future outcomes<sup>1</sup>. Food security relates to inadequate availability of healthy food, impaired access to affordable healthy foods and limited resources to store and prepare healthy food - leading to a double burden of malnutrition and obesity<sup>1</sup>, which is seen in particularly in Australia in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory<sup>2</sup>.

Poor nutrition can be linked to a significant number of diseases which disproportionately impact Aboriginal people in adulthood. Chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, kidney diseases and diabetes, are responsible for more than 70% of the disease burden for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Furthermore, the burden of disease is three times higher for Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory<sup>3</sup>.

Evidence has also shown that health outcomes improve when communities are empowered to fully participate in and lead local projects aimed at the community's needs<sup>4</sup>. Aboriginal people are the experts in understanding their community's needs and what can be implemented locally. Community-driven initiatives therefore are central to the steps towards uncovering and delivering solutions to food insecurity in the Northern Territory.

The aim of the Food Summit project is to work with community members and other key stakeholders to identify and develop potential policy and programs that can help to address issues impacting on the food security of Aboriginal communities. The project seeks to provide initial project support for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory facilitating the identification, development and proposal of evidenced-based, community-led and supported solutions to food security issues. These may range from targeted, local initiatives to Territory-wide policy solutions requiring partnerships with government and industry.

During the time these consultations were undertaken, the only supermarket in Tennant Creek burnt down, and the COVID-19 pandemic impacting on health systems and food supply. These two events have highlighted the vulnerabilities of our communities and the need to strengthen communities to become more food secure into the future.

---

Acknowledgements to:

**The Northern Territory Food Security Working Group Members** for supporting the consultation process and development of this paper. Members of this group include

- The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA)
- Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC)
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Congress)
- Central Land Council (CLC)
- Danila Dilba Health Service
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council
- Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS)
- Northern Territory Government, Department of Health
- Outback Stores
- Wurli Wurlinjang Health Service

Thank you to the Aboriginal communities and people who gave up there time to be involved in this paper and provide their insights into food security in Aboriginal communities.

Contact: **Ben Pike, Food Summit project manager**

Email: **[ben.pike@AMSANT.org.au](mailto:ben.pike@AMSANT.org.au)**

Phone: **(08) 8959 4624**

---

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	8
Background.....	9
Methodology .....	10
Framework for the consultation.....	11
Terminology.....	11
Limitations .....	11
Consultation results.....	12
Food Security .....	13
Food access.....	15
Affordability and Income.....	15
Transport .....	20
Traditional foods .....	24
Stores.....	27
Food Usability.....	35
Housing and Infrastructure .....	35
Skills and Knowledge .....	38
Food Availability .....	40
Quality .....	40
Quantity.....	42
Growing foods .....	43
Services and programs .....	45
Emergency food relief .....	49
Key Findings.....	51
Conclusion .....	52
References.....	53
Appendix: Previous report recommendations .....	54

---

## Purpose of the Discussion Paper

This project is being undertaken by AMSANT in partnership with our members, Northern Territory Council of Social Services (NTCOSS), Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council and the Northern Territory Government Department of Health to understand the issues, barriers and potential solutions to the high rates of food insecurity seen in Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory and the wider Central Australian region.

The intent of this Discussion Paper is to relay what information is currently available, along with community and service providers' experiences, to support considerations around factors that influence food security in Aboriginal communities and what actions are most important to help improve outcomes and close the gap in rates of food insecurity. The data collected through these two sets consultations, service providers and Aboriginal community members, has resulted in a data pool where some topics are given more attention than others, reflecting the current concerns and priorities of informants in the consultations with great emphasis on Aboriginal community member's information. By addressing these major factors in communities and individuals, we have an opportunity to lead major improvements in health and wellbeing outcomes through community-led solutions. Food insecurity impacts on all areas of life from child development and school outcomes, to social and emotional wellbeing and household income. It therefore requires a whole-of-community and systems focused approach.

The discussion paper provides an opportunity for community groups and service providers to consider and build on the service provider and community consultation already undertaken and help inform the development of recommendations for policies and programs into the future.

At the end of this document is the recommendations from a series of previously undertaken inquiries and reports into food security issues in Aboriginal communities. It is important that these recommendations are revisited to help inform future approaches.

## The Consultation Process

The consultation process already undertaken has fully informed this discussion paper. We consulted with a total of 146 people from Aboriginal community members, remote stores management, social services, health services, education providers and housing services across the Northern Territory and wider Central Australia region.

Feedback on the discussion points and questions posed in this paper are import to the Food Summit project and they will inform any recommendation and initiatives developed through this project. There will be an opportunity to provide feedback on this paper in the lead up to and at the Food Summit in June 2021.

For the purpose of this paper, the definition of food security developed in consultation with Aboriginal people from the Northern Territory in 2010, through the Menzies school health 'Good Food systems' project, was used.

*'The land and the sea is our food security. It is our right. Food security for us has two parts: Food security is when the food from our ancestors is protected and always there for us and our children. It is also when we can easily access and afford the right non-traditional food for a collective healthy and active life. When we are food secure we can provide, share and fulfil our responsibilities, we can choose good food, knowing how to make choices and how to prepare and use it' <sup>5</sup>*

---

This definition builds on more established definitions developed by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to include the importance of culture and traditional foods in food security for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and wider Central Australian region.

---

To guide feedback and discussion 12 questions have been developed following the consultations within this document:

For more information or feedback on these questions and this paper please contact:

[ben.pike@amsant.org.au](mailto:ben.pike@amsant.org.au)

### Discussion questions:

1. What are the key priorities needed to address the gap between income and the cost of food for Aboriginal communities? Are there policies and program changes that can ensure community members have access to sufficient income to afford healthy food and that reduce the cost of living in all regions?
2. What policy and program changes are needed to develop and support more job opportunities for Aboriginal people in both remote and regional centers?
3. How can Aboriginal communities in both regional and remote areas and remote community stores be better supported to have access to affordable and safe modes of transport to improve access to food?
4. How can organisations and communities support community members to gain greater access to bush foods?
5. How can the availability of bush foods be supported in all regions of the Northern Territory and what should be undertaken to ensure its ongoing accessibility and consumption for future generations?
6. How can communities be supported to ensure they are able to have a significant and meaningful role in the governance and direction of community stores to ensure stores are supporting and delivering on community needs?
7. What measures are necessary to ensure all stores are able to benefit from policy and logistics measures that can reduce the cost and availability of healthy foods within stores?
8. How can models of local food production be developed and who is best placed to collaborate and lead these initiative to ensure sustainability and strong community engagement?
9. How can we support better health and nutrition outcomes for people receiving food through services?
10. How can we increase the level of nutrition resources and support in Aboriginal communities?
11. What would a successful collaborative, integrated and sustainable approach to food security by services look like and need?
12. How can both formal and informal food relief systems be support to ensure a collaborative, integrated and health supporting approach in the Northern Territory?

---

## Executive Summary

The Food Summit project is a collaboration between AMSANT, NPY Women's Council, NTCOSS and the Northern Territory Government Department of Health that aim to work with Aboriginal community members and other key stakeholders to identify and develop potential policy and programs that can help to address issues around food security. Aboriginal communities experience food insecurity up to seven times the national rate. The purpose of this paper is to identify priority areas and guide discussion regarding issues impacting the level of food security in Aboriginal communities.

The information collated in the paper come from both Aboriginal community members across the Northern Territory and service providers who work with these communities. 57 service providers and 89 Aboriginal community members participated in the consultations throughout 2020 and early 2021. These community and service provider consultations were undertaken across the whole of the Northern Territory and collated and analysed in this paper.

The major finding from these consultations showed that greater work is needed to support Aboriginal community members to be food secure and support community-led sustainable approaches to addressing community food security. Through this project it's hoped that a greater understanding of food security will help empower communities can identify local issues and advocate for improvements in their food security.

The affordability of healthy food and income were the two major issue people identified as impacting most on people's food security. Systematic issues that impacted on people's access to jobs and sufficient income to purchase healthy food were regularly raised. In remote communities, stores were seen as central to food security of the community and when stores were functioning well and working with the community ongoing improvement were seen in the quality and quantity of healthy food. In regards to increased access to healthy foods community members expressed a desire for greater food production in or near communities. This was seen as a jobs opportunity and a way to improve access and affordability of fruits and vegetables for community members. Outside of affordability of healthy food and income, transport was the most consistent theme that arose from the consultations. Transportation issues impacted on all aspects of the food system from production, to stores and household access. Addressing issues of transportation was seen as one clear way of increasing access to food and lowering the cost barrier to obtaining foods for stores and households. Where organisations have introduced services like community buses or small community owned stores people have been able to spend more money of food and less on expensive services like taxis.

Participants in the consultation identified key strengths within remote and regional centre Aboriginal communities that supported communities to be food security. Family structure and support were critical to ensuring people had access to food, particularly when they were experiencing food insecurity. Traditional foods also played a role in supporting Aboriginal communities to be food secure, ensuring access to culturally appropriated foods that can be shared and that support health. Greater access to traditional foods were seen as important aspect to food security for Aboriginal community members.

The role of this paper in the Food Summit project is to inform and generate discussions about how best to address food security issues from a community driven and supported approach. This discussion paper forms one aspect of the engagement process. Crucially, it invites all interested parties to consider and respond to a range of questions that will help to build a collaborative approach between Aboriginal communities and services.



---

## Background

Food insecurity affects Aboriginal people up to seven times more than non-Aboriginal people in Australia. These rates of food insecurity are worse in remote areas<sup>6</sup>. High rates of nutrition-related ill health are linked to these higher rates of inequality. A wide variety of food security determinants such as lower income levels, poor access to transport, inappropriate housing and other areas of disadvantage further confound people's ability to achieve better outcomes for their families and communities.

Food security exists when everyone has physical, economic and social access to food that is safe and consumed in sufficient quantities and quality to meet their health needs and food preferences. It is important that all people can access, use and afford healthy food at all times<sup>1</sup>. In Australia this is still not the case with 31% of Aboriginal people living in remote areas facing food insecurity, and regularly running out of food<sup>6</sup>.

Aboriginal people in the NT are heavily impacted by limited food access and affordability, restricted availability and often infrastructure and other restrictions for preparation and procurement of healthy, nutritious meals<sup>7</sup>. High costs, due to long supply chains and the poor quality of roads between communities and major centres, impact the level of access and affordability of healthy food. The availability of a wide variety of food and access year-round also plays its role in people's food security<sup>8,9</sup>. Aboriginal people in the NT reported a less nutritious diet compared to non-Indigenous people, with 97% reporting inadequate vegetable intake and 49% reporting inadequate fruit intake<sup>10</sup>. Although levels of fruits and vegetables have increased in remote communities over the last 20 years, these levels fluctuate during the seasons as roads are cut off and supply is often reliant on single sources<sup>11,9</sup>.

International standards have shown that food is considered affordable when no more than 30 % of household income is required for its purchase<sup>12</sup>. In a remote Aboriginal community, an average family receiving government allowances could use up to 50% of their household income on food alone<sup>13</sup>. Further, it has been well documented that families are often not receiving their full entitlement to social security payment leading to greater pressure being placed on individual household members<sup>14</sup>. Government benefits have also not kept up with the rising cost in all areas. The remote area allowance has not increased in the last 20 years, even though prices have continued to grow above CPI in remote communities. In the last 10 years, price differences for the same basket of food between remote stores and town supermarkets have increased from 36% (\$710 vs \$522) to 60% (\$854 vs \$535)<sup>11,14</sup>. During this same time, Jobseeker allowances have also not increased at the same rate as the aged pension, with increases of less than 15%, which has ultimately places people below the poverty line<sup>14</sup>.

Adding to factors affecting food insecurity in Aboriginal communities are the issues of insufficient food storage and cooking facilities. It has been previously shown that in Aboriginal communities, as little as 6% of houses have acceptable levels of functioning health hardware needed to store, prepare and cook food, such as cupboards, bench space, refrigeration and a functioning stove and sink<sup>8</sup>. This hampers people's ability to properly prepare healthy meals and forces them to rely on food that can be eaten straight away. These meals tend to be less nutritious takeaway and fast food options due to their proliferation in the food system and affordability compared to healthier options. Unhealthy diets and associated health implications are contributing to the gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the wider Australian community<sup>8</sup>.

Food insecurity is linked to significant health issues and poor outcomes, including higher rates of gestational diabetes, lower birth weights, malnutrition in infants and children, anaemia in children and young women, and higher rates of chronic disease<sup>8,9</sup>. Aboriginal women in the NT are ten times more likely to have type 2 diabetes in pregnancy and twice as likely to have low birth weight babies<sup>15</sup>. There is also a greater impact on child health, with 15% of Aboriginal children under five years old in the NT suffering from chronic malnutrition, compared to 2% nationally. Childhood anaemia can lead to

developmental vulnerabilities, falling below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in one or more developmental domains. Anaemia rates in the Northern Territory are as high as 15%, which is strongly linked to poor diet and a lack of nutritious food<sup>16</sup>. The interconnection to high rates of food insecurity with lifelong effects, including poorer education outcomes, employment as well as impacts on overall wellbeing, is significant and plays a role in the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the nation<sup>8, 9</sup>.



Figure 1. Domains influencing food security in communities and households

## Methodology

The consultation process for the Food Summit project was undertaken in two parts. The questions used in the consultation were developed with the Food Security working group and informed by previous consultations undertaken in Central Australia.

### 1. Service Provider consultations

Organisation and Individuals who work with and support Aboriginal communities from a range of different sectors were interviewed in either groups or one-on-one sessions. **57 individuals** from sectors including health services, social services, local councils, education, research institutions, food retailers and the horticulture sector engaged in the consultations sessions.

### 2. Community consultations

---

A series of group and individual interviews were undertaken with Aboriginal people who live in remote and urban areas of the Northern Territory. **89 individuals** from across the Northern Territory participated in the consultation from a community perspective.

The interviews were recorded and the transcriptions used as the primary source for this discussion paper. Direct quotes from the interviews have been de-identified to maintain anonymity of participants.

## Framework for the consultation

In March 2020, a literature review was undertaken to inform the key topics and questions of both the service provider and community consultations. Consultation questions were designed to collect information on issues, barriers and current and future solutions that impact food security within both urban and remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and wider Central Australian region.

Participants in both the service provider and community consultations were identified and invited to participate through networks and using a cascade effect. The consultations were undertaken over 2020 and 2021 and included service providers and Aboriginal community members from across the Northern Territory and the APY lands. Both community and service provider consultations came from groups and organisations that represent urban and remote communities to ensure all geographical areas and their unique issues were represented.

## Terminology

**Service Provider.** An individual who works for an organisation who works with and whose program aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal communities

**Aboriginal community member.** An Aboriginal person who lives in or is from the Northern Territory and or the wider Central Australian region.

**Food security.** The economic and physical access to culturally appropriate, safe and sufficient healthy food and the ability to safely store and utilise it.

**Food insecurity.** The lack of part of one or more of the components that make up the term food security.

**Regional centres.** This refers to the six major towns of the Northern Territory: Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Darwin and Palmerston

## Limitations

The constraints of travel placed on the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic meant early engagement with community groups and services were limited in the early periods of this project during 2020. This limited the number of remote communities that were able to be visited and engaged in the community consultation.

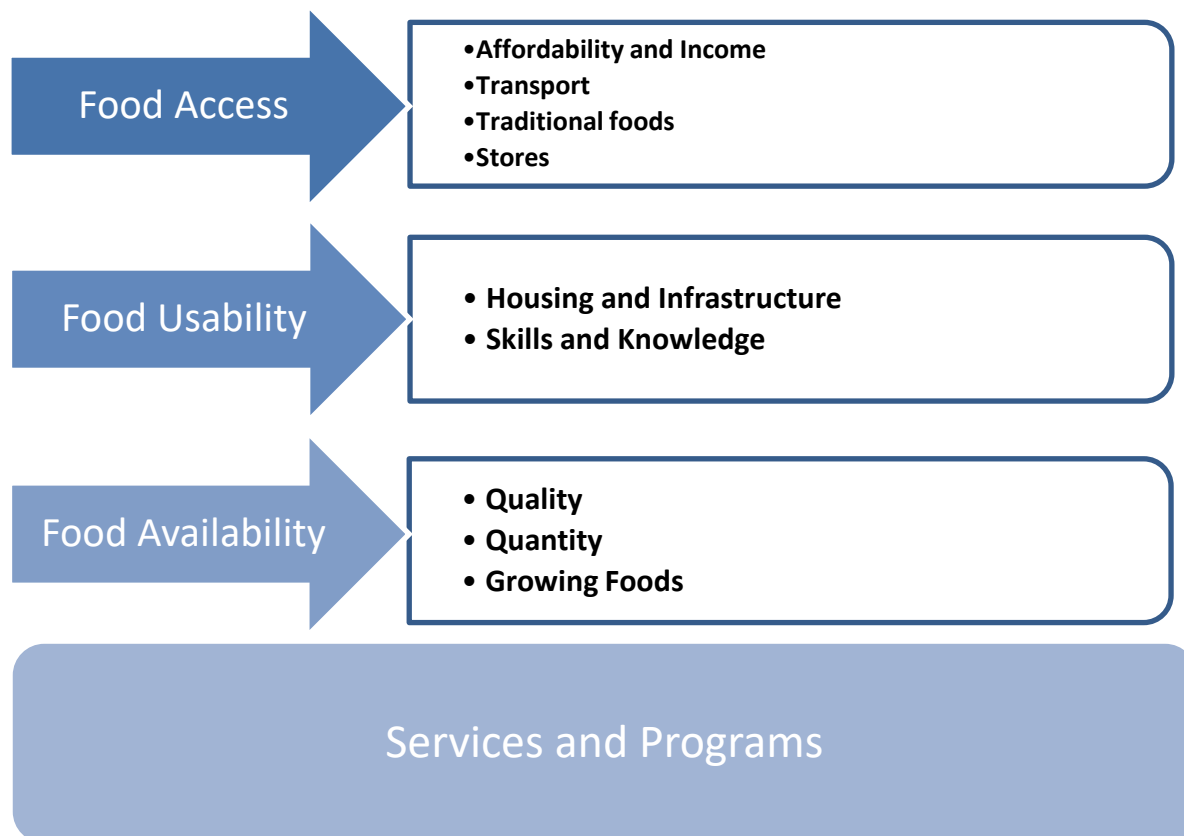
Those interviewed may not represent the views of all Aboriginal communities although attempts were made to include participants from all regions, remote and urban areas, outstation and communities with different health service and store structures.

Not all interviews undertaken with Aboriginal communities were supported by an Aboriginal staff member or interpreters but efforts were made to ensure translation could take place where possible.

---

## Consultation results

The results of the consultation have been structured in 4 domains; Food access, Food usability, Food availability and Services and programs, with subheading underneath these domains based on major topics that arose from the consultations.



---

## Food Security

While service providers who engaged in the consultation expressed an understanding of what food security means, the term was not as familiar to people participating in the community consultations. While a number of community members had heard the term used before, particularly those engaged with health services, knowledge about what it means was limited. The term was described by some community members as sounding like it meant locking up your food or putting a lock on your food box. This highlighted the need to explain food security properly and ensure everyone had an opportunity to understand how food security may affect people's lives.

*It's not a word we use. There's no words for this that would describe it to people. You have to tell the story just like you told us. You have to tell each part.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

In community consultations, food security was described like a car chassis. For the car to function, all four wheels are required and need to work. For food security to function and for people to be food secure, the four key pillars are required and need to be working, food access, availability, useability and stability of the food system. The definition of Food Security developed in the Menzies School of Health 2010 'Good Food Systems' project resonated well with service providers.

*It's a difficult thing for people to talk about and how people interpret it in communities and what we think we're asking about...When you go back to that food security definition that stuff about a healthy active life there a difference between having enough food in your belly to having some food in your belly vs it being the food people want to purchase for their family throughout that whole fortnight cycle. So I think it's [rates of food security] double what governments report.*

**Researcher, NT wide**

Both the service provider and the Aboriginal community member consultations recognised the different challenges that remote and urban areas faced in regards to food security and the potential need to develop and implement different solution that meet community needs. The service provider consultations also highlighted some key differences to the food environment in the five regions, in addition to the differences between urban and remote communities. Across Arnhem Land in particular, service providers continually raised the issue of unlicensed stores or private takeaway shops run out of houses or vans after hours undermining health promotion and public health initiatives. While this issue was not raised in other regions, it's not to say that they are not an issue.

Consultations also highlighted the interconnection between elements that are needed to ensure people are food secure and that addressing issues in isolation is unlikely to lead to community-wide improvements.

Major groups of people that participants identified through the consultations as being at risk of food insecurity were elderly, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues, people impacted by gambling and alcohol and children and young people.

*One of the things I have noticed around food security particularly with elderly clients is when they have gone and purchased food it tends to disappear from the house because they don't have anywhere to store it and if they store it in the fridge in the kitchen it will just disappear. So a lot of times we've got elderly people that don't have any tucker.*

---

## Social services, Katherine region

Those working in the emergency food relief sector were particularly concerned about elderly and the high level use this group has on their services.

While community members felt some groups were more vulnerable to food security issues, they also felt strongly that family and the community worked to ensure those at risk were always supported.

*Sharing keeps people food secure so when we have family we are always food secure.*

## Aboriginal community member, Barkly region

*If family need something, if they need food, we give it to them. We share.*

## Aboriginal community member, Central Australian region

Community consultations highlighted the importance of the collective, with sharing among family and the wider community in line with the Aboriginal community view on health<sup>i</sup>. The different world views were highlighted by language used in regards to food sharing. Community members discussed this in a positive, enabling way, which focused on ensuring all community members maintained a level of food security at all times, while service providers were more likely to discuss this through the lens of the lack of security around the food that people may buy and store in their house. These divergent views highlight the importance of community-led solutions and the need for communities' involvement in the development and implementation of policies and programs to ensure they are culturally appropriate.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that took place during the consultation period was also identified as important in highlighting the areas that are most vulnerable to food security issues.

*Food insecurity has come far more into people's minds [due to COVID-19 lockdowns] that aren't involved in food normally recently. When previously it was mainly health services talking about it as an issue. I think this highlights with recent events it's really been highlighted that it's an issue for everyone to play a role.*

## Health professional, Katherine region

Through the consultation process, multiple workshops and reports were identified by participants and highlighted as key sources of information that informed peoples' ideas within the area of food security. Some of these reports are mentioned throughout the discussion paper and those that contained recommendation these have been listed in the [appendix](#). A number participants noted that while these reports had strong recommendation that would improve food security the recommendations have often gone unfulfilled.

---

<sup>i</sup> "Aboriginal health" means not just the physical well-being of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life

---

## Food access

### Topics:

- **Affordability and Income**
- **Transport**
- **Traditional foods**
- **Stores**

### Affordability and Income

For people to be able to achieve food security they must have the financial resources to afford adequate and nutritious food; as well as the transport, storage and cooking facilities and the resources to run them. Throughout the community consultation it was made clear that affordability of food was the biggest issue that impacted the level of food insecurity in the community. The two determinates of food security, being affordability and income, were regularly discussed in consultation interviews as being mutually inclusive and so therefore presented together. While the quote 'the biggest issue is money' is attributed to a participant in the community consultations in the Katherine region, these words or similar were repeated in numerous community consultations across the five regions. The issue of affordability was discussed by participants through either the cost of food in stores or the level of income available to people to afford healthy food.

*The biggest issue is money.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*Obviously cost is an issue and that's on two levels the cost of the food and the money people have available for food.*

**Policy officer, Northern Territory wide**

*We pay rent, power, food is expensive and transport is expensive so it's hard to have enough money*

**Aboriginal community members, Central Australia region**

During a community consultation in Barkly, the differences in the cost of living between the regions, and the resultant impact this has on income, was highlighted as an example of where the amount of income people had disposable to them was not in line with the cost of living across the different regions. That is to say, the pattern of living costs is not spread evenly across the NT.

*The cost of living has kept going up higher and higher over the last 20 years but income hasn't followed so people have less money...it costs more to buy food here, rents more, petrol is more but income is the same. It cost more to live here than it does Alice but the money is the same.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

---

*The solutions to the problems don't lie in education alone; they require improving people's access to financial resources whether that's through more appropriate payments for remote living or through better options for employment and empowering communities to create local solutions to allow people to be more financially independent and financially secure.*

**Health professional, Central Australia region**

Within the Northern Territory, 20 years of food basket surveys have been conducted and have demonstrated the need to consider the cost of food, food consumption and health. Results for the regular NT Market Basket Survey have shown the cost of food has continually increased faster than the consumer price index (CPI) in remote communities. They also show that the cost of healthy food in remote communities is substantially higher than regional centres across the whole of the Northern Territory. When comparing this with household income remote community members can be spending as much as 50% of their household income on food alone<sup>ii</sup>.

*The rate of Newstart which is so low. If people can't afford food it doesn't matter how cheap we make it, it doesn't matter if we make it more accessible, if people just basically don't have enough money to buy food then we can't solve this problem.*

**Policy officer, Darwin region**

Secure access to funds was raised as a key issue to the affordability of food. While some community groups reported the cost of food was reasonable, these groups often discussed issues related to income including jobs, Centrelink payments and insecure access to personal income. The elderly and vulnerable groups were identified at particular risk of personal income being misappropriated. Participants also noted that not all communities' members were receiving any or their full entitlements from Centrelink. This was highlighted as a particular issue for youth who had not engaged with Centrelink.

*A lot of my clients aren't on Centrelink because they don't have the documents to get on Centrelink and no one to support them to get the right documents.*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

*Young people find it hard to stay on Centrelink. We need to make it easier to support them. Maybe at first they only need to go one day a week [to CDP] and then build up from there.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

One service provider noted that this was not a new issue and that during the 'Intervention'<sup>iii</sup>, concerted effort was made in around 2010 to ensure all people entitled to Centrelink payments were receiving them, and that potentially over the last 11 years this has again dropped off. Service providers also raised the issue of loans and Centrepay payments<sup>iv</sup>, which are deducted from people's income, and in some

---

<sup>ii</sup> Lee, A, et al. 2016, 'Nutrition in remote Aboriginal communities: lessons from Mai Wiru and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands'.

<sup>iii</sup> The Northern Territory Emergency Response, known as 'the Intervention', was implemented in the Northern Territory by the Commonwealth Government from 2007 and continues to this day under the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/centrepay/what-centrepay>



---

cases this is occurring without people being fully aware. These payments often continued to go to stores after the initial item was paid off where credit was accrued. That automatic deductions were accruing in store accounts, and thus reducing the amount of income available to participants, raised concerns about people ability to shop around and benefit from sales and consumer power. Community members also noted other payments like School Nutrition Program contributions as reducing expendable income significantly. Currently, across the Northern Territory, parents with children receiving meals as part of the school nutrition program are estimated to contribution to the program between \$8.7-9.2 million<sup>v</sup>. While the School Nutrition Program was generally seen as a key successful program in supporting young people having regular access to meal during the school term issues were raised about the cost to families and the quality of the food. Some participants noted that in some communities, the parent-funded portion of this program was funded through community organisations reducing the finance stress on families while maintaining the strong benefits to the program, which includes local job opportunities.

In Darwin the issue of access to affordable food was often limited to those that could access different sources of healthy food beyond the supermarkets. One service provider noted:

*A lot of people in Darwin access the healthier foods through markets because it's cheaper and better and fresh. But for people who are on Centrelink benefits as most of the stores [at local markets] are cash. People who are on income management can struggle to have access to money to shop in those markets.*

#### **Health profession, Darwin Region**

Affordability of food was also noted as being impacted by seasonal factors at different times of the year in some regions. This is particularly problematic when roads become cut off and there is increased cost of food arising from the higher costs of transporting food to stores. Timing of pay week ('pay week' vs 'non-pay week') was also a common issue that was raised. Many participants relayed an increase in social issues for vulnerable families often occurring on non-pay weeks.

*People buy all their food on pay day and then will go until the next pay until they buy more. Fresh food is eaten on day one and then some people might not eat for a few days or go to family on their [family member's] pay day*

#### **Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

This was often compensated for at a local level through sharing of food and resources within family networks and spreading multiple family members pay days over the fortnight to ensure there is income coming in across both weeks. Of note, it was also reported that increased demand is placed upon resources during ceremonial business times of the year when there is an increased need for food for bush camps, but no increase in income.

Service providers and community members both raised that affordability of food and income levels were strongly connected to other social issues, particularly gambling and alcohol misuse. The impact that these issues had on food choices, and the ability to access sufficient funds to purchase food, was seen in both urban and remote areas.

---

<sup>v</sup> Based on the 2017 report An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory estimates and current daily rates for parent contribution.

---

*Some people spend money the wrong way round, buy alcohol before food, go to town get drunk then come back to community hungry and have to get food from family.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*Poker machines takes money too. While you wait for a lift back home or have time to kill.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*To get to the shops you've got to pass two places that make it hard (alcohol shops). It affects how much money people have for food, creates a dent in the money.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

There were a variety of reasons raised as potentially contributing to the high cost of food in communities. For some, this higher cost in remote communities was seen as an economical issue, whereby a lack of economies of scale has impacted on food prices. This is also supported by the fact Group managed stores, such as Outback Stores and The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA), were not only seen as being cheaper, but Market Basket Survey NT results supported this.

*In remote communities ALPA, Outback stores or other store associations tend to be a bit cheaper than your community owned and then if you are in the situation and you only have a private store you might be a small community with only access to a road house or a roadhouse considered to be a small store then you actually then not going to be doing so well, you're quite food insecure because that's when the prices just go up astronomical.*

**Policy officer, Northern Territory wide**

Other factors that contributed to the higher cost were highlighted by participants from the larger stores groups discussing the need to buy higher quality food, so that it is able to last the travel time and maintain quality for the entirety of the 1 to 2 week between deliveries. The need for higher quality fruits and vegetables therefore drove price increases for these products in stores, and also limited stores' ability to shop around for cheaper alternatives.

Subsidies were seen as a potential solution to the higher prices of food in remote communities. This was either through a cross-store subsidy that some stores already have in place to support healthy eating, or through government subsidies to lower the overall price for consumers.

*In some stores that price of healthy food compared to processed food it was all expensive while in other stores they had initiated that the price of fresh foods were sold at cost price so the shop made no money at all on the fresh food and so there was a large difference between the price of the fresh food and the processed food.*

**Education professional, Katherine region**

---

*There's basic essential lines that people buy every week; your rice, your milk, your eggs...and your fruit and veg as well and the strategy is you try and make the prices for those things as low as possible. That might mean you're selling them at cost or below cost but that gets paid for when people go and buy a Mars Bar because that Mars Bar is expensive, or your bag of snacks or your sugary biscuits. You subsidize those really expensive lines by having those unhealthy lines really expensive. Not everyone does this but it's a good way to get those healthy lines [prices] down.*

**Food retail, Northern Territory Wide**

For the two large national supermarkets it was noted that cross subsidies are already used and are a major reason for the lower prices seen in regional centres. Those who worked in and with the food retail space talked about how national freight prices for the two major supermarkets meant smaller stores where unable to compete on price. This is because smaller stores lack access to these low freight prices and the national buying power.

*We've worked out there is a national pricing system in that [the major supermarkets] do price things across the whole of Australia on a range of goods, not on absolutely everything, so it would be interesting to see a comparison from major centres of what you can actually get.*

**Policy Officer, Northern Territory wide**

*We're never going to see the same prices as in town it's always going to be more expensive in remote. If there's no big changes in terms of the way stores are run. I think if we're looking at government subsidies or changing the structure of stores so they don't have to operate as a business. That's where you could make the costs come down. But in the current state of play with store operating costs that need to be covered to operate it's just not feasible. So there really needs to be funding pumped in externally to make that a feasible option.*

**Health professional, Central Australia region**

Community members felt that by addressing the affordability of food, those that are more vulnerable to food insecurity would be able to better meet their own needs. For some community members, access to adequate funds was the issue that defined food insecurity and was the link to all other issues impacting food insecurity including transport, food preparation and storage infrastructure and access to quality and sufficient healthy food. More jobs and training to support people to undertake their role was seen as the best way to address this. While a closer reflection of the cost of living in social security payments was also seen as important.

*Greater amount of support for business to employ Aboriginal people, funding for jobs, will help people get into jobs and trained properly how to do the job.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

---

*Centrelink payments should reflect the cost of living in that area. There should be a regional adjusted Jobseeker payment.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

However, there were differences in opinions in both the community consultation and the service provider consultation about whether cheaper prices would lead to people eating more healthy food. This was mainly put down to peoples' priorities and that without an increase in the level of priority placed on healthy eating practices, changes in prices would do little to increase the sales of healthy food.

**Discussion questions:**

1. What are the key priorities needed to address the gap between income and the cost of food for Aboriginal communities? Are there policies and program changes that can ensure community members have access to sufficient income to afford healthy food and that reduce the cost of living in all regions?
2. What policy and program changes are needed to develop and support more job opportunities for Aboriginal people in both remote and regional centres?

## Transport

To ensure easy access to good food, transport is critical to connecting people from their homes to places of food availability and connecting food producers with markets and stores. Transport was seen as a major factor in inhibiting people's food choices and ability to afford healthy food. Both Aboriginal community members and service providers identified this as one of the major factors in the cost of food and people's ability to eat healthy food.

*There is some beauty in the communal collective way of living if you are without a car someone will give you a lift or you can borrow someone's car. In one previous community that I worked in there was a bus that was going around from the shop. So you didn't have to carry your groceries and walk back from the shop and so when it's 45 degrees and I wouldn't even want to carry myself let alone my groceries back from the store then a bus can help. And so this could be a factor that people choose not to do a big shop and have to carry it all home. Transport could be an inhibit factor to buying a big lot of food. They could just go for something easy quick so they didn't have to carry a big lot of food back home*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

Taxis were reported as the most common form of transport used by people in major centres and remote communities when unable to access a private vehicle, however, the cost of them and the reported unethical behaviour had major impacts on people's available income to purchase food. In the consultation interviews taxis were the most common service complained about and regularly seen as disadvantaging those who relied on them to access food due to the high cost and therefore reduce income to purchase food. In five of the six large regional NT towns, a public bus service was available and

---

used by some community members involved in the consultation. However, those that did use the public bus found navigating the service sometimes difficult:

*There's a bus but you never know when it's going to come. You could be waiting a while.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*If you live in Yirrkala and you want to shop at Woolworths that's 20km and so you do see people trying to hitchhike. There is a bus but that's not very frequent and it's during working hours so if you have a job you can't get there. There's bush taxis but they charge ridiculous amounts of money.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

In consultations with Aboriginal community members in regional centres, transport was a big issue that limited people's access to food often through the cost of using services such as taxis to get to and from the shops. Stories about taxi trips costing from \$100 up to \$700 were not uncommon. While people who lived in regional centres felt the cost of food was affordable, it was the high cost of services like taxis that took away from expendable income. It is somewhat of a 'Catch 22' as there was an expressed need for people to use taxi services because of the distance from where people lived in the regional centres to the location of the major supermarkets.

*Taxis rip us off! It's too expensive to go into town to shop. It takes money away from other things... Sometimes I'll ask family to drive me in but if they can't you have to take a taxi which is \$10-20 just around town you can see the metre spinning up and up just going for a short trip [to the takeaway].*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*People drive into town for the shop. It's hard without a car. A taxi is \$60 one way but people do it... Previously we had a bus before shire took over. It was \$2 one way so you had more money for food.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*The corner stores are super expensive so if you live in an area away from the centre of town and you don't have access to transport and you rely on the corner store then you're paying remote community prices anyway even though you're technically close to a Woolworths.*

**Policy Officer, Northern Territory wide**

This issue was identified in recent body of work undertaken in Alice Springs around food security with food outlet and public transport mapping showing town camps were particularly disadvantaged with public transport not going into town camps and a greater access to fast food outlets within walking

---

distance. This closer proximity to unhealthy foods likely influences food choices and has been regularly noted in food systems/environment mapping research<sup>vi</sup>.

As mentioned in the above '[Affordability and income](#)' section, community members raised the issue of fuel and its cost and availability. Some remote communities don't have a fuel pump in them so people need to travel to fuel up their car, before driving to town to do a large shop or go hunting - sometimes in the opposite direction to where they're traveling.

*No fuel in community so you have to go into town to fuel up before going bush.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

Sharing both cars and the cost of fuel was a regular strategy employed to cover the high costs of fuel and private vehicles. Access to a car was seen as critical to having access to bush foods as well as being able to purchase cheaper food in the regional centres.

*Some people use family to go into town for shopping. Everyone goes in together and helps pay for fuel.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*People go hunting on the weekend and share the food with everyone. There is lots of bush foods but you need a car that works to go get it.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

In some communities, new services have emerged to address issues of the high cost of transport and limited access to private vehicles. These services, such as Kalano's community bus in the Katherine region, were identified as models that often help improve people's access to health food by being cheaper compared to taxi services and supporting community needs often in under serviced areas. The services provided a cheaper alternative to taxis but were more flexible and reached into underserved areas that currently public bus don't.

*Community bus comes everyday Mon-Fri to go to town. It leaves in the morning and comes back in the afternoon for people to go into town to do shopping.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

Better public transport and community-run bus services were seen as positive ways to address the issue of inhibited access, with a number of success stories provided through the community consultation process. These services were seen as viable options in both urban and remote communities and spoken highly of by community members and service providers.

---

<sup>vi</sup> [https://health.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/976785/PART-1-Food-and-Nutrition-Security-Needs-Assessment-REPORT.pdf](https://health.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/976785/PART-1-Food-and-Nutrition-Security-Needs-Assessment-REPORT.pdf)

---

*[they] have a free bus that can take you around town. It picks you up and takes you home. You need to call them to book but it's easy*

#### **Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

Some concern was raised about improving access to regional centres, and the flow-on effect that would have on the viability of remote stores particularly in the smaller communities. It was noted that as access to the regional towns improves, the amount of shopping undertaken within local stores is reduced, thus reducing turnover and their viability. This could have flow-on effects to other community benevolent programs that are funded through store profits such sports teams, funeral funds and emergency relief.

Transport was also a major issue from a store's perspective, as was the impact of freight costs on the cost of food within stores. While the cost of transport for independent stores has previously been reported as making up a small amount of the cost of food within the store<sup>vii</sup> there were a lot of indirect cost.

*A lot of freight companies have a thing called not a common courier. If there's any damagers they go I'm not a common courier I'm not responsible. You wear the costs. Big contracts like we've got we've got the freight companies wearing the cost. If they damage something. They pay for it. Your little independent store down the corner they'd never be able to do that and they'd have to pay for all the damages.*

#### **Remote store, Northern Territory wide**

Freight out to remote communities was inhibited by high costs of transport due to road conditions, the need for specialised trucks and the length of time and distance that food needs to travel to make it to consumers in both remote communities and regional centres. In the wet season, these issues are exacerbated and drive up costs for stores.

*A lot of the communities aren't accessible in the wet season which then either hikes up prices due to air freight which again in some cases they can't get planes in, or they can't get trucks in so the shops do run out of food.*

#### **Horticulture, Katherine region**

One effective strategy that has previously been attempted was to consolidate freight between stores to increase their negotiating power, and lower the cost across a larger group of stores.

*[We] negotiated freight contacts together to try and put their consolidated revenue together. And the idea was to try and demand cheaper freight rates and it worked quite well and they had a lot of leverage doing that. So one of the things, and you would need ACCC to be ok with it, but if you got Mai Wiru, Outback, ALPA, and you had a consolidated approach to freight, both road and barge it would be good.... The more people you've got in to the consortium the more leverage you've got and the hungrier that freight companies are going to be for that business which brings all your prices right down*

#### **Food retail, Northern Territory Wide**

---

<sup>vii</sup> Aputula Aboriginal Corporation submission to inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=5c1d4060-2e66-4067-a160-732b8e45bb17&subId=685528>

---

This idea could also be applied to independent stores but would require a coordinating organisation to ensure individual stores were compliant to the agreement.

#### Discussion question

3. How can Aboriginal communities in both regional and remote areas and remote community stores be better supported to have access to affordable and safe modes of transport to improve access to food?

### Traditional foods

Traditional foods and a strong connection to culture were seen as key strengths of communities. For community members, these factors were a key measure used to maintain food security in both urban and remote Aboriginal communities. Community members talked about changes to access to land, guns and vehicles impacting on their ability to get to places where traditional foods are located and thus having a significant impact on people's ability to be food secure. Access to traditional food and the lands in which they are found are extremely important to helping people maintain food sovereignty in Aboriginal communities, as well as and strengthening people's involvement in the food system.

*Being out bush keeps us healthy... Bush foods make you feel strong and you can walk for miles after you eat it.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*People go hunting but they need a gun. It's too hard to get a gun licence so people don't go hunting as much as they used to. Before when people go hunting everyone would have food.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

*I do think communities do have a little bit of resilience in built. So in saying they are severely food insecure there is that resilience of traditional foods.*

**Policy officer, Northern Territory Wide**

Participants raised concerns that community members were getting less and less access to land and seas. With increased farming activity happening around communities, the availability of traditional foods was seen to be declining. Issues such as buffel grass, introduced animals and environmental damage from dumped rubbish and land clearing were the most common concerns raised regarding bush food access and availability. In particular, in Central Australia and the Barkly region, those who were involved in the consultations noted that people needed to travel further to access bush foods. Additionally, the amount and availability of bush foods has been depleted due to long periods of droughts and ongoing damage to the environment. Counter to this, ranger programs were seen as positive examples of addressing these issues through an emphasis on caring for country and increasing access to bush foods for all community members. These programs also provide important job opportunities for community members, which then increases the affordability of healthy food.



---

*The station has blocked off where people used to go hunting and fishing. People have to go further now.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*Want more young people going out to get bush foods and bring it back for family. Not happening now cause young people lazy. We would like to eat more bush foods if we could get out more.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*Going back and what Aboriginal people would refer to food secure would be having access to traditional foods and the use of land but now there are fences in place, people don't have access to land and the waterways in so many places. They are ruined due to cattle and bush foods are diminished because of feral animals... Older people talk about traditional foods and that due to introduced species like cane toads these aren't as available as they used to be.*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

*The rangers do learning on country stuff and so they'll take kids out from school and teach them about bush foods and other things about their country. I think the rangers tend to be the ones utilised for the kind of cook ups and pay to go and catch things and I think it would be great to see how we can support that more.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land region**

Programs that used traditional foods as economic opportunities and increased community members' access to traditional foods within the community were highlighted as examples of how communities could be better supported to be food secure. One such program raised in both service provider and community consultation was the fishing program occurring in Maningrida. This program was even referred to in a community consultation as far away as a Central Australian remote community.

There are also significant benefits to greater promotion of and support to access traditional foods that would help address a range of health issues. Service providers also felt it was extremely important that traditional foods play a bigger part in service delivery, working with communities to ensure greater access.

*When you go and see that GP when someone is low on iron instead of it being 'you need to go eat some red meat' when steak or even gravy beef is \$20 for a little packet of it, it's frozen and taste like freezer burn. When a little bit of mangrove worm instead, which is a lot more easily accessible and free, is going to be a better option for you.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

---

*I've previously had a conversation about this around research into the nutritional benefits of bush foods but I think that might be problematic because it's trying to justify something that Yolngu already know but in a different context but it's like well we have to make it believable in this western science otherwise your knowledge is not important. Yolngu already know bush foods are good for them and they don't need us to tell them why.... It's actually more important for Yolngu to talk about their reasons why they eat those things.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

Both Aboriginal community members and service providers regularly noted the key role that traditional food play as a coping mechanism to both prevent and address food insecurity. When community members had access to bush foods it was noted that food security was less of a concern. Greater access to traditional foods was mentioned as one of the strongest ways to address food insecurity in Aboriginal communities.

*You get a killer and everyone gets a cut of everything, you share it as a family so it feeds everyone*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*When people go out bush they often come back looking healthier. People often go out bush when they don't have money for food from the shop.*

**Health Professional, Katherine region**

*For our clients the number one thing they ask for is transport to go fishing and hunting. That's a barrier...We have a program that does sort of hunting, gathering and bush community access. So we take families out for the day and they get to go hunting and fishing and come back with their spoils and then they get to feed their families for a couple of days. That was something that was told to us 'I'd love to go but no one has a car so I can't go anywhere'.*

**Health Professional, Arnhem Land**

*Without those natural resources and people being able to access those and then without the generosity or that cultural practice of sharing with people there would be so much more food insecurity and governments would be having to set up services to deal with that, a lot more than they are now.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

However it should be acknowledged that traditional foods and hunting is not a practical solution in all cases and greater dependence on bush foods may be pointing to the sheer high cost of living and the fact people on welfare payments are no longer able to afford sufficient amounts of food.

*There is a lot more people going out bush and hunting and using their money in other ways because it's [food at the shop] too expensive.*

---

### Health professional, Arnhem Land

While it was suggested by both community members and service providers that stores could play a role in increasing access to traditional food, especially for elderly, this may not be appropriate for all foods due to the cultural significances regarding the hunting, preparing and cooking of these foods.

The availability of bush foods is definitely restricted by access to vehicles, being physically well enough to go out hunting and collecting. That would be the limitation to access to healthy bush foods.

### Health professional, Arnhem Land

*More bush food in the supermarket. People would buy it and be more healthy.*

### Aboriginal community member, Katherine region

*Buying it from the shop takes out cultural traditions connected to the food. You have to prepare the food the right way.*

### Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region

#### Discussion question:

4. How can organisations and communities support community members to gain greater access to bush foods?
5. How can the availability of bush foods be supported in all regions of the Northern Territory and what should be undertaken to ensure its ongoing accessibility and consumption for future generations?

## Stores

Remote store were the most common topic that was raised in remote community and remote service provider consultations. While not all of this discussion was related to the cost of food in stores, this was the most common issue raised in this setting. In remote communities, participants in the consultations highlighted the important role that stores play in the story of food security. Stores were seen as critical to improving and driving changes to improve food security. This was most often raised through conversations around the cost of food and the affordability for families to purchase healthy food. The role of private stores in communities was a concern as they were seen to be more likely to limit the availability of healthy food within the store and have higher costs of food in remote communities. Some community members felt that privately owned and run stores made communities more food insecure and that these stores failed to provide job opportunities and effectively engage with community. This was supported by Northern Territory Market Basket survey results, which showed private stores to be 13%

---

more expensive than group managed stores<sup>viii</sup>. Privately run stores also limited people's ability to have a say about how a store was run and made it more difficult for community members to raise concerns about the access and availability of healthy food carried by stores<sup>ix</sup>.

Concerns about health and safety risks were raised by community members and highlighted the issue of poorly supported consumer advocacy systems around stores.

*Shops and takeaways sell out of date and old food to people but everyone is too scared to take it back.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

*Lots of store in TC the price isn't shown and the food is old. Drinks are flat, the food is off sometimes.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

Infrastructure, both in stores and in homes, influences what people buy and eat<sup>x</sup>. The major supermarkets were singled out as most likely to set up stores that increase people's purchasing of unhealthy food, whereas remote community stores were often praised for the work undertaken to support healthy food choices. This was limited, however, when competition undermined these initiatives. Community members continually talked about distractions of unhealthy food at the front of the store (usually targeted at children) making it difficult to find and purchase healthy foods. One community found success during the COVID-19 pandemic when children were banned from the store, making it easier to make healthy choices.

*...they're not able to implement some of the strategies because of the competition from other privately owned stores. And those privately owned stores are not there to serve the community, they're there to make a profit.*

**Health Professional, Arnhem Land region**

*It's hard to buy healthy foods at the shops when the unhealthy food is right at the front. Kids see them and want to get the lollies and soft drink... There is a wall of soft drink at the shops that you can't avoid and makes it hard.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

*When you walk into the shop that fried food is right in front and the sandwiches is behind and harder to see.*

---

<sup>viii</sup> NT Market Basket Survey 2019 <https://data.nt.gov.au/dataset/nt-market-basket-survey-2019>

<sup>ix</sup> There four major store structures in the Northern Territory; Group managed stores, Independent community owned stores, private independent stores and supermarket chains.

<sup>x</sup> Monash University, Healthy Stores 2020 <https://www.monash.edu/medicine/healthy-stores-2020>

---

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia.**

Service providers noted that while there had been an increase in the availability of healthy food, particularly in remote stores, at the same time there has been a significant increase in the range of unhealthy foods. A number of remote community stores are working on combating this issue. However, in communities that had more than one store, private stores were seen as inhibitors of healthy promotion practices being undertaken within the community due to the impact this may have on store sales.

*In the remote communities in the region they all have ALPA stores and I know ALPA subsidise the freight so the fresh produce is sold at cost so they obviously have some strategies but I think at [remote community] they're not able to implement some of the strategies because of the competition from other privately owned stores. And those privately owned stores are not there to serve the community they are there to make a profit.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land region**

Store hours were also a major factor that impacted on people's access to food. Community members regularly complained that stores in remote communities closed or failed to open without community consultation or notice and/or had short opening hours, limiting the shopping time available to those community members who work. Participants noted that shopping habits of people in remote communities were different and that some people, particularly those vulnerable to food insecurity, may shop from meal to meal going to the store up to 3-4 times a day. The combination of irregular hours, half-day Saturdays and Sunday closure meant people were at increased risk of going without food and other essential goods for days.

*Shop is closed on the weekend so you have to go all the way into town to buy power. Only one place in town. We asked for another closer to community put it got knocked back.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*Shop manager opens shop on their own time. Sometimes the shop doesn't open for half the day.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*The shop is closed early on Saturday and closed on Sunday so people can't buy food when they need it... We would like the shop open 8am - 8pm like the shops in town so people can go after work.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*Even knowing if the store is open. People are often going to shop twice a day for food and if something happens overnight then the next day the shop isn't open so people have to go without. Even for work events if we want to plan a cooking activity and buy food from the shop and then you drive out from town and then the shop is closed so you have to say 'oh well will have to do*

---

*that tomorrow'. It just adds to the chaos and makes planning impossible. As much as I understand that there is a collectiveness in Aboriginal communities I think closing the shop just pisses everyone off. It's a bit of a weird one.*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

The environment outside the stores also played a key role in peoples' food choices. In the regional centres and urban areas access to healthy food from stores was also impacted by the location and connection of supermarkets to where people live. Those that lived on the fringes of regional centres often relied on smaller stores closer by to access food and so paid a higher price. As mentioned in the earlier '[transport](#)' section, people are also impacted by transport access and the costs associated with this. Built environmental factors were seen as a key issue in all five of the regional centres. It was noted that small stores play a critical essential service ensuring people have easy access to power cards, and sometimes mail, but they also increase access to unhealthy and expensive food.

*Access to food in the town is pretty good through the large food and grocery store but that's in the centre of town so away from that in the smaller stores around town there isn't much choice and the price really jacks up and things are expensive.*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

*[In Darwin] all of the supermarkets are a bit far from where everyone lives. From the town camps they need to travel 5 to 6km to reach any shops and Maccas is just up the road...*

**Health Professional, Darwin Region**

In the literature, this issue is often referred to as 'food deserts' whereby people live in areas with limited access to healthy food. The issue is often punctuated by easier access to unhealthy foods and limited transportation options for vulnerable groups. It's this issue that was continually highlighted by participants in regional centres as having an impact on food choices.

*They don't have food we want like vegetables and fruit...Here in the shop there's hardly no fruit and veggies. You can get coke, hot food (fish and chips), pie, hamburger, tinned meat.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

The majority of community members involved in the consultation sessions stated that they regularly travelled into major regional centres or larger nearby communities in order to find cheaper food and a wider range of products. It was in these stores that people did their large grocery shops often buying two weeks' worth of food. As mentioned in the '[transport](#)' section, pooling of finances was regularly done for these trips to reduce costs and increase the amount of food that can be purchased.

*Lots of people travel to Alice to do their shopping as it's cheaper, better quality and more range.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

This included community members traveling to Alice Springs from the APY lands and the Barkly region which could take up to six hours one way. The long-term cost of these trips, including cost of petrol, wear and tear on cars, lost time for those who do the trip, and social issues related to regional centres, were all

---

discussed as major issues with regularly undertaking these trips. There is a growing number of people doing their shopping online but again, this is limited those who have the means and the knowledge to access these services. Online grocery services also have a limited range they deliver within and require a house number and street address which often Aboriginal communities lack even in urban areas<sup>xi</sup>.

*People aren't always doing their shopping in the community store they're doing it online and getting it sent in. For people who have the financial means and internet access they aren't shopping at the store but if the store had the quality, and price then people would be using the store. Service providers don't shop in the community. It must make people think that the food in the stores is less quality than what you can get in town.*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

*Some people use online shopping but you need to have a computer and know how. I just learnt how to do it but no one shows you how or tell you about it.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

There were a number of key underlying factors that seemed to impact the price, quality and quantity - and therefore people's perception - of the store. These were the size of the store and community, the frequency of deliveries, and whether it was a private or standalone independent store. Those stores in larger communities and with weekly (instead of fortnightly) deliveries were seen as performing better at providing good quality and a range of foods within the store. Comparatively, private stores and standalone independent stores were often seen to not be working in the best interest of the wider community, with a limited range of healthy foods, poorer quality of produce and higher prices.

*Store managed groups they tend to have much better pricing particularly on staples than privately run or independent stores.*

**Health Professional, Central Australia region**

The cost of doing business in remote communities was seen as a major issue affecting store viability with high cost of maintenance, staffing for stores and high cost of freight due to the wear unsealed roads have on trucks. The cost of rent and other operating fees were also seen as additional costs that made balancing health initiatives with profits more difficult in stores.

*These businesses are on the edge of what's possible and in some cases not possible in a business sense. You have directors who have very low numeracy and literacy. They're on the boards of these stores and there's no direct benefit for them, a very sort of placid interest in the store at best.*

**Remote stores, Central Australia region**

In remote communities, alternative models were raised as new ways forward to take some of the pressure off stores. These models would allow stores to provide the essential services that are critical to communities, such as access to power cards, essential food and grocery items, along with working with

---

<sup>xi</sup> [Standing committee on indigenous affairs, 2020, report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities](#)

---

health services to improve the health of community members through public health and health promotion initiatives.

*Even taking a look at the organisation model. What do they stand for? The model of the organisation are we trying to get economic results, are we trying to get health results, what are we trying to do here. I think looking at that could be a good starting point. What are we trying to achieve and does that align with the community.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

In regards to remote Aboriginal communities one service provider noted from the Federal inquiry into remote stores and food security that only a small amount of food out of the national food supply is required to support remote stores<sup>xii</sup>.

*...we know it's only 2% of the food supply in the whole of Australia going to remote communities.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

This was raised in the inquiry by NIAA noting the small size the remote stores play in the larger national food market.

From both the community and service provider consultations, it was clear that stores in remote communities play a critical role in ensuring and improving access to health food. They are also often a community-owned business that reinvests money into communities.

*Most stores are alright. At the end you get money back from your store, back to the community... Make sure people spend their money in community so that the money benefits the community.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*The benefit of having the shop in the community is that there's always that access. So even if there's only \$10 left on their card they can still buy something they don't have to wait for the next payment to go and do a big shop and then hide their food and worry about storing it. Having access to the shop all the time, every day I think alleviates that stress.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

*If you've got people going to another community to do their shopping that's an issue. That's saying I'm not spending money in my own community because it's too expensive and going to drive down the road.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

However, the issues of ownership, management and governance were seen as major areas that required improvement and that without more support around community ownership and governance, stores would continue to be unable to meet communities' needs. From the consultations, the management of

---

<sup>xii</sup> [House of Representatives standing committee on Indigenous affairs Thursday, 11 June 2020.](#)



---

stores under management groups such as ALPA, Mai Wiru and Outback Store improved the stability of stores and price and quality of food due to the increased market power and specialisation of roles within the organisations. This was supported by data from the Northern Territory Market Basket Survey<sup>xiii</sup>.

*You need to have good operating business to be able to have good prices to start with. You need to have good management that know what to do with their stock and how to manage it. You need to have good systems that sit behind that, you need to have good operational process to manage negotiation with suppliers. You need to be able to keep up with your freight companies so you know things are being transported safely so you don't need to write off stock.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

*So what often happens with a lot of those independent stores is they've got a really good manager come in and they'll do really well and then that manager goes for whatever reason, they've done their 2-3 years, and then the next operator who's not that great and everything falls in a heap.*

**Remote stores, Central Australia region**

*The same with a lot of other stuff you need someone who understands the market to make sure they're buying the right product at the right time of year at the right price. At ALPA and Outback you've got people employed to do that, little independents they've got no chance.*

**Remote stores, Northern Territory wide**

However, the balance between management and control of how the business is run, and community ownership was often raised as giving rise to concerns about the blurring of lines between ownership, management and governance of stores and each groups role.

*Outback stores is a service provider and a service provider shouldn't then be telling the directors how to do their own governance and due diligence and make decisions for them.*

**Remote stores, Central Australia region**

But there was strong agreement in both service provider and community member consultations that greater involvement of the community in the stores was a positive thing and will lead to long term improvements in all aspects of store operation.

*We need more community people involved in the store.*

**Aboriginal community members, Central Australia region**

*Why we are where we are and we've run up against it in all its various forms is that owners of stores don't have the skills to understand how the store operates and then don't have the*

---

<sup>xiii</sup> [Northern Territory Government, Department of Health, 2020, Market Basket Survey 2019](#)

---

*confidence to challenge operators and service providers on their store...The best work done [ in the government] had a section of engagement officers and would actually work as an independent work with the directors of stores and would actually go with them along to the meetings on the financials within store and would work alongside them and say you should be asking a question about this or that but that doesn't happen anymore.*

#### **Remote stores, Central Australia region**

All participants that discussed store operations agreed that increased community engagement and ownership with stores lead to better long-term outcomes.

*One of the things I hear is generally the longer you've got store directors the more engaged they are in decision making. It's the same as anything the longer you're on a committee or a board the more you understand the information coming to you and the more you can make informed decisions... where we see some strong decision making coming from those store committees and store boards where they have had some time and they can really understand and ....definitely supporting them with the information that they want at the time is a key. That helps them not only with the business side but they're the ones that come up with the nutrition stuff. They're the ones that say we need to do something about this more than the store manager will. So it's about them having all that information....A store board not getting nutrition information is not getting all the information.*

#### **Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

Those with an understanding of the food and grocery sector discussed the issue of competing on price with the major supermarkets. This is a result of major supermarkets having a national pricing strategy, which effectively means their core range of products are the same price in Alice Springs as they are in Sydney. Due to the size and power of these corporations, those working in the remote stores space felt it was unfair to use them as a benchmark regarding pricing and range of products. Remote service providers were also less likely to use the remote community store for shopping for programs and personal use reducing the amount of money spent in remote store and there turnover.

*I think a lot of providers in community still access a lot of their food from outside of the community. So it became quite apparent during the covid-19 pandemic that their access to food that they usually provide to clients in community became limited and they weren't linked into the store so didn't have processes to access food locally and they were quite reliant on Alice Springs for supplies of food.*

#### **Health Professional, Central Australian region**

##### **Discussion questions**

6. How can communities be supported to ensure they are able to have a significant and meaningful role in the governance and direction of community stores to ensure stores are supporting and delivering on community needs?
7. What measures are necessary to ensure all stores are able to benefit from policy and logistics measures that can reduce the cost and availability of healthy foods within stores?

---

## Food Usability

### Topics:

- **Housing and Infrastructure**
- **Skills and Knowledge**

The ability to safely store and prepare food is critical to people's ability to be food secure. Within the Northern Territory and wider Central Australian region, the quality of housing hardware and infrastructure in remote communities has long been an issue. Having access to the resources to store and prepare healthy food, along with the skills and knowledge to undertake this, were discussed as factors contributing to food insecurity in the NT.

Individual's values was a theme that was raised in both community and service provider consultations as a major factor affecting food choices. Community members talked about individual choice while service providers discussed the need to change people's values. There was often a mis-match between the values that community members held and the priorities the service providers saw. This is not a new issue to food and nutrition, or health generally, but as per all service delivery is important when working with communities to improve the nutritional quality of foods prepared and consumed.

### Housing and Infrastructure

Access to infrastructure to safely store and prepare food at home was raised as an issue in both urban and remote communities. Lack of housing, and appropriate housing, and therefore food storage and preparation infrastructure was universal across all regions and played a significant role in peoples' food choices. Overwhelmingly, service providers saw the lack of infrastructure and housing as the major barrier to people being able to implement healthy behaviours and effectively utilise support and resources provided to them from services.

*People don't have fridges and freezers to keep things in. A lot of people don't have fridges in communities. Some of the food choices are imbedded and some of it's because of infrastructure.*

**Education professional, Katherine region**

*If you've got a family to feed quickly and the powers not on at home and you don't have a fridge at home and you just want to fill up the family you're limited to buying a frozen meals to heat up in the microwave [at the store]. The selection of the frozen meals that are affordable to feed up a family are things like pizzas or pies. If you can buy a frozen pizza cheaper than buying four lean cruise meals or the healthier option then that's what you go for. Those sorts of infrastructure issues play a big part in what people are choosing.*

**Policy officer, Northern Territory wide**

*Nutrition is difficult as it requires...in order to be making healthy decisions in the store and having the time and capacity to be making a healthy meal at home, it's very challenging when you look*

---

*at the fact that most of our community members are living in overcrowded houses and living poor socio-economic circumstances and that they have more pressing issues than health and nutrition.*

**Health professional, Central Australia region**

*If you're not in your own home and don't have a fridge, sometimes the cheapest thing to feed a kid is a bag of chips and some soft drink.*

**Health professional, Darwin region**

The cost and quality of food storage and preparation facilities, along with the cost of power, were seen as inhibiting factors that prevented people from having and using the infrastructure needed to prepare healthy meals. Power was seen as a significant issue in all regions; people regularly reported running out of power and not having any money to purchase a power card to top up their meter.

*Overcrowding means power is a big worry as we use more power meaning more money... The houses are too small for the families. When the houses were fixed up they put in new cupboards and storage which was smaller than before which makes it hard for people to store foods.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*New house cupboards are small you can't fit everything in there.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

People also had to wait long periods of time for issues to be fixed. Community members regularly talked about the need for multiple items to be broken or requiring a number of houses to have issues with infrastructure before responsible organisations would arrange for a tradesperson to come and fix the issue. This often leaves people going months without a functioning oven, hot water or working taps.

*If something in the house breaks like a tap you have to call the shire, who call the plumber in Alice Springs and then you might wait 1 month before it's fixed as it all parts, plumber comes from Alice Springs.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*Some don't have functioning oven or a fridge. Sometimes for up to 3 weeks... People then use family and friends to cook and store food if they don't have working fridge or oven.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

In the urban setting, Aboriginal community members felt that they were regularly disadvantaged in access to housing and so were more likely to spend long periods on housing waitlists, which can be up to eight years. This then had flow on effects to other areas of people's lives like work, health and relationships.

---

*Private landlords won't rent to young people and definitely not Aboriginal people. It means our kids can't find a house for themselves and makes overcrowding a big issue... If people have a house then they can start looking for work but people need resources first to live.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

While a number of community members and service providers discussed the lack of functioning ovens and cooking equipment in households and the need to often cook outside on fires, community members didn't see cooking on fire as a major barrier to food security and more as an example of people's adaptability.

*If you don't have an oven you just cook outside on a fire.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

In areas where there was a lack of housing, service providers saw high levels of homelessness which further restricted people's ability to make healthy choices. Those that were sleeping rough in regional centres also had to contend with harassment from council rangers and emergency services, including removing the food bags stored in trees, putting out or preventing them from using fires and moving them on from using communal barbecues. This often forces homeless people to abandon cooked meals and limits their abilities to consume a healthy balanced diet.

*For homeless people even if they buy food to cook there's nowhere for them to go cook it. There is barbecues in the parks but they're often too shame to go and use them. They're continually getting moved on so even if they started cooking there's always the danger of being moved on... The social side of food is you sit down, you cook it and you eat it but these guys aren't allowed to do that. And when they try to do it they're humbugged by private security, (council) rangers and sometimes even the police. It might do seem like a food security issue but it really is as it impacts on people's ability to cook and eat what they have managed to purchase.*

**Health professional, Darwin region**

Through the consultation process, examples of programs were highlighted as supporting improved infrastructure in housing. These included examples such as Aboriginal organisations and councils supplying fridges and freezers to households. People also discussed programs like Aboriginal environmental health workers who support households to maintain and repair household infrastructure and was mentioned as a way to improve access to food preparation and storage infrastructure.

For the homeless community, programs like Katherine Salvation Army's 'The Hub' were raised as models that are able to provide support and wrap-around services for this community and address some of their food security issues, as well as advocate on their behalf on a number of key issues impacting them.

---

## Skills and Knowledge

Throughout both community and service provider consultations, there was a strong acknowledgement that the level of skills and knowledge around healthy foods and cooking was high amongst community members. Participants talked about issues of income, power and access to healthy foods as the major barriers that prevented people from being able to use the skills and knowledge they had to make healthy meals.

*People's ability to cook is good but getting people to cook at home is hard. People can follow recipes and have the skills... Barriers of having to ensure kitchen equipment and getting the whole family on board particularly if they are cooking for a lot of people. One fella has to cook for 10 plus people all the time which means having the skills and utensils to do that takes a lot more effort.*

**Social services, Katherine region**

This was echoed in community consultations:

*Knowledge is not a big issue but lack of resources to support for people is.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

Community members and service providers identified that while the level of knowledge around healthy food was good, there was an appetite for more education particularly for young people, and to expand people's knowledge of foods that they can use and how to use them.

*We need to know more about the brands. Like home brand it's cheap but is it healthy?*

**Aboriginal community member, Arnhem Land**

Use of the internet to find recipes and to learn to cook meals were raised in multiple community consultations in regional centres. Some community members were confident in their abilities to find and follow recipes using the internet.

*I'd just go onto YouTube and watch a video if I want to know how to cook something.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

However for communities and community groups that don't have good access to the internet or for those who are less computer literate, this may be a limiting factor in their ability to prepare and cook a healthy meal.

Social influences, priorities and motivation were regularly discussed topics around cooking and buying healthy meals. Community members regularly discussed that while people may have the skills and knowledge around healthy food, it was often low on people's priorities and people often lacked the confidence and motivation to implement this into their lives. Interestingly, this topic was much stronger in community consultations than service provider consultations.

*I've seen it on TV some really big people they don't want to eat fatty food and they got the will power to do exercise and they cut down on food levels. I tried that for myself but it's really hard. I have that battle in my mind that I want to have that taste of that fat again.*

---

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*Maybe too lazy to cook at home or had no breakfast and go to town to get a feed... People can cook and cook healthy food but the food at the shop makes it hard.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

Participants expressed that many people were largely reliant on takeaway or community services for a lot of the food they ate as they seek convenience due to the barriers associated with procuring, storing and cooking food, and a lower priority placed on preparing meals from scratch. Therefore, improving the quality of food that people access through these services through increased skills and knowledge of staff was suggested as a means to support improved food security and health outcomes.

*People like to buy takeaway as it's easier for you but it's really expensive and people spend all their money on takeaway so there isn't any money for other food.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*And then you have the mental health side of things that people often just don't have the drive to cook anything and it's easier to just go down to the store and buy food that's poor nutritionally and they can only afford one meal a day because it's \$18 for a takeaway meal.*

**Social services, Arnhem Land region**

*[Areas that need improvement] I still think the takeaway, I guess it's the choices that they're making the fried foods and things, but I still feel that good foods like for the little kids should be more available. So we need to do a bit more work around that and a bit more promotion. Because people rely heavily on takeaway for their food.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land region**

Service providers and community members both discussed the need for greater connection between recipes and cooking classes run by a range of services, including youth services, health, aged care and schools and the food available within stores.

*We can have the information and education but if it's not supported by the store where you live it's only half the job.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia**

---

## Food Availability

### Topics:

- Quality
- Quantity
- Growing Food

### Quality

Community members were very aware of the quality of the food within their stores and this was a major factor that drove peoples' shopping habits and food choices. Along with lower priced food, Aboriginal community members associated town supermarkets with better quality of food. This meant people were more willing to travel to get better quality. The quality of food in remote communities was raised as a major factor in why people felt their store was not meeting community's needs. Service providers, particular those who worked in the retail and horticulture areas, linked the issue of quality with infrastructure, including roads and storage in stores and at home, and the long supply chains to get food out to remote communities.

*The quality and range of food at the shop is really poor.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

*Lots of people travel to Alice to do their shopping as it's cheaper, better quality and more range.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

Quality of food was regularly reported as an issue during consultations with Aboriginal community members. This is a major driving factor around food choice, particularly for fresh food, as better quality fresh food was more likely to last a longer period of time once it got home and stored in a fridge.

*[At the community shop] Foods not fresh. Keep it in the fridge for 2 days and it goes bad... People get upset cos wasting money on it, spend money for nothing.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*Quality of food in community shop is poor and get mouldy quickly... Veggies and salad go off quickly and meat will go off and be smelly and sour*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region.**

One service provider questioned if the quality of the food was as bad as reported, suggesting there is a need to objectively assess which foods people are talking about

*The quality of the fruit and veg is so much better than what it used to be.... And that's supported by the market basket survey in that the quality of the fruit and veg isn't as bad as people say it is out in remote. Most of it is good or fair quality, is what it comes back as, yet constantly people say 'yeah the quality of fruit and veg food is poor' and I often don't know what they are talking*



---

*about because you look at the data and the quality is probably reasonable. Are they talking about poor quality meats?*

**Policy officer, Northern Territory wide**

However, the majority of those interviewed stated while the quality of the food might be acceptable in the first few days of a delivery, it was in the later part of the week or second week between deliveries; once this food was taken home, the quality dropped quickly. This suggested short shelf-life was the driving factor behind poor quality. Meat in particular was raised as an issue, particularly in remote communities where frozen meat is the main source of meat sold by stores.

*The time between deliveries makes a huge difference to the quality of the food. I've seen it when it's running really low and there's not many options. Two weeks is a long time between fresh food deliveries and food's going off by that point and therefore it's not there if people haven't already bought it.*

**Social services, Central Australia**

*Everything's a good week or so older when it gets here than it is anywhere else and so your fruit and vegetables deteriorate very quickly.*

**Social services, Arnhem Land**

For stores, the quality of the food was heavily impacted by the freight of it. Rough roads, poor handling of food and the temperatures management of food from distribution centres to remote communities were major factors impacting the quality of the food. One participant working in the remote stores sector provided this example:

*All your leafy products they don't like 0-2degrees. So particularly in the build-up when it's hot all the road freight will set their temperatures really low so all your leafy greens by the time they get there look all mouldy and slimy... chiller trucks they put a partition so they run half of them at -20 and put a partition in and run the other half supposedly at +2. Whatever's hard up against that partition freezes. If they put fruit and veg hard up against that partition we end up with frozen fruit and veg and we've got to throw it out. Again if the contract is big enough they invest to make sure it doesn't happen.*

**Remote store, Northern Territory wide**

*It's the way it's freighted out and the way to be handled, and again I'm getting back to the freight, I think that's got a lot to do with it (spoiling quickly). It's the timeline getting it out there. That's the issue... We've been sending some food packs out and it doesn't always go out on time and it doesn't always go in the part of the truck it should be in. It's really simple stuff but it has a great effect.*

**Horticulture, Katherine region**

---

Service providers working in the remote stores sector discussed the impact of greater buying power, which allows for improved outcomes in freight contracts, along with improved quality and standards of transporting of food leading to improved quality in remote stores.

*When I was at [stores group] we were servicing some remote communities and there was only one trucking company that went out there so the quality of the food getting out there was really bad, covered in dirt, partly defrosted, the fruit and vegetables were rubbish. As soon as you've got a big contract all that disappears.*

#### **Remote store, Northern Territory wide**

However, even the large supermarkets in the Northern Territory don't seem to be immune from the short shelf-life and freshness of fruits and vegetables, which was widely agreed as being the result of the distance food travels to reach consumers.

*But in the NT even in the bigger supermarkets, which are way better than any of the community shops, still the quality by the end of the week was pretty sad. Even though a lot of it was kept in the fridge it was still pretty sad.*

#### **Education professional, Katherine region**

Greater local production was the major strategy mentioned to address the issue of quality of food in both regional centres and remote communities. The feedback regarding local food production is discussed in the '[Growing food](#)' section of this paper.

### **Quantity**

The range of food in stores has increased over the last 20 years particularly in remote communities and this is reflected in the Northern Territory Market Basket Survey with a 43% increase in fruits and vegetables available in stores<sup>xiv</sup>. However some service providers raised concerns that while this is the case they have seen an even bigger increase in the availability of unhealthy foods.

*I think the shops are getting better and recently the shops have changed and putting the healthy foods at the front and the sugar loaded things down the back or the side.*

#### **Health professional, Arnhem Land region**

*There has been a growth in the amount of food stocked in stores but while some of this is healthy food the majority of it is high fat, high sugar, high salt foods.*

*It's easy to show if you replace soft drink with diet soft drink there will be a decrease in sugar from drinks. That's not the issue.... Most of the other changes dominated any improvement in fruit and veg with the increased turnover of junk. Particularly pizza, soft drinks, ready meals, fried foods those sort of things. You can't just measure fruit and veg and saying isn't this good.*

#### **Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

---

<sup>xiv</sup> [Northern Territory Government, Department of Health, 2020, Market Basket Survey 2019](#)

---

This is supported by research on the APY lands which found a 70% increase in floor space of unhealthy foods<sup>xv</sup>. In the recent inquiry into food security and remote stores the availability and quantity of unhealthy food was regularly raised. Particular issues such as stores rebates were seen as strong drivers of increased amounts of unhealthy foods in stores<sup>xvi</sup>. Rebates are payments made by manufacturers or wholesalers to stores to stock particular quantities of products. Participants discussed the issue of not focusing on increased supply and greater access to food alone. An example of this was the single focus on increased food availability through remote bakeries which were previously established in remote communities and criticised for selling unhealthy items and thus posing an increased risk of contributing to greater health issues<sup>xvii</sup>.

Those living in remote communities often commented that they regularly travelled into town to access a wider range of food. While this was often driven by price, some did comment on the lack of range within stores, and the desire for particular products for health reasons were motivating factors on the decision to travel long distances to access a greater quantity of food.

As mentioned earlier under '[Stores](#)', weather was also discussed as a factor that impacted on the availability of healthy foods in remote communities, and even in some regional centres. Wet weather was a key issue in all regions from the APY lands to the Tiwi Islands that could lead to restricted availability of healthy foods in communities. Smaller stores reportedly had limited capacity to store food for extended periods of time when necessary.

When community members were asked what they would like to see changed around the food environment in their communities, remote community members regularly talked about stores evolving to cater for a bigger range of items.

## Growing foods

The topic of community gardens was regularly raised in both community and service provider consultations, however there were mixed views on how effective they are at alleviating food insecurity. While service providers were more sceptical of the sustainability and therefore long-term benefits of these initiatives, community members regularly discussed the need for greater food production in or near communities and generally supported more locally-grown food. Community members saw greater production of food in or near communities as a key strategy to address food insecurity in their communities, by improving the quality of food available, lowering the price of healthy food, increasing access to healthy food and creating job opportunities for community members.

*We should be growing more food locally like the old days. Growing all the vegetables in the community... Big farm growing food and giving people jobs.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

---

<sup>xv</sup> Lee, A, Rainow, S, Tregenza, J, Tregenza, L, Balmer, L, Bryce, S, Paddy, M, Sheard, J & Schomburgk, D 2016, 'Nutrition in remote Aboriginal communities: lessons from Mai Wiru and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands', Australian & New Zealand Journal of Public Health, vol. 40, pp. 81–88,

<sup>xvi</sup> [House of Representatives standing committee on Indigenous affairs Thursday, 11 June 2020.](#)

<sup>xvii</sup> [House of Representatives Standing Committee of Indigenous Affairs, Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities, Submission :National Indigenous Australians Agency 2020](#)

---

*Communities growing their food in their community is what we want. Then you don't need to go to the shop and buy expensive food... Like the mission orchards, it was huge, growing your own food. Some days there was a market day and fruit and veg was cheap. We should start again and there will be jobs for young people.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*There are some new programs with CDP where they are growing food locally and stocking it in stores and it means this food is fresh and lasts longer. It's a great example of locally grown food and the profit goes back into the local region.*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

*I think where we're going to make the most change is in that education and training. The importance of having food security, having good nutrition. The [community gardens] are the supply but they are not the answer. Unless the community really take the garden on and what to build their own market garden.*

**Horticulture, Katherine region**

Increased local production was also seen as a possible way to improve the quality of fruit and vegetables in NT stores and supermarkets.

*It's pretty critical going forward that fresh produce in any shape or form being readily available and being fresh. It's definitely about shortening that supply chain and by shortening the supply chain you're able to do it more affordably because you're eliminating those freight costs.*

**Horticulture, Katherine region**

However, those who worked in retail were less convinced that greater local production would see the produce stay within the Territory, as producers seek bigger markets and are attracted to sending their produce through markets in Adelaide and the east coast. Likewise retailers seeking consistent supply and quality find it preferable to use the same large markets to buy through.

*I don't think the cost of freight north is necessarily why they send it down south. They send it down south because you've got access to places like Adelaide markets.*

**Remote stores, Northern Territory wide**

Over the last 20 years there has been variable success in the growing of food in or near communities. While in more recent times, programs like Food Ladders greenhouses in Katherine and Tennant Creek, Eon Foundation and ALEC community gardens in Katherine and Central Australia regions and Centrefarms Work Experience Program (WEP) in Ali Curung, a horticulture training program for Aboriginal youth, have shown some success. However, the issue of sustainability persists. An example is the greenhouse in Ramingining which, according to consultation participants, is no longer operational despite periods of success.

---

Previous work has been undertaken in this space, including work in Central Australia through the ‘Growing to grow’ workshop. The issue of limited local production of food within the NT has been a continual theme in previous work undertaken in this area, going back to the NT government review of food security and supply issues in 1999<sup>xviii</sup>.

#### Discussion question

8. How can models of local food production be developed and who is best placed to collaborate and lead these initiative to ensure sustainability and strong community engagement?

## Services and programs

As has been highlighted above, the analysis of both community and service provider consultations found a shared view that food security issues and potential measures to address issues require a whole of community approach.

Outside of stores, there are a number of services that participants discussed as being food providers in communities. This included aged care meals on wheels programs, school nutrition programs, youth programs, CDP and child care. These were all raised as critical sources of food for Aboriginal communities, particularly for those who are vulnerable to food insecurity.

*You’ll find that most programs that are funded to work with communities have an element of food because it’s seen as the only way of getting people to attend.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

Some programs like Families as First Teachers (FaFT) programs and youth programs contained a more hands on approach involving the families and youth in the preparation of meals and feeding, but this was often stated as being person-dependent. This was also the case in other programs that provide food, where limited resources and guidelines to provide high quality and appropriate food. While not discussed earlier, the quality of food from service providers was identified as a major issue and potentially an influencing factor on peoples’ food choices and eating behaviours

*CDPs often provide meals if people attend the programs but then we’re on a budget so we would provide the white bread, the sugar, tea and 2 minute noodles. So there are probably programs like that that the food provided is not the healthiest available.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

*When I go to one particular CDP they are buying cake, cordial and biscuits to eat while they are there. There needs to be more rules around when you are working with vulnerable groups about what are the right foods to provide and not just giving them white bread. It’s dependent on who*

---

<sup>xviii</sup> Northern Territory Government, Select Committee on Territory Food Prices, 1999, <https://parliament.nt.gov.au/committees/previous/territory-food-prices>

---

*the supervisor is if they provide unhealthy foods. There are a lot of people in these programs so it could have a big impact.*

**Health professional, Katherine region**

Regular sausages sizzles were raised specifically by service providers as actually becoming a major part of people's diets due to the regular nature of them. This has the potential to not only impact people's health but also people's perceptions of good food choices.

*It's the first thing organisations do they'll be 'oh what will we do. We'll put on a community barbeque to get people there'. It drives me crazy but they're the sorts of things people think we're going to get fed and they could go a whole week getting fed sausages somewhere.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

The delivery of services was also discussed with some service providers questioning the benefit of programs that provided food without community involvement and the reliance of individual knowledge and motivation to ensure healthy food is provided.

*They'll be different programs and different people who do it differently. The way we did it the kids had to help cook it, do the chop and learn about the ingredients going in it and so it's like a big team activity and at the end of it they sit down with a bowl and they know what went into it. But then you will get people or programs that just put on food for kids consistently and I think that's doing more harm than good.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

Public health nutritionists within health services were seen as a key driver of food security-related programs at a local level, and the major source of information about food and nutrition programs and community needs for both communities and services. It was commented by some service providers that this workforce is getting smaller, particularly in remote communities. Public health nutrition roles were seen as critical in ensuring a strong and consistent message regarding healthy eating. Others commented that while health services, and particularly nutrition positions, were seen as being important in addressing food security, the services and roles were often limited in what they could do due to the type of service delivery, funding and skill set required to address the issue holistically.

Child and maternal health programs were also regularly identified as services delivering nutrition education to families and providing nutrition support. These programs were often run with or supported by public health nutritionists. In areas where specific nutrition services were lacking, services expressed the need for education resources and support materials that are currently not available.

Re-development of a community nutrition workforce was also seen as a key step in supporting future programs and public health nutrition messages that address food and nutrition issues in Aboriginal communities.

*Years ago we used to have the community nutritionist and you'd work with them as part of the strong women program but a lot of those services don't seem to be operational as much anymore.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

*We would love to see again more training for Aboriginal staff in Nutrition. That's something that we have identified that we would love to increase our Yolngu workforce on Nutrition.*

---

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

While these programs have existed in the past in various regions they have often been project roles within programs such as 'Building better communities' and 'Healthy lifestyles' program. Through the consultation sessions, it was identified that 'Tackling Indigenous Smoking' workers and 'Strong Women, Strong Culture, Strong Baby' program workers - whilst not having nutrition as their core or sole business and built into the programs - were regularly supporting nutrition messages in communities.

In areas where strong collaboration between health services, other service providers and the community were reported, such as Katherine KISP program, improved outcomes were noted. Overwhelmingly, participants wanted to see more collaboration between sectors to work with communities to achieve the community's overarching goals.

*We need to go back to having programs that look after families. At the moment we've got programs that have split up families into body parts, women's programs, and men's program, ears and eyes but what about families because as a family we can look at what we are eating... It's a whole of government. We can't have health doing their part, education doing their part, housing doing their part we need to come together and support that family. Why do we all have different action plans, we've got the same consumer.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

*Stores and health services need to work together to make sure people are eating the right foods.*

**Aboriginal community member, Katherine region**

*Everyone is doing their piece. The schools are doing their bit, the childcare is doing their thing. Everyone is trying but I think that collective strategy together would be really beneficial. Because I think everyone is doing something different. I think if we all could just reiterate the same messages then I think we might just actually get somewhere.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

Health service providers felt that while they may often be the one raising the issue, they are often left feeling powerless with little ability to change major barriers to food security.

*I think that's one of the barriers to deal with it. It needs more than health to be concerned about it. It often comes back that this is a health issue, well it's not a health issue it's a whole of Government issue. I think that's one of the big barriers is that it hasn't had that support across the government to try and do something about it. Health has always gone 'this is an issue' but there's nothing we can do about it.*

**Policy officer, Northern Territory wide**

Initiatives such as 'Eat Well Tasmania' and Western Australia Council of Social Services (WACOSS) food relief framework were raised as examples of collaboration and coordination between sectors to address food security issues. The need to get the right level of organisational representation and at what level of



---

government (territory wide, regional or community) was also discussed, along with the need for a position designated to lead the collaboration.

*I think if you were to set up something like that it would probably need to sit with the local government or with the health service but then people might think it's all about health where if it's with the local government then they can bring all the services together. Each community has to have a community plan so if you are bringing people together it needs to sit within an existing governance structure and so it could be link to the community plan. You know how some councils have health and wellbeing plans. So then if you go to the next level to the region it's linked.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

*You need a champion to run the coordination...Definitely having leading Aboriginal organisations lead the way as they have the influence.*

**Health professional, Arnhem Land**

*(Previous working groups) It was probability too low of a level of representation as in from government reps from there to lead to much change so I think it needs to be quiet high level.*

**Policy officer, Northern Territory wide**

*It needs funding for a position to drive it because I guess what we've seen is even for the local food security working group it relies on heavily on one or two members and then a lot of people fall off the bandwagon. It's such a big and complex problem that it can't just fall under the banner of peoples day to day work. It needs to be something that is funded to be coordinated and then that way there is someone who is there to push the work and drive the work and get information from different sectors but whose core business is not to do that.*

**Health professional, Central Australia region**

Service providers also felt that collaboration and sharing of information could also support improved intervention development.

*I think one of the key things I hear from organisations is wanting the information or wanting the data. So the data could be community nutrition reports out of stores, it could be local health data. For the community nutrition report, it could be to see where the best ways for us to intervene and if we intervene how that works. The local health data is not necessarily tracking intervention but understanding what are the problems. There are lots of people, especially stores groups that would love to be seeing that and involved in the discussion of that.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

Long term people felt that through working together with strong leadership, food security issues could be better addressed. Service providers especially felt the focus needed to be on long-term social determinants of health, driven through community engagement and consultation in order to see effective outcomes.

*I guess the biggest thing is the need to be taking community members with you. It's all very well for us white people to identify the problems and come up with a whole pile of solutions but it's*



---

*never going to work unless it's led by the community and you've got strong community leaders doing it....The only way you can do that effectively is community out sitting under a tree and talking to elders and finding out what it is they think and what it is they want.*

**Social services, Arnhem Land**

**Discussion questions:**

9. How can we support better health and nutrition outcomes for people receiving food through services?
10. How can we increase the level of nutrition resources and support in Aboriginal communities?
11. What would a successful collaborative, integrated and sustainable approach to food security by services look like and need?

### Emergency food relief

While it is not the intention of this project to focus on the emergency food response to food security. It clearly plays a key role in the management and support of people experiencing food insecurity to provide immediate, short-term support while determinants of food security are not being addressed.

Both Aboriginal community members and service providers - when asked what people do to cope with running out of food - overwhelmingly discussed the use of family support networks. Family support was seen as critical to those experiencing food insecurity and was always seen as the first response to those in need.

*People will share with families. Both ways. People have been sharing for a long time ago. That's our way. People go to family members in the morning and say 'I don't have any food' and we share.*

**Aboriginal community member, Central Australia region**

Bush foods were another common measure used by communities, however as mentioned above, this also often relied on family to support access to a vehicle, petrol and, if available, a gun.

*Aboriginal people share. We Share food, share guns to go hunting and cars.*

**Aboriginal community member, Barkly region**

There is also a significant amount of informal emergency relief occurring in Aboriginal communities. This often comes from direct food handouts or financial assistance from organisations who don't necessarily have emergency relief funding or programs within the organisation such as health service, youth services, stores, women's services and schools.

---

*Some stores kind of provide [food relief] as well whether you call it a benevolent fund or they call it vouchers. So I know in some communities if they know a particular family is in trouble they give them vouchers and they can use them in the store.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

Other non-regular food supports mentioned through community and service provider consultation were leftover foods from community events or services programs. While more regular support, as discussed earlier, is provided through school nutrition programs, aged care and childcares were also discussed as regular services vulnerable groups use to ensure they have access to regular meals. The size and coverage of this informal emergency food relief and food service is not fully known and should be considered before any expansion of new services provided to vulnerable groups.

The awareness of which organisations or agencies provide emergency food relief in remote communities was particularly limited and often relied on relationships, service engagement and word of mouth. In regional centres, the use of support services was much more common and well utilised, however family was still the first point of support for most people when available.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, emergency food relief services, in partnership with food and grocery retailers, played an ever bigger role in increasing the supply of emergency food relief across the whole of the Northern Territory. This increase in the role of larger relief services, like Foodbank, in the context of a pandemic situation was seen as a benefit as it increased access and lowered costs for social services.

However, there was also a real concern that expanding emergency food relief-focused service providers into remote communities could affect the viability of remote stores and prevent the issue of food insecurity truly being addressed.

*I think one of the biggest risks... is if they were to start operating in remote communities there is a huge risk to the viability of the store then you've got a huge food security risk. So the thing you were trying to address is bigger...and particularly in the Northern Territory all of those are Aboriginal corporations that you are talking about.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

*I do think introducing some kind of hand out service is going to have its unintended consequences so it needs to have a lot of consultation with communities. Even though it might be put in place as a stop gap measure it will become the solution. Then the upstream problem will continue but not be addressed. Like high costs of food.*

**Researcher, Northern Territory wide**

Also for consideration is whether an increase in large emergency food relief services would lead to increased access to unhealthy foods to a population who are already at increased risk of nutrition related chronic diseases.

---

#### Discussion questions:

12. How can both formal and informal food relief systems be supported to ensure a collaborative, integrated and health supporting approach in the Northern Territory?

## Key Findings

The results from the community and service provider consultation confirmed the key aspects found with the review of the literature undertaken in 2020. The results of the consultation found that there were a number of key factors, particularly income, that impact on all aspects of food security in Aboriginal communities in both remote and urban setting. However there was some level of disagreement, particularly within the service provider interviews, about the role stores play and the future direction of stores in remote communities and the impact that skills and knowledge have on individuals' food security. Through the consultation process key strengths, issues and opportunities were identified.

#### Strengths:

- Access to traditional foods and the knowledge of how to find and prepare these foods was seen as an important reason for communities having food security and a critical way that communities ensure all family members have sufficient food particularly high quality protein sources.
- Family supports and networks play a critical role in supporting those community members experiencing food insecurity and preventing family members from going without food.

#### Issues:

- Income was central to a number of barriers and issues raised by both service providers and Aboriginal community members. The lack of jobs and level of Centrelink payments were seen to negatively impact purchasing habits, access to infrastructure, reliable power and transport.
- Poor infrastructure in regards to housing and transport were central to the level of food insecurity people saw in communities. The issues of infrastructure was strongly connected to income with the two working together to make people more food insecure. Transport infrastructure also impacted on the quantity and quality of healthy food for household and stores.
- Poorer outcomes are seen in remote communities and regional centers where there is little engagement and involvement of Aboriginal community members in the stores.

#### Opportunities:

- Community members identified greater job opportunities were needed to ensure people could support their families to access more food by having a sufficient income to meet the high cost of food. Job opportunities were identified in all the major areas required to address food insecurity.
- Both community members and service providers discussed the need for increased production of food locally. This was at a local level within communities and more broadly across the Northern Territory and wider Central Australian region as a whole.
- An improvement in transport infrastructure particularly roads would likely reduce the cost of food getting out to communities.

- 
- Greater participation of community members in the governance and operation of stores can lead to improvements in how stores meet community needs and the quantity and quality of healthy food.

## Conclusion

The findings from the Aboriginal community and service provider consultations show that food security issues have an impact on all areas of peoples' lives. Addressing these issues will require the collaboration and coordination of all sectors working with Aboriginal communities, and empowering Aboriginal communities themselves. There were no major differences in the issues and barriers impacting on people's food security across the regions, with consistent themes around inadequate income and high costs of living being the most common issues raised during both community and service provider consultations. There were some differences seen between people living in regional centres and remote community, where in regional centres the affordability of food was seen as a lesser determinant of food insecurity but access to transport, social issues such as alcohol and overall cost of living combined with low incomes reported as major factors. Systematic issues in both the welfare system and job opportunities were raised as areas that if addressed could lead to major improvement in community food security.

People living in both remote and regional centres felt family played a key role in supporting each other's food security along with greater access to bush foods. This aligns strongly with the previously developed definition of food security by Menzies in the Good Food Systems project. More job opportunities, supported through training and mentorship, was also a key priority that participants felt would ensure greater food security in Aboriginal communities. Job opportunities for community members were raised in conversations regarding food affordability, stores, food production and gardens, traditional and bush foods and service delivery.

It was clear from the consultations that food security was strongly connected to a wide range of socio-economic factors that are shared with a number of other key priority areas in Aboriginal communities. By working with communities to support greater job opportunities, improved housing, better transport infrastructure and greater access to cultural activities would not only improve food security of communities but also improve other areas including mental health, chronic disease and child development. These social determinates of health have long been recognised as being critical to improving outcomes for all communities. Participant felt that with greater coordination between services issues could be addressed more effectively and sustainably.

While the consultation process revealed the major driving factors behind food security what was less clear is how communities and services might work together to address these issues. This is the first time from our knowledge that this level of community consultation on food security in the Northern Territory has been undertaken. From this point, the work undertaken so far as part of this Food Summit Project will be used to inform and develop priorities for a Food Summit to be held in Alice Springs in 2021. Through the literature review around food security combined with the service provider and community consultations, priority areas for the agenda have been set for the Summit. It is hoped that through the

---

Summit, Aboriginal communities and services who work with and support them can develop recommendations about how best to address issues impacting food security.

## References

1. McKay, F.H, Haines, B.C, & Dunn, M. 2019. 'Measuring and understanding food insecurity in Australia: A systematic review'. International journal of environmental research and public health, vol 16, no 476
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2017. 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2017 Report: Northern Territory'. Cat. no. IHW 186. Canberra: AIHW.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) .2016. 'Australian Burden of Disease Study: Impact and Causes of Illness and Death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: 2011. Australian Burden of Disease Study Series No.: 6.
4. Lee, A, & Ride, K. 2018. Review of programs and services to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition and food security. Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin. Vol 18 No 4
5. Menzies school of health research. 2016. Developing a good food system in your community, Information sheet 1, Good food systems overview. Darwin, Australia
6. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2015. 'Food security, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: Nutrition Results - Food and Nutrients, 2012-13'. Australian Government
7. Lee, A 2016, 'Closing the Nutrition Gap in Indigenous Health Disadvantage', Nutridate, vol. 27, no. 3, p. 3,
8. Lee. A & Ride. K. 2018. Review of nutrition among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin Vol.18, no. 1.
9. Brook, F. 2016. 'Food security and health in rural and remote Australia'. National Rural health Alliance. Rural industries research and development corporation No 16/053.
10. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: Nutrition Results - Food and Nutrients, 2012-13, Accessed from <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4727.0.55.005main+features12012-13>
11. NT Health, Strategy Policy and Planning. 2020. 'Northern Territory Market Basket Survey 2019'. Northern Territory Department of Health, Northern Territory Government.
12. Lewis, M & Lee, A, 2016, Costing 'healthy food baskets in Australia- a systematic review of food price and affordability monitoring tools, protocols and methods, Public health Nutrition, Accessed from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/public-health-nutrition/article/costing-healthy-food-baskets-in-australia-a-systematic-review-of-food-price-and-affordability-monitoring-tools-protocols-and-methods/AA7BC5E76FAC8E81703BFC186FAF4698/core-reader>
13. Lee, A, Rainow, S, Tregenza, J, Tregenza, L, Balmer, L, Bryce, S, Paddy, M, Sheard, J & Schomburgk, D 2016, 'Nutrition in remote Aboriginal communities: lessons from Mai Wiru and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands', Australian & New Zealand Journal of Public Health, vol. 40, pp. 81–88,
14. Markham, F & Biddle, N. 2018. 'Income, Poverty and Inequality'. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, census paper 2.
15. Li, L, & O'Neil, L, 2018, Mothers and babies 2015: Northern Territory midwives collection, Northern Territory Department of Health, Darwin
16. Department of health, 2018, Healthy under 5 kids program growth and nutritional report: NT annual report 2017, Northern Territory Government, accessed from <https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjspui/handle/10137/7523>

---

## Appendix: Previous report recommendations

### Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, 2020

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee recommends that the Treasurer direct the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to undertake an enhanced market study into food and grocery prices in remote community stores. This study should make recommendations about how to increase competition in remote areas and put downward pressure on food prices.

The study should also identify better complaints handling mechanisms for people in remote communities, any changes to the consumer protection laws that might need to be made to address price gouging in these communities, which the current laws do not address, and a consideration of the impact, if any, of rebates.

The study should also recommend ways in which remote community members can be better informed of their rights as consumers, especially the right to make complaints.

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a real-time price monitoring and disclosure mechanism through a point of sale data system across all remote community stores. Such a system should allow for real time information about changes in price and patterns of consumption and supply. The price monitoring system should be reported and made publicly available by the NIAA.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government investigate the need for upgrading the infrastructure and shipping lanes in the Torres Strait and coastal areas of the Northern Territory, and road infrastructure into remote communities, to improve the supply of food to remote First Nations communities.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government encourage the establishment of more local distribution centres by wholesalers in major regional centres closer to remote communities.

**Recommendation 5:** The Committee recommends that an independent review of the outcomes and quality of governance training conducted by ORIC be undertaken so that in future training be available in language, and that evidence be collected that those who have completed the training actually understand their duties and obligations as directors.

---

Completion of initial governance training and some level of continuing professional development for directors and staff should also become part of the national licensing scheme.

**Recommendation 6:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government institute a national scheme of licensing and inspection of remote community stores.

**Recommendation 7:** The Committee recommends that the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012 be amended to remove the requirement that stores be given notice before inspections.

**Recommendation 8:** The Committee recommends that remote stores provide material to inform communities on their use of rebates.

**Recommendation 9:** The Committee recommends as a means of applying competitive pressure that at the expiration of store management contracts, new contracts should ideally be open to competitive tender.

**Recommendation 10:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in partnership with the States and Territories and First Nations people, develop a strategy for food security and nutrition for remote First Nations communities.

**Recommendation 11:** The Committee recommends that the Food Security Working Group that was established during the COVID-19 pandemic be maintained and tasked with:

- Identifying improvements to the logistics of food and grocery supply into remote communities.
- Assessing the viability of warehousing greater volumes of food and groceries in more remote parts of the supply chain.
- Identifying ways to improve the replenishment cycle of food and groceries in remote community stores.
- Ensuring food supply during pandemics, natural disasters and seasonal changes.
- Identifying ways which the major supermarket chains can help play a role in driving down food prices and guaranteeing supply for remote communities.
- Identifying ways in which Outback Stores might assist independent community stores with the supply of food and grocery stock.

**Recommendation 12:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government support local food production in remote communities to meet food safety standards and other regulations in order to encourage the greater use of locally sourced food.

**Recommendation 13:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce a remote community competitive grants program, with a focus on:

- Access and continuity of power.
- Improving cold and dry storage in communities.
- Promoting and supporting local food production schemes such as mobile abattoirs, fishing enterprises and community gardens.

**Recommendation 14:** The Committee recommends that community stores be eligible to access and apply for any grants that might be available to other essential services in remote communities.

**Recommendation 15:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consult with the relevant State and Territory Government agencies to develop solutions to deliver reliable electricity to remote communities

---

**Recommendation 16:** The Committee recommends that the NIAA consult with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of town camps can receive food deliveries from supermarkets in their vicinity.

---

## Food Security and Health in Rural and Remote Australia, the National Rural Health Alliance, 2016

**Recommendations 1.** A National Food Security Strategy developed and managed jointly by the Departments responsible for health, agriculture and natural resources.

**Recommendations 2.** A National Food Security Strategy that includes an appropriately funded research agenda that addresses:

- Economic research into the cost of food insecurity in Australia today and modelling the benefits of different policy interventions.
- Agricultural research into improved productivity and increased yields, improved pest and weed management, better use of water resources and development of crops that adapt to variable climatic conditions.
- Innovative approaches to addressing food insecurity and translation of successful models into different community settings.
- Longitudinal research on the effect of food insecurity on children over the life course.
- Regular communication of the range and status of research projects and emerging issues in food security research.

**Recommendations 3.** A review of the adequacy of statistical collections measuring food insecurity in Australia by Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

**Recommendations 4.** Adjustment of sampling methodologies for surveys measuring food security in Australia to ensure data from remote and very remote participants is collected for analysis and reporting. Additional questions could be included to improve the sensitivity of measures of food security.

**Recommendations 5.** The annual conduct and reporting of a National Healthy Basket Survey, with results analysed by remoteness area. The foods included should reflect the needs of nursing mothers and children aged up to 3 years of age.

**Recommendations 6.** The inclusion of food security in national policy discussions about tax, the environment, trade and income support.

**Recommendations 7.** The development of policies addressing food insecurity that consider and respond to both its causes and effects.

**Recommendations 8.** Reporting on national rates of food security coordinated by a single agency, working with all jurisdictions.



---

**Recommendations 9.** Promoting food security as part of a coordinated national approach to addressing poverty and inequality.

**Recommendations 10.** Making available small start-up grants (e.g. up to \$5000) to support local community action to address food insecurity. Activities funded could include development of a local community garden and/or kitchen, establishing a local farmers' market, and establishing a community cooperative to support the sale of locally grown produce.

**Recommendations 11.** Should subsidisation of healthy foods be considered, options to fund the subsidy could be developed by an independent agency, such as the Productivity Commission, and may include consideration of a 'Healthy food levy' applied to energy-dense foods to support the distribution of healthy foods into rural and remote communities.

**Recommendations 12.** Recognising that not-for-profit and charitable food aid is one approach

---

## AMSANT Fresh Food Summit, 2010

**Recommendation 1:** That AMSANT, representing comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector, support the work of Remote Indigenous Gardens Network, and promotes its extension into the Northern Territory.

**Recommendation 2:** That, given the important role of family, community and market gardens in

- a) Supply fresh food to families communities;
- b) Promoting health and well-being for participants; and
- c) Job creation

The comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector be encouraged to work with existing and potential family, community and market gardens, including in supporting their growth, expansion and sustainability.

**Recommendation 3:** That the comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health care sector supports the further evaluation of family, community and market gardens with an emphasis on the health and social benefits to individuals, families and communities.

**Recommendation 4:** That AMSANT, representing Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector, supports urgent action in investigating the development of food labelling mechanisms that will inform, educate and promote the consumption of healthy foods, using effective cultural social marketing.

**Recommendation 5:** That AMSANT, representing Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector, supports the initiatives of Centrefarm in creating viable Aboriginal remote area food production enterprises. AMSANT notes that it provides considerable opportunities to stay on our land, to work our land in supplying our community with fresh foods and to develop a sustainable horticultural industry that works closely with Aboriginal health services and provide a positive step in closing the gap and an alternative to welfare economy.

---

**Recommendation 6:** That AMSANT works with Centrefarm to develop an overarching body to monitor utilisation of underground waters; sustain all forms of family, community, market gardens and agribusinesses and evaluate benefits to our health.

**Recommendation 7:** That AMSANT supports the Centrefarm MOU with TKG and looks to working with the joint venture to further promote the health of our people.

**Recommendation 8:** That AMSANT supports urgent research to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of subsidising the cost of fruit and vegetables with equivalent of, say, 1% of annual cost of running clinics, that is, say, \$10,00 per \$1M

**Recommendation 9:** That AMSANT promotes research into freight, logistics and packaging and good food subsidies into remote communities to build an evidence base towards achieving food security (i.e. availability of good food).

**Recommendation 10:** AMSANT encourages Outback, ALPA and other stores to work together to source competitively priced fresh food through joint purchasing.

**Recommendation 11:** That AMSANT encourages Outback, ALPA and other stores support the development of community and market gardens through strategic purchasing to allow such gardens to compete against external sources of fresh food.

**Recommendation 12:** AMSANT calls on all governments to improve transport networks and infrastructure in remote areas both as a long term mechanism to reduce freight costs, as well as allow capacity to build large scale horticultural projects such as that proposed by Centrefarm.

**Recommendation 13:** That core services standards are developed for all stores, and that these core services form the basis for store licensing.

**Recommendation 14:** That there be a mandated relationship between stores and the primary health care sector, using the store licensing system such that there are consequences on stores and their management that don't meet requirements of the PHC sector in ensuring food security.

**Recommendation 15:** That this Summit believes the NT Market basket survey is too restricted and should extend to monitoring prices and availability across a wider range of fruit and vegetables, carried out independently by the primary health care sector represented by AMSANT.

**Recommendation 16:** That AMSANT supports rec 3 of the Parliamentary inquiry into community stores and immediately appoint a nutritionist to its Board.

---

Everybody's Business, Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Community Stores, House of Representatives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee. 2009

---

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee recommends the Australian Government fund the rollout of the Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) resources to all remote Indigenous communities across Australia, in conjunction with the support required by a nutritionist.

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee recommends the Australian Government consider the development of an incentive scheme to influence store managers to sell healthy produce.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require that membership of the Outback Stores board include a nutritionist.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work collaboratively with state and territory governments, health services and remote store operators to ensure that nutrition education programs are available to all remote Indigenous communities.

**Recommendation 5:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require all Outback Stores to develop, in consultation with local communities, a specific healthy store policy.

**Recommendation 6:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work collaboratively with all remote Indigenous community store owners, operators and communities to assist in the development and ongoing management of a healthy store policy.

**Recommendation 7:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work collaboratively with state and territory governments to fund and make available to all remote Indigenous community stores:

- The Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) or similar point-of-sale monitoring tool,
- Training for store employees on the operation of the tool, and
- Mechanisms to provide feedback to communities and governments about the sale of products from the store.

**Recommendation 8:** The Committee recommends the Australian Government make available in all Outback Stores a system similar to the FOODcard established by the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation. The Committee also recommends that the Australian Government consult with other remote community store operators to facilitate more widespread introduction of this system for communities who are interested.

**Recommendation 9:** The Committee recommends the Australian Government consider the optional introduction of a healthy food card system to pregnant and breast-feeding mothers in remote Indigenous communities.

**Recommendation 10:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national Primary Health Care program to fund and coordinate supply of healthy lunches and drinks to children at pre-schools and schools in remote Indigenous communities where this need is identified.

**Recommendation 11:** The Committee recommends the Australian Government, in collaboration with educational institutions, investigate and develop:

- The facilitation of training of Indigenous staff living in remote communities to store management levels, and
- The certification of in-store training of skills such as health promotion and food supply and storage.

---

**Recommendation 12:** The Committee recommends the Australian Government assess the impact that Community Development Employment Projects reform will have on the viability and employment opportunities in stores in remote Indigenous communities.

**Recommendation 13:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national remote Indigenous food supply chain coordination office to:

- Support individual communities or regional groupings of communities to develop supply models by examining the possibilities appropriate to them,
- Facilitate the establishment of cooperative arrangements including transparent cross-subsidisation models, if appropriate,
- Assist to develop supply models that deliver healthy perishables to remote communities weekly where possible, and
- Disseminate information on options for supply models to remote Indigenous communities.

**Recommendation 14:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the proposed national remote Indigenous food supply chain coordination office, investigate working with charitable delivery organisations, such as FoodBank Western Australia, to aid in the delivery of fresh fruit and vegetables to remote Indigenous communities.

**Recommendation 15:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a remote community store infrastructure fund to assist stores to invest in delivery, refrigeration and storage facilities that will support the supply of fresh and healthy produce to Indigenous communities. Access to the fund may be contingent on stores having a healthy food policy and participating in a nutrition education program.

**Recommendation 16:** The Committee recommends the Australian Government ensure health clinics in remote Indigenous communities are aware of the nutritional value of bush tucker and other traditional foods and actively encourage communities to continue to engage in traditional practices.

**Recommendation 17:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government support community garden, traditional food and farming projects in remote Indigenous communities for the local production of food, particularly in schools, where it is demonstrated that long term sustainability can be attained.

**Recommendation 18:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to fund programs to eradicate feral animals in remote areas as required.

**Recommendation 19:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government examine ways to facilitate remote Indigenous communities undertaking collaborative arrangements with stores to distribute and /or sell locally grown or harvested produce.

**Recommendation 20:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government assist stores across Australia in remote Indigenous communities to develop partnerships with local food production and harvest industries and expand operations to also function as market places for community grown produce. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government trial a partnership that requires Outback Stores to support local food production and harvesting industries and buy an annual minimum of goods from these local sources.

---

**Recommendation 21:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission a regional cost of living study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote communities in Australia and report by the end of 2010.

**Recommendation 22:** The Committee recommends the Australian Bureau of Statistics consider expanding the Household Expenditure Survey to capture Indigenous specific data and remote community data.

**Recommendation 23:** The Committee recommends that, following implementation of supply chain coordination and efficiencies, the Australian Government give consideration to a freight subsidy for fresh produce for the Torres Strait.

**Recommendation 24:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a working group with representatives from the Department of Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, state and territory governments, remote community store operators and the Australian Bankers Association. The working group should be tasked with:

- investigating the transaction fees being charged in remote Indigenous communities,
- investigating the impact of the limited banking choices available in remote communities, such as the consequent extent of fees charged for using foreign Automated Teller Machines,
- ensuring Indigenous Australians in remote communities have the financial literacy and access to facilities to make informed decisions regarding money management options, including the use of book up, and
- Investigating mechanisms to lower or waive financial fees and charges for Indigenous people in remote communities.

**Recommendation 25:** The Committee recommends that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs support remote Indigenous community service programs that develop lifestyle skills, such as home cooking and shopping, to ensure Indigenous families have the skills to prepare healthy and nutritious meals in the home at low cost.

**Recommendation 26:** The Committee recommends that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs coordinate the dissemination of a healthy takeaway food guide, such as the Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) Healthy Fast Food: a Resource for Remote Stores and Takeaways, and provide appropriate start-up training for remote store operators.

**Recommendation 27:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government support proposals that Indigenous owned and controlled community stores register as corporations under the Corporations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2006.

In addition, the Committee recommends the Australian Government actively promote and encourage registration under the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations.

**Recommendation 28:** The Committee recommends that the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations receive additional funding to provide governance and financial management training to community stores that register under the Corporations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2006.

---

**Recommendation 29:** The Committee recommends that, if the Australian Government proceeds with the proposal for a national licensing regime for remote community stores, the following should be taken into account:

- administrative processes to apply for and maintain a licence should be streamlined and easily complied with by Indigenous corporations, store committees and managers,
- there should be a well-defined procedure to appeal any decision to refuse a licence, such as through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, and a refusal should also consider the interim and longer term impacts it may have on a remote community's food supply security,
- the definition of a community store should be sufficiently flexible to encompass bush delivery, hub and spoke operations and other food supply models which offer economic and health benefits to communities,
- licence assessment should be undertaken in a timely manner,
- licences should be issued either to store owners, or jointly to store owners and store managers,
- mandatory qualifications and accreditation should apply to store managers,
- licences should include a requirement for a healthy store policy and to display pricing, and
- licensing should be subject to a review to ensure it is not providing unfair advantages to corporately managed stores over individual and community stores.

**Recommendation 30:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require that membership of the Outback Stores board include Indigenous representation.

**Recommendation 31:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government revise the purpose of the Outback Stores model to recognise the following two distinct roles:

- the commercially viable operation of a remote store where a community contracts it to manage their store, and
- under advice from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the delivery of store services to communities where the current store is unviable or the regular supply of healthy food is not secured. Supplementary interim funding for these services be provided on a case by case basis.

**Recommendation 32:** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require Outback Stores to disclose a financial statement of expenditure of the appropriated funds received to date.

**Recommendation 33:** The Committee recommends that, rather than support particular service providers, the Australian Government work proactively with individual communities to develop and support a diversity of good store operations or delivery models that recognise the unique needs and situations of those communities and ensure food security to all remote communities.

---

## Food North: Food for health in Northern Australia, 2003

**Recommendation 1:** Establish a high level 'whole of government' approach to resolve issues of food supply.

**Recommendation 2:** Secure funding to implement a north Australia Food Supply Project

**Recommendation 3:** Establish a monitoring and evaluation system

- 
- A. Food supply monitoring and evaluation system
  - B. Health, growth and nutrition indicators monitoring and evaluation system

**Recommendation 4:** Include nutrition as a core component in the new national Aboriginal Health Worker Training Package and as an option within the new national Population Health Package

---

## NT Aboriginal Nutrition Workshop, Northern Territory Department of Health, 2001

**Recommendation 1:** The need for more positions for Aboriginal people working in the area of nutrition and to have a career structure for nutrition specialist health workers and community based nutrition workers

**Recommendation 2:** The need to ensure that existing positions (across all levels) that directly support and promote nutrition are not left vacant over extended periods

**Recommendation 3:** The need for more community based nutrition workshops to allow other community people to access relevant information on nutrition

**Recommendation 4:** The need for more males to work in the area of nutrition and particularly in remote communities

**Recommendation 5:** The need for resources (funding) to fully implement the Growth Assessment and Action program in Top End.

**Recommendation 6:** The need for funding to allow for a biennial NT wide nutrition workshop.

**Recommendation 7:** The need to strengthen links with other government departments and agencies who are stakeholders in improving nutrition outcomes for Aboriginal people eg. NT Department of Education, Local Government, Department of Primary industries and fisheries, ATSIC, Land Councils, Department of Transport and Works.

**Recommendation 8:** The need to continue to investigate strategies to ensure affordability of essential foods in remote communities with an emphasis on partnerships with other government and non-government organisations