

# FOOD SUMMIT REPORT

FOOD SECURITY IN THE  
NORTHERN TERRITORY



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) acknowledges the Aboriginal Peoples of the Northern Territory, their un-ceded sovereignty over Country, and the lands on which this report workshops and consultations have been conducted.

We pay our deepest respect and gratitude to ancestors, elders and leaders who have paved the way for our future generations with strength and fortitude.

This report draws upon the ideas and desires of Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory (NT) and we pay our respect to those who shared their experiences, ideas and hopes for a more equitable Australia without disadvantage

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- The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA)
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- **Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS)**
- Northern Territory Government, Department of Health
- Wurli Wurlinjang Health Service

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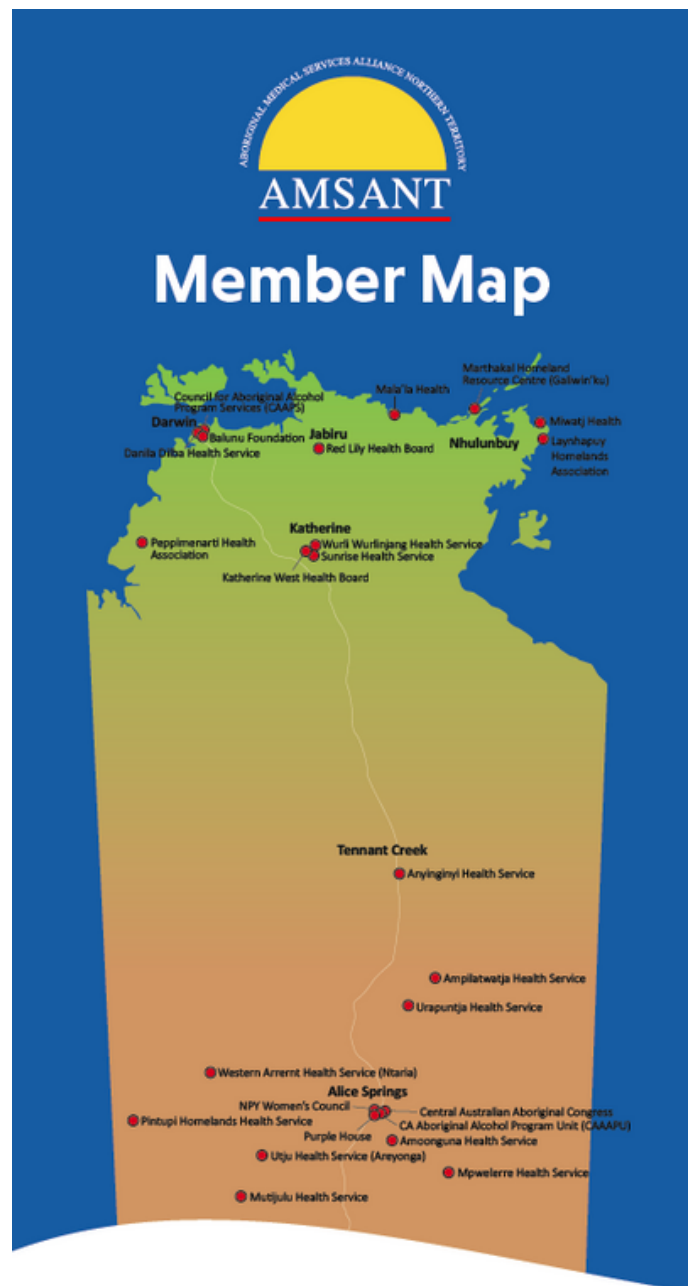
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# ABOUT AMSANT

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) is the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) in the Northern Territory (NT) and advocates for health equity, while supporting the provision of high-quality comprehensive primary health care services for Aboriginal Peoples.

ACCHSs are incorporated independent organisations controlled by Aboriginal people under the principles of self-determination. Their accountability processes include holding annual general meetings and regular elections of management committees which are open to all members of the relevant Aboriginal community. Community control enables the people who are going to use health services to determine the nature of those services, and then participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of those services. AMSANT has twenty-six member services throughout the Northern Territory.



[www.amsant.org.au](http://www.amsant.org.au)

# BACKGROUND

The food security of our communities and households is important for our health and wellbeing and reliant on multiple factors within our food system and society [1]. These social determinants support the four main domains that underlie the term food security. In the Northern Territory (NT) not all Territorians experience these social determinants in the same way, with issues and barriers around food security impacting on our Aboriginal communities at a greater rate than non-indigenous Territorians. This gap has continued for decades, with little progress towards improvements [2,3,4]. The food security gap is driven by the four domains;

1. The physical availability of food
2. Economic and physical access to food
3. The opportunity to utilise the food
4. The stability of the system and the three other domains

These domains are seen as a human right that all Australians should enjoy but are regularly not available to Aboriginal people in the NT [5].

Within Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are up to six times more likely than non-Indigenous people to not have food security at all times. These rates are worse in remote areas where access, availability and

affordability of healthy food is significantly constrained. At least 31% of Aboriginal people living in remote areas face food insecurity, regularly running out of food [6]. These high levels of food insecurity are the consequence of a mix of food supply, access and utilisation factors and are contributing to poor health outcomes for those communities affected. These factors drive unhealthy consumption patterns and food choices leading to increased risk of nutrition related ill-health [7]. The high rates of food security determinants such as lower income levels, poor access to transport, inappropriate housing and other areas of disadvantage in Aboriginal communities of the NT confound people's ability to achieve better outcomes for their families and communities [8].



In 2010 Menzies School of Health Research along with a number of NT Aboriginal communities using the four domains of food security developed their own definition of food security. They defined food security as;

*“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.” (Menzies School of Health Research, 2010)[9].*

Aboriginal people in the NT have long recognised the heavy impact that inhibited economical and physical food access, restricted availability due to infrastructure and practice constraints have on food choice and eating patterns [9].

In the NT high costs, due to long supply chains and the poor quality of roads between communities and major towns, impact the level of access and affordability of healthy food in remote areas. In some cases the lack of roads means food needs to be barged to communities at great cost.

The cost of food impacts on people's food choices and access to healthy food [10]. National standards have shown that food is considered affordable when no more than 30 % of household income is required for its purchase [11,12]. In a remote Aboriginal community, an average family receiving government allowances may need to use over 50% of their household income on food alone [13]. Compounding these issues, it has been well documented that some families often do not receive their full entitlement to social welfare payments leading to greater pressure being placed on families and individual household members [14]. Government benefits have also not kept up with the rising cost of living in all areas of the NT. For remote areas the remote area allowance has not increased in the last 20 years, even though it has regularly been documented that prices have continued to grow faster than



Menzies school of Health Research,, Good food systems planning tool.

CPI in remote communities [4, 15]. This places people in remote regions at great disadvantage. In the last 20 years, price differences for the same basket of food between remote stores and town supermarkets in the NT have increased from

**30% more expensive in remote communities (\$502 vs \$385) to 56% more expensive in remote communities (\$848 vs \$542) [4].**

Compounding this, during this same time, Jobseeker allowances have not increased at the same rate as the aged pension, with an overall increase of less than 15% ultimately

placing people below the poverty line [14].

The nutritional aspect of food security is often overlooked in favour of simply ensuring people have access to any food. However, the UN human rights statement promotes food security as access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods [1]. The high cost, resources and time needed to enjoy regular healthy meals can be impractical for families living on low incomes and/ or overcrowded households with inadequate infrastructure. This can mean that while some people have access to food the lack of all four domains of food security mean they are forced to make undesirable food choices leading to increased risk of lifestyle related diseases [7].

Although the availability of fruits and vegetables has improved 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 a single source [4, 8] .

In major towns the density of fast food outlets, location and connectedness of supermarkets plays a significant role [8, 16]. As these issues have flow on effects to the diets of the community, health services in the NT have regularly tried to address them through health promotion and education programs aimed at increasing intake of fruits and vegetables. This promotion is especially important as 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 [17]. However, health promotion and education programs alone are restricted in their ability to achieve success due to the significant other constraints on households to access and utilise healthy foods.

The issues of insufficient food storage and cooking facilities in the available housing is one the biggest constraints on families consuming a healthy diet. 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 [16]. This hampers people's ability to properly prepare healthy meals, forcing 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.

The unhealthy diets and associated health implications are contributing to the gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider NT community and so therefore need urgent action to address the issues and barriers driving the gap [16].



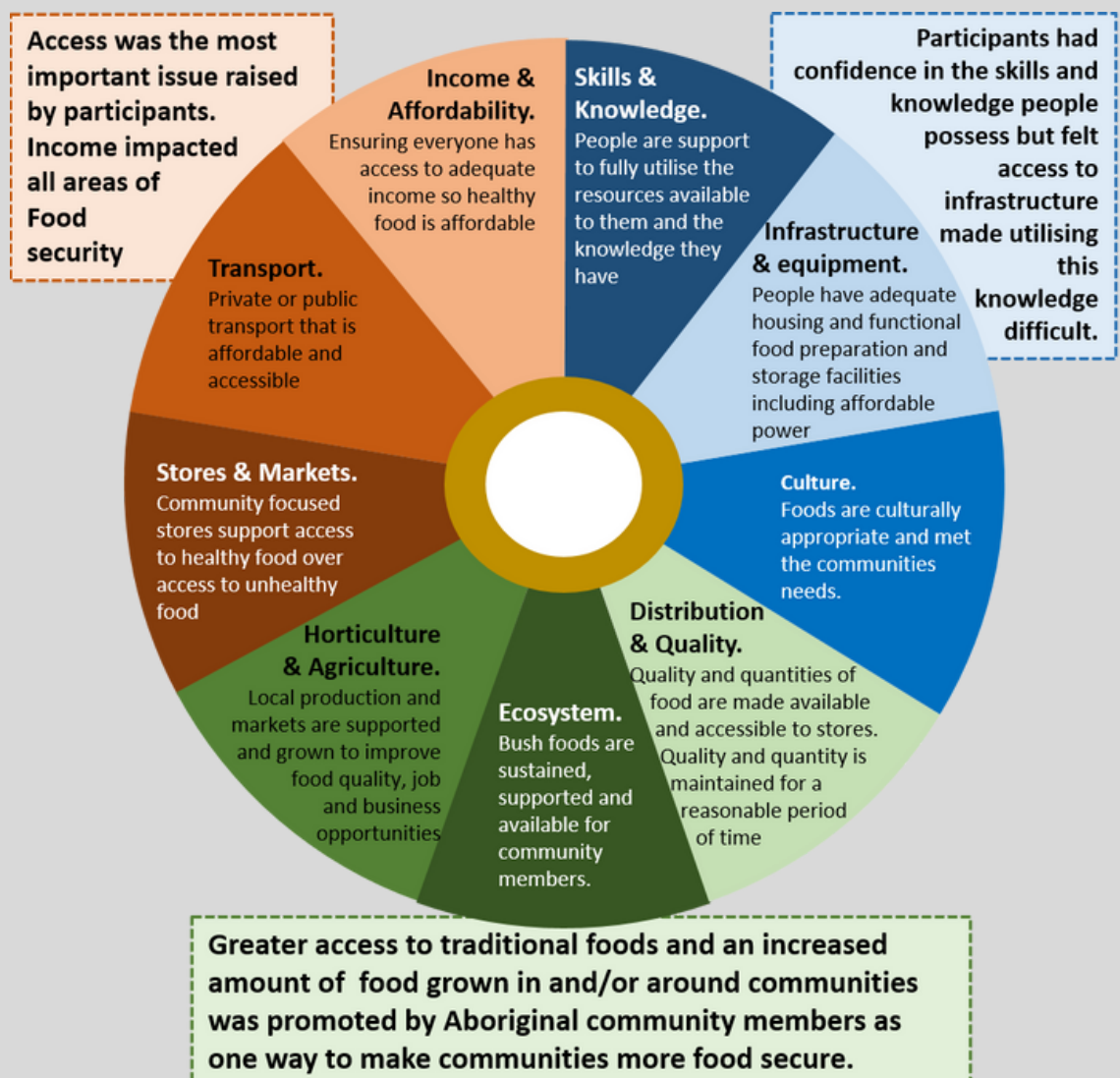
Health issues, including higher rates of gestational diabetes, low birth weights, anaemia in children and young women, and higher rates of chronic disease are continuing to impact the NT health system at a far greater rate than any other State or Territory [8,16]. There are also impacts on education through child growth and development, with 15% of Aboriginal children under five years old in the NT suffering from chronic malnutrition, a condition linked to cognitive development, compared to 2% nationally [18, 34]. In addition to this are long standing concerns about childhood anaemia rates, which can lead to developmental vulnerabilities. Anaemia rates in the Northern Territory at 15%, are strongly linked to poor diet and a lack of nutritious food intake for mothers and children [18].

This interconnection between high rates of food insecurity with social determinants,

including poorer education outcomes, lower employment rates, poor housing, effect on peoples overall wellbeing and consumption of healthy food, plays a key role in the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the nation [8, 16].

For a long time Australian governments have addressed food security through funding of emergency food relief services, with a lack of focus on prevention in communities and households [19]. The overarching theme that has emerged from the work of AMSANT regarding food security in the Northern Territory has been the connection that food has on all aspects of life and culture. As food security is a fundamental human right it's imperative that all sectors work together with Aboriginal communities to overcome the underlying barriers and issues impacting on them to build greater resilience and lead to prevention.

Figure 1. AMSANT Community and Service provider consultation theme results





# FOOD SUMMIT

In 2020 AMSANT, in partnership with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, NTCOSS and NPY women's council, undertook the Food Summit project with the aim of working with community members and other key stakeholders to identify and develop potential policy and program ideas that can help to address issues impacting on the food security of Aboriginal communities. The project follows on from the initial Fresh Food Summit in 2010, responding to the long term health effects related to nutrition seen in Aboriginal communities and their desires to see change within the food system to better support communities and health services. The Food Summit project aimed to find community-led ways of addressing the systemic issues that impact on the food choices and diets of people in the Northern Territory. The project was focused on providing initial policy and project support for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory by facilitating the identification, development and proposal of evidenced-based, community-led and supported solutions to food security issues.

The Food Summit project comes along at a time when the Australian Government held its second inquiry into food security in remote Aboriginal communities within 11 years. The project also occurred in unison with Monash University's Healthy Stores 2020, Healthy stories = Good food project, which

highlighted and promoted community led health promoting store policies and programs.

What was clear throughout the project and through submissions to the government inquiry is the impact that food insecurity has on the nutrition and health status of our communities. Without addressing the high rates of food insecurity, it is becoming increasingly difficult for services to address the nutrition related diseases which disproportionately effect Aboriginal people in the NT. 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 in Australia and within the Northern Territory these disease play a significant role in the three times higher burden of disease experienced by Aboriginal people [2].

**Food insecurity  
impacts peoples food  
choices leading to  
increased risk of  
nutrition related  
diseases.**

Evidence has also shown that health outcomes can improve when communities are empowered to fully participate in and lead local projects aimed at addressing community needs [4]. 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.

To achieve the aim of the project AMSANT have built on previous work undertaken in this area over the last 20 years, building on and leveraged from existing knowledge, experience and networks that have previously and currently work in this space. This included building on the work already undertaken by AMSANT 10 years ago at the initial Fresh Food Summit in Tennant Creek in 2010.



Barb Shaw, AMSANT chairperson and Anyinginyi Health Service CEO

Figure 2. Food Summit project process structure



In the lead up to the Food Summit forum in 2021 AMSANT undertook extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities and service providers and mapped services and food security and data related to food

security to help identify and prioritise the barriers and issues impacting on communities which leads to some of the highest food insecurity rates in Australia.

During the time these consultations were undertaken, the only supermarket in Tennant Creek burnt down, and the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted 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. The consultation sessions were used to develop a discussion paper and circulated to stakeholders. The consultation analysis and discussion paper was also used to inform the scope of the Food Summit held in Alice Springs using the key themes that emerged from the consultations. Extra weight was placed on Aboriginal community members' views and ideas from the consultations to ensure these led the project recommendations.

At the Food Summit forum Aboriginal community-led projects were given the opportunity to present. These presentations highlighted examples of community led solutions to the consultation priority areas. These presentations were also used to guide the workshop sessions with the two day Summit broken up into five workshop sessions;

## • Access and Affordability

## • Usability and infrastructure

## • Availability and support services

## • Local food production and traditional foods

## • Community leadership and Governance

From these workshop sessions and analysis of the previous consultation work AMSANT undertook, the recommendations from this project have been developed. The recommendations from this project have been developed from these workshop sessions and the previous consultation work undertaken by AMSANT.

AMSANT views this report as the next step in the process towards identifying and improving the food security status of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.



Food Summit forum room mind mapping



Figure 3. Food Summit forum combined mind mapping



Over the two days of the Food Summit forum workshop sessions helped map key areas and priorities. The mind maps generated were used to determine themes, priorities and recommendations for this project. Using this data together with the service provider and community consultation results should play a key role in how governments and service providers address issues and barriers regarding food security. It's clear from this work that a community-led approach is needed in all areas. Without a systems wide approach barriers and issues will persist to inhibit future gains in food security.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this report and its recommendations is to provide a snapshot of food security issues within the Northern Territory and recommendations for all to work towards and advocate for.

These recommendations have been developed through a long process of consultation and partnerships to ensure the views and ideas of all are reflected in them and require a commitment from both government and non-government organisations to work with Aboriginal communities to achieve them.

## GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

**1: Greater Aboriginal community involvement in the governance and management of community stores through;**

- i. The Australian Government funding an Aboriginal led governance training and support program such as APO NT's Aboriginal Governance and Management Program to provide ongoing community board training and support and develop a remote stores governance specific resource package.*
- ii. A mandatory condition through Stores Licensing that all remote community stores to have an operating community board or advisory committee.*
- iii. All remote community store boards receive introductory governance training within the first 12 months of becoming a board member and then follow on training every 2 years.*

**2: Australian and Northern Territory Governments conduct open grant opportunities for community controlled organisations to implement programs to improve access to healthy food for Aboriginal communities. This could include support for local transport solution, community stores, local food production and harvesting.**



# GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

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**3:** *The establishment of a food security working group with representation from all relevant sectors reporting directly to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The working group to be charged with supporting the collaboration between sectors and development of an action plan to implement changes in the NT food system that support greater equity in the access and availability of healthy food.*

# HOUSING

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**4:** *The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to invest in more social housing in both remote and regional centers that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people.*

**5:** *The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to commit to long term funding of an Aboriginal Environmental Health Workforce and through this adopting the 'housing for health' approach in Aboriginal communities that:*

*i. Supports an environmental health workforce to implement evidence based initiatives that improve health outcomes.*

*ii. Support a proactive Housing for Health 'survey and fix' program which adheres to the '9 Healthy Living Practices' particularly with respect to improving nutrition, the ability to store, prepare and cook food.*

*iii. Supports culturally led sustainable design of housing to address overcrowding and culturally appropriate food storage, preparation or serving facilities.*

# INCOME & AFFORDABILITY

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**6:** *That the Australian Government implements APO NT's Fair Work and Strong Communities proposal for a remote development and employment scheme to enhance employment opportunities and community led development for Aboriginal people.*

**7:** *The Australian Government to increase social welfare payments including;*

*i. JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and other related payments to be permanently and adequately increased to keep people out of poverty.*

*ii. An increase in the rate of the remote area allowance in line with higher cost of living of remote regions of the Northern Territory.*

*iii. Ongoing indexation of all payments in line with wage movements at least twice a year.*

# FOOD PRODUCTION

**8:** *The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to provide long term investment in community controlled local food production and critical infrastructure to support greater food production, including the harvesting of traditional foods, in and around Aboriginal communities. This should include;*

*i. Funding for training for Aboriginal people linked to Agriculture jobs in and around Aboriginal communities.*

*ii. Assistance for Aboriginal communities to harvest traditional foods for community consumption and sale to both local and national markets.*

*iii. Provide investment into community controlled primary industries which provide economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities.*



# STORES

**9:** *The Northern Territory Government and Land Councils to review and develop a remote stores lease agreement that ensures the viability and sustainability of remote stores in line with other essential services.*

**10:** *The Australian Government to adequately fund and expand the remote stores licensing program by monitoring all food security aspects of remote stores; access, affordability, availability and safety of healthy food. Benchmarking should be used, working with the health sector, through the licensing program to provide information to store committees to support community decision making.*

**11:** *The Australian Government to invest in the upgrade and expansion of community stores to allow for increased availability of fresh foods, including meat, fruits and vegetables, and healthy takeaway options.*

**12:** *The Australian Government to fund a feasibility study to determine the most practical way to implement a subsidy scheme that increases the availability of healthy food for people living in remote communities at a more affordable cost for consumers.*

**13:** *The Australian Government through its entities and the food industry assist remote community stores to collaborate and develop partnerships with local food producers, wholesalers and other remote community stores to lower the cost and increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables within stores.*



# NUTRITION & FOOD SERVICES

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**14:** *The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to invest in the development of a local community based workforce where community members are trained and adequately supported (by public health nutritionists/dietitians, Health promotion officers and Chronic disease workers) as local nutrition promotion officers. These Aboriginal health promotion officers should be involved in:*

- i. Community-wide nutrition promotion through use of local language, cook-ups, group education, hunting trips and education on traditional foods to children in schools with elders*
- ii. Store and food provision program assessments so as to provide information to operators on where improvements could be made for the promotion of healthy food and less promotion of unhealthy food in line with communities needs*
- iii. In partnership with stores, schools, rangers and local councils, set-up and maintain promotional activities that support access to traditional foods, nutrition education and knowledge sharing.*

**15:** *Fostered through the establishment of a Food security working group and a community based workforce; Health, Education and Youth Services to work closely together to educate and develop the skills of young Aboriginal people in cooking, healthy eating and promoting healthy behaviours. These programs should aim to be led by Aboriginal people using local languages to promote healthy living.*

**16:** *All sectors working in and with Aboriginal communities to implement healthy food choices policies that support the health messages of local health services. Food made available through services should promote healthy eating practices and build on a healthy food environment.*

## INFRASTRUCTURE

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**17:** *The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to invest in safe, community acceptable and affordable water and power supply with the view of supporting healthy choices for community members through appropriate infrastructure. This should include;*

- i. Palatable community water sources to ensure easy access and increased consumption of water.*
- ii. Invest in community power infrastructure that leads to a reduction in cost of power to households and allows for continual power supply to households for safe storage of fresh food.*

**18:** *The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to develop an investment fund and plan for the upgrading of roads, bridges and sea landings for remote Aboriginal communities and potential food production regions.*



# GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP



**Greater Aboriginal community involvement in the governance and management of community stores through;**

**i. The Australian Government funding an Aboriginal led governance training and support program such as APO NT's Aboriginal Governance and Management Program to provide ongoing community board training and support and develop a remote stores governance specific resource package.**

**ii. A mandatory condition through Stores Licensing that all remote community stores to have an operating community board or advisory committee.**

**iii. All remote community store boards receive introductory governance training within the first 12 months of becoming a board member and then follow on training every 2 years.**

Aboriginal governance and leadership in all aspects of the food system are seen as the key driving points for change for long term solutions to the issues and barriers impacting the food security of Aboriginal communities in the NT. This is in line with the historical partnership between the Coalition of Peaks and the Australian Government around the new Closing the Gap agreement, with the priority reforms placing community control at the center of the new targets. While food and nutrition hasn't been

included in the new agreement the delegates at the Food Summit were strong on the need to grow and support Aboriginal community control in all aspects of the food system.

***You need the back end to be working well for the front end to work at all – Wes Miller, AGMP***

Through greater community ownership and management combined with support for strong Aboriginal led governance, Aboriginal ideas, values and priorities can be placed at the front of the food system communities currently engage with and the future food systems that can be grown from community led ideas.

Without supporting Aboriginal governance and management of services involved in strengthening the food security of Aboriginal communities, it's likely other measures will be inhibited in their progress. As has been shown in other sectors, including the Aboriginal community controlled health sector, strong community led organisation support improved engagement and outcomes for communities. Through the mandating and funding of measures to strengthen community governance, community stores will be better placed to respond and support community driven ideas and community focused outcomes.



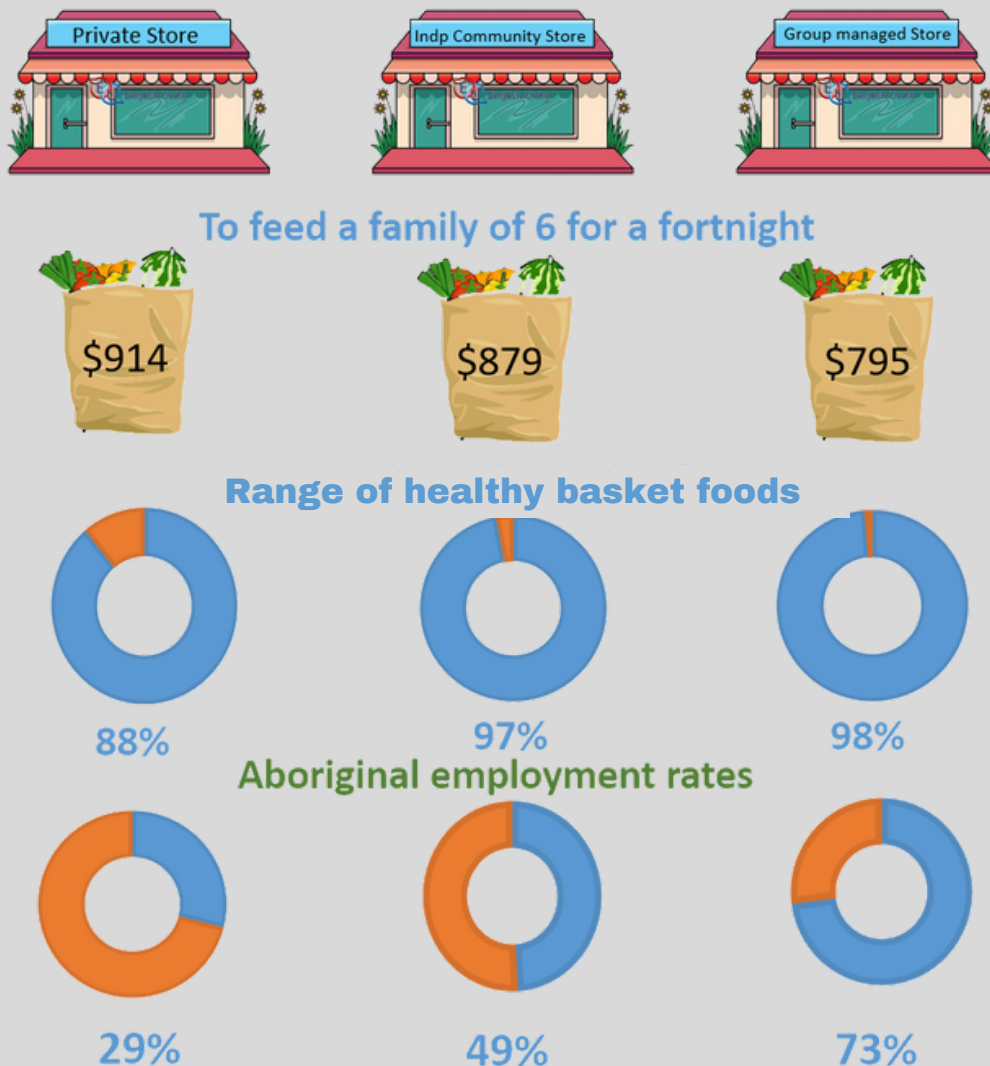


Tracey Ward, Director Environmental Health, NTG  
Department of Health

Throughout the Food Summit project there was a strong call for greater community control and engagement of Aboriginal communities in the issues related to food security. Remote stores were seen as a key area where support was needed. Remote stores groups like ALPA were put forward as

success stories where community control and leadership in remote stores has been shown to lead to greater employment opportunities, economic empowerment and increased availability and access to healthy food. Where community control was lacking, such as in privately run stores, good outcomes for community food security were often absent. Policy ideas like Healthy Stores 2020 and the APY Lands Mai Wiru policy have been led by the community controlled sector and supported communities to have greater access to healthy food and more community engagement with the stores, while having lower healthy basket prices within stores. In remote communities Aboriginal community owned stores are 9% cheaper than private stores and this increases to 13% cheaper when stores are able to group together to increase their buying efficiency and lower costs [4].

Figure 4. Comparison of community store structure and benefit to community using 2019 NT Market Basket survey data



**Australian and Northern Territory Governments conduct open grant opportunities for community controlled organisations to implement programs to improve access to healthy food for Aboriginal communities. This could include support for local transport solution, community stores, local food production and harvesting.**

Stakeholders at the Food Summit were clear that the most important factor determining the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food and nutrition programs is community involvement in; [and, ideally, control of] the initial program idea, development and implementation, with community members working in partnership at all stages. Community voice and leadership was raised as a key topic in all areas of the food system. When these voices and engagement were present better outcomes regarding food security were seen.

However, challenges exist for communities to find ways to fund and set up such programs. A lack of dedicated funding in such a critical space, which affects and is affected by all areas of community life, was often an issue for community led ideas to get up and be maintained.

Successful programs highlighted throughout the Food Summit project that have previously shown success in addressing issues and barriers to food security in Aboriginal communities have all included elements of community control and leadership. These successful programs such as Laynhapuy homelands community stores, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation rangers fishing program and Kalano's community bus have found their success by being community led ideas with strong community involvement and support to meet community needs.

***The seafood is sold locally and means people eat local foods that they can't get access to without a boat or a 4WD and petrol. – Charlie Gunabarra***

There is a strong desire from other communities to set up similar or their own programs that work towards supporting food security of communities. These programs need to meet the needs of communities and be driven by them. By providing an open grant scheme that allows for each community to determine and implement programs that support any or all 4 domains of food security, communities can meet their unique circumstances and build on the community's strengths.

Charlie Gunabarra, Malala Health Service  
Chairperson



**The establishment of a food security working group with representation from all relevant sectors reporting directly to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet. The working group to be charged with supporting the collaboration between sectors and development of an action plan to implement changes in the NT food system that support greater equity in the access and availability of healthy food.**

Better collaboration and coordination of resources around food security related programs is critical to ensuring people are working together and knowledge is shared across different sectors. During the COVID-19 pandemic food security working groups were set up to ensure ongoing supply of food to Aboriginal communities and coordinate and support services providing food. Connecting services and guaranteeing food supply to remote community stores were a great success of these working groups. To achieve long term improvements in food security the establishment of food security working groups has had great success in other jurisdictions such as the Tasmanian Food

Security Council, which was an advisory group made up from different sectors to advise Tasmanian Government on policy solutions to food security issues, and Western Australia Food Relief Framework Working Group, which worked with the Western Australia Government to develop policy and program solutions to improve the functioning of emergency food relief services. These working groups led by the community with strong government backing have the ability to combine resources, share knowledge and develop food security policies that improve the function of the NT food system.

The establishment of a working group should have the majority of members from community controlled organisations across sectors and be chaired by a community controlled organisation in line with Closing the Gap principles. The group could be tasked with furthering the recommendations within this report and the development of a food security policy for the NT, ensuring strong engagement and collaboration from all sectors.



Figure 5. Tasmania Government, Eat Well project. Accessed via: <https://www.healthyfoodaccesstasmania.org.au/what-is-the-role-of-local-government-in-supporting-community-food-security/>

# HOUSING



***The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to invest in more social housing in both remote and regional centers that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people.***

Access to appropriate and functioning food storage and food preparation facilities are a key component to any household having the ability eat healthy food. The access to these facilities for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory has long been a problem and has been raised through numerous forums by Aboriginal people. While progress has been made in some areas it is clear from hearing from Aboriginal community members and organisations at the Food Summit that there is still a great deal of work to be done.

As the National housing agreement comes to a close in 2022 there is a new opportunity to readdress and appropriately fund and resource measures to address overcrowding and inappropriate housing in Aboriginal communities. Inappropriate new and existing housing with small/ no cupboard space or kitchen benches with no doors to keep pet

and pest out, remain a significant problem for addressing the safe access and usability of healthy food for Aboriginal communities.

This, combine with this overcrowding, remains one of the biggest issues in Aboriginal communities. In 2014–15 in the Northern Territory, 53% of Aboriginal people reported living in overcrowded households [2].

Through the community consultation process undertaken as part of the Food Summit project it is clear that even when upgrades and new houses are being build the lack of community engagement has often meant inappropriate designs and construction has been undertaken. Consulting with and engaging communities in the design and building of new housing will go some way to reducing these issues and can lead to employment opportunities for communities so that they can benefit from the considerable amount of funding spent in this space.

***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, AMSANT community consultation*

**Improved housing and more housing**

was the single highest priority from Food Summit delegatess

***The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to commit to long term funding of an Aboriginal Environmental Health Workforce and through this adopting the 'housing for health' approach in Aboriginal communities that:***

***i. Supports an environmental health workforce to implement evidence based initiatives that improve health outcomes.***

***ii. Support a proactive Housing for Health 'survey and fix' program which adheres to the '9 Healthy Living Practices' particularly with respect to improving nutrition, the ability to store, prepare and cook food.***

***iii. Supports culturally led sustainable design of housing to address overcrowding and culturally appropriate food storage, preparation or serving facilities.***

As part of the Food Summit workshop sessions and through the consultation process undertaken over 2020-2021 both Aboriginal community members and services providers from all sectors recognised the key role adequate and quality housing plays in the food security of communities.

Delegates at the Food Summit heard from the Northern Territory Governments Housing for Health program. This program worked with Aboriginal communities to implement a trial project using a Health Habitat style survey and fix model to improve the quality of housing health infrastructure including food preparation and storage facilities. In previous reviews of housing quality in Aboriginal communities the Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Aboriginal households without functioning food preparation facilities, at 19% [3]. Without adequate, functional food preparation facilities even if measures are put in place to improve the supply and access to healthy food in

Aboriginal community, families are unable to fully benefit from improved supply and access due to the limited infrastructure to utilise the available food.

In previous work undertaken in the NT to improve intake of fruits and vegetables, Brimblecombe et al, noted the limitation in their discounts provided to fruits and vegetables in remote Aboriginal communities [20]. While the trial saw an increase in the sale of fruit and vegetables this was less than was expected, potentially due to the limitation insufficient and poor quality household food storage and preparation facilities place on households purchasing capacity.



John Paterson, AMSANT CEO,

***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 all parts, plumber comes from Alice Springs.***

***Aboriginal community member,  
AMSANT community consultation***

Through the Food Summit the implementation of an Aboriginal environmental health workforce was identified as one measure that can improve and maintain the quality of housing for Aboriginal communities. Through the implementation of a proactive monitoring and preventative maintenance program small infrastructure issues can be fixed early preventing potential catastrophic failures and ensuring household's ongoing access to basic infrastructure like taps, sinks and bench space. Similar programs running on the APY lands since the 1980's, and later in Western Australia and New South Wales, have been found to have a profound benefit to the housing quality and living conditions and Aboriginal households.

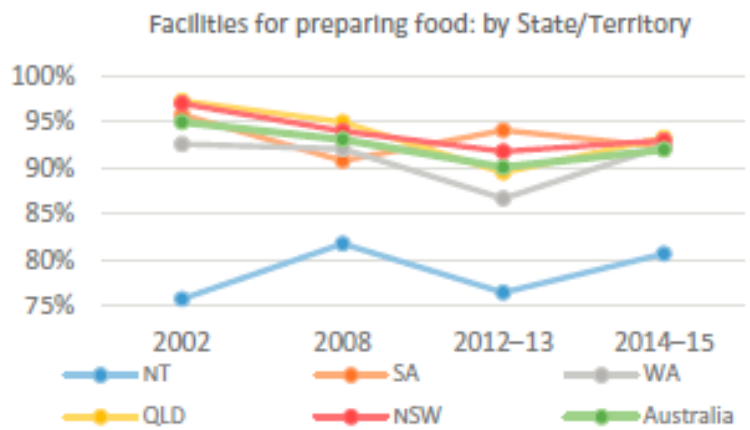
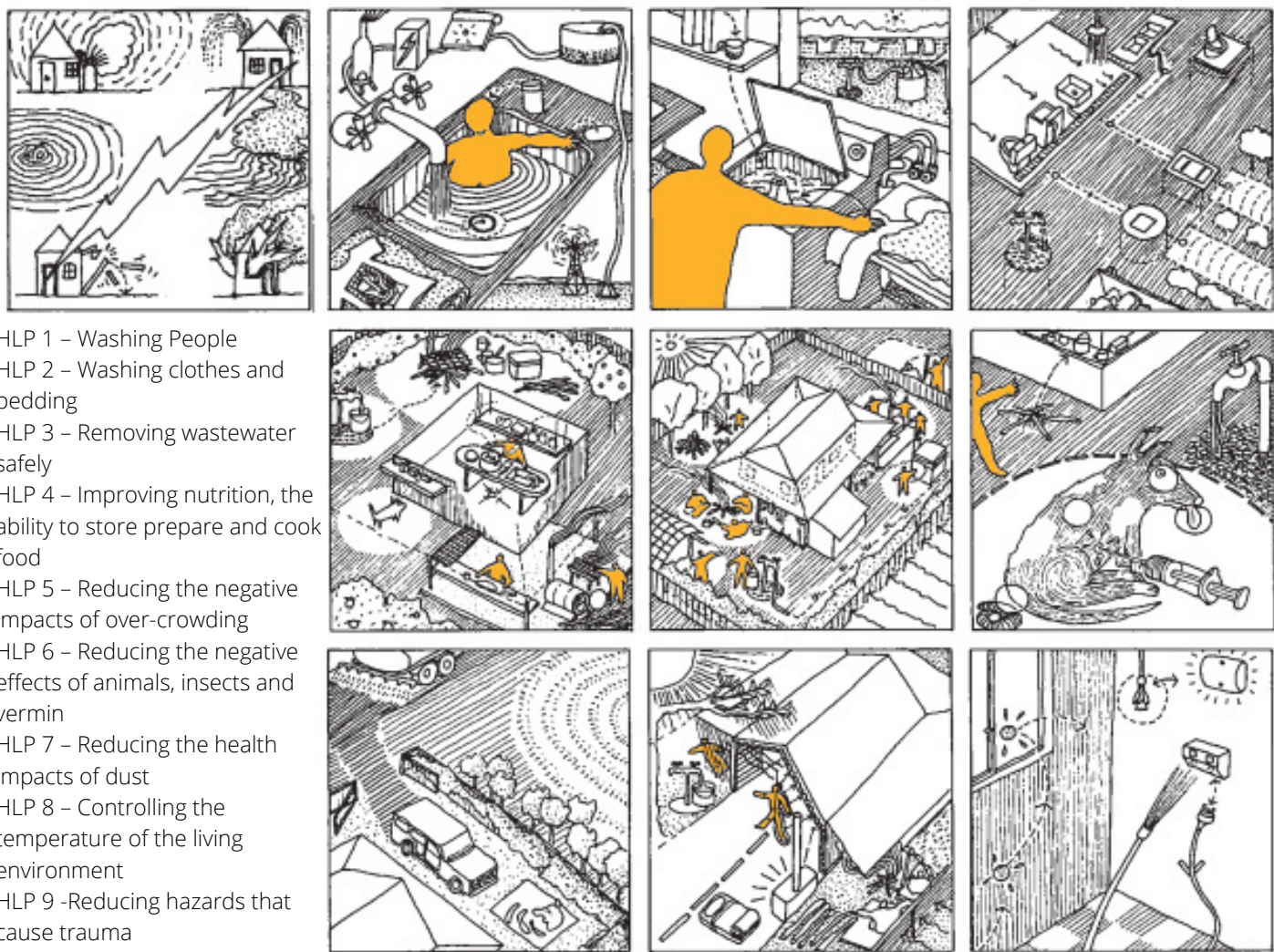


Figure 6. Aboriginal housing survey results chart by Foster, T & Hall, N, 2019

Figure 7. Nine healthy living practices developed by Health Habitat. Accessed via <https://www.healthhabitat.com/what-we-do/safety-and-the-9-healthy-living-practices/>



# INCOME & AFFORDABILITY



***That the Australian Government implements APO NT's Fair Work and Strong Communities proposal for a remote development and employment scheme to enhance employment opportunities and community led development for Aboriginal people.***

Income is a major determinant of food security and plays a role in different forms in all four of the domains of food security. The combination of lower household income and higher food costs for Aboriginal families living in the NT has become a growing issue for Aboriginal community members. Limited job opportunities, low wages, stagnant and low social security payments and high cost of living all impact disproportionately on Aboriginal communities in the NT and play a significant role in their higher rates of food insecurity.

The APO NT model for a redeveloped CDP program is designed to support community based jobs. It's long been recognised that normal labour market principles do not apply in remote communities due to limited employment opportunities and remoteness of communities. In some communities even if every job was filled by a local person there

would still not be enough jobs for everyone who wants one. Programs like the Indigenous Rangers program and Night Patrol, developed under the old community-led CDEP, are now national programs that were born and develop from community priorities and initiatives [21]. A complete redesign of CDP is critical in empowering communities, creating new job opportunities and moving people away from the welfare system.

***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, AMSANT community consultation.*

Throughout the Food Summit project Aboriginal community members have been very clear in their desire for more job opportunities for their people. Twenty three percent of all the Food Summit workshop ideas related to employment opportunities. This strong focus on jobs and economic empowerment has been reflected through the recommendation put forward as part of the Food Summit project.

**23%**

of Food Summit workshop ideas related to Aboriginal employment opportunities



# HOUSEHOLD AFFORDABILITY OF A HEALTHY BASKET OF FOOD.

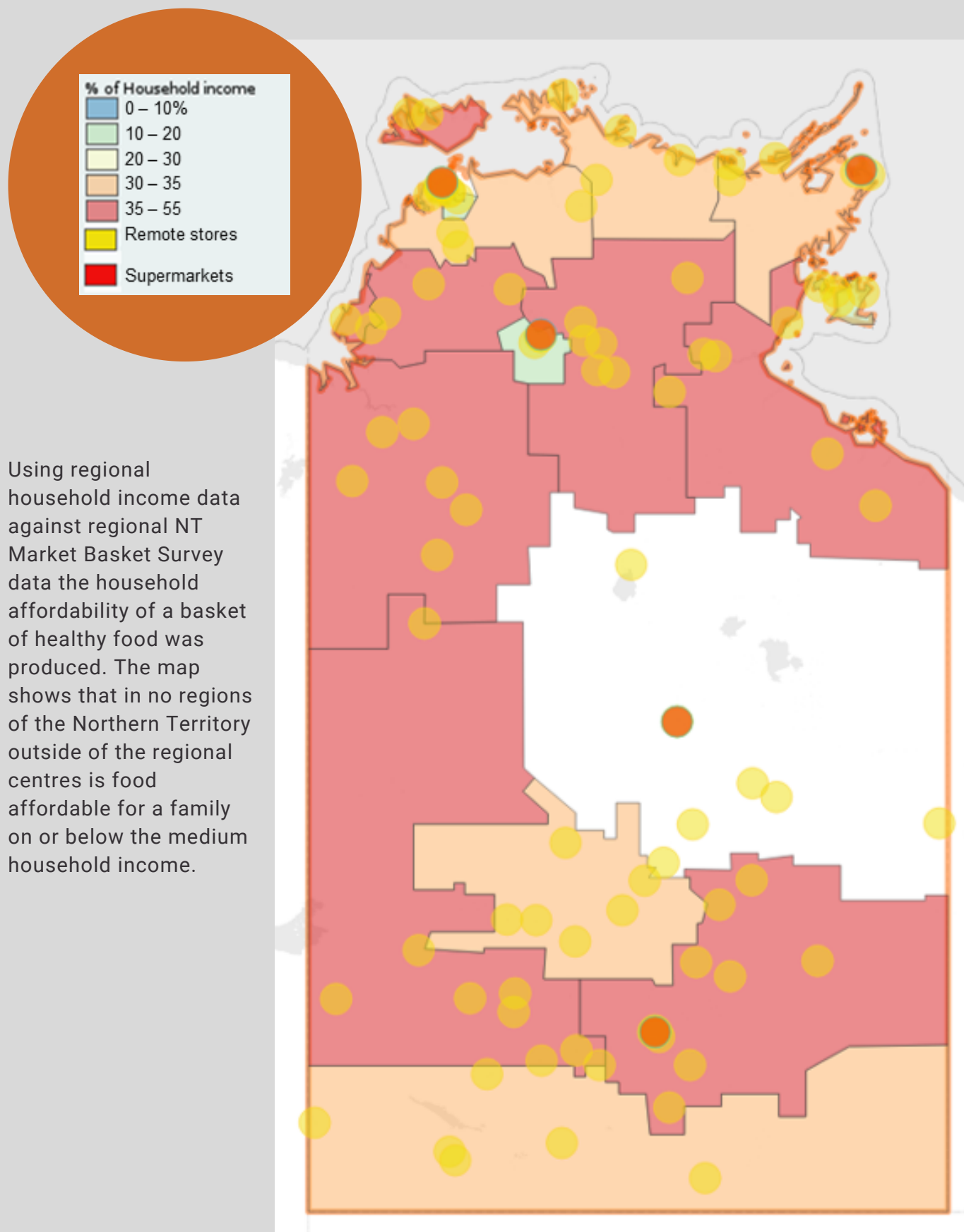


Figure 8. Comparison of SA2 region medium household income and regional average market basket cost

**The Australian Government to increase social welfare payments including;**

**i. JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and other related payments to be permanently and adequately increased to keep people out of poverty.**

**ii. An increase in the rate of the remote area allowance in line with higher cost of living of remote regions of the Northern Territory.**

**iii. Ongoing indexation of all payments in line with wage movements at least twice a year.**

AMSANT's Aboriginal community consultation work undertaken in 2020 found income and the pressure on households from low incomes and the high cost of a basket of food was a major factor in people feeling food insecure and what drove people's food choice. In 2015, Aboriginal households in the NT had a median weekly income of \$817 less than non-Aboriginal households and a significant proportion of the population were receiving social security payments [2]. This is compounded by the fact that in the NT 74% of Aboriginal people live in the most disadvantaged areas, where access to healthy food is harder, thus increasing the overall cost of food to the household [22]. This significant equity issue within the NT around access and affordability of healthy food is a major driving factor behind the disparity in food insecurity rates [8].

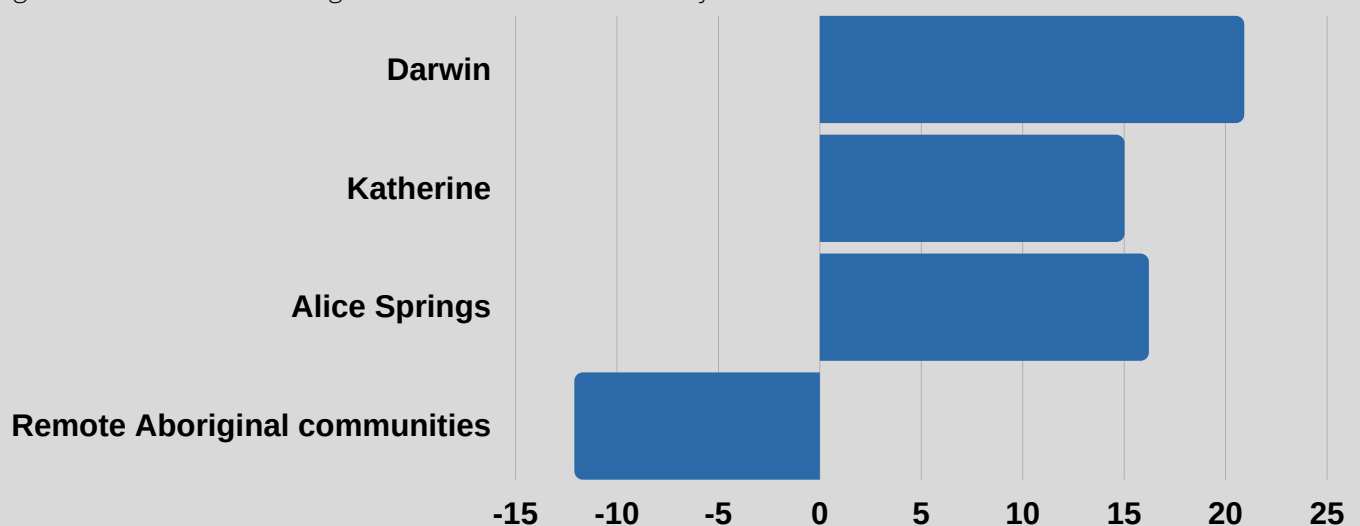
**People buy all their food on pay day and then will go until the next pay until they buy more. Fresh food is eaten on day one and then some people might not eat for a few days or go to family on their [family member's] pay day.**

**Aboriginal community member, AMSANT Community consultation**

There is also a growing divide between remote areas and towns. NTCOSS's previous analysis of ABS data showed a growing divergence between the incomes of Aboriginal people in urban areas and remote areas leading to greater rates of poverty in some of the most expensive areas for food in the NT [20]. The 2019 NTG Market Basket Survey showed that the gap between the cost of healthy food in remote communities and urban centers has grown continuously over the last 20 years, to now be 56% more expensive [4]. This has further illustrated the need for greater employment opportunities and changes to government policies like the Remote Area Allowance, which has not increased in 20 years [14,15].

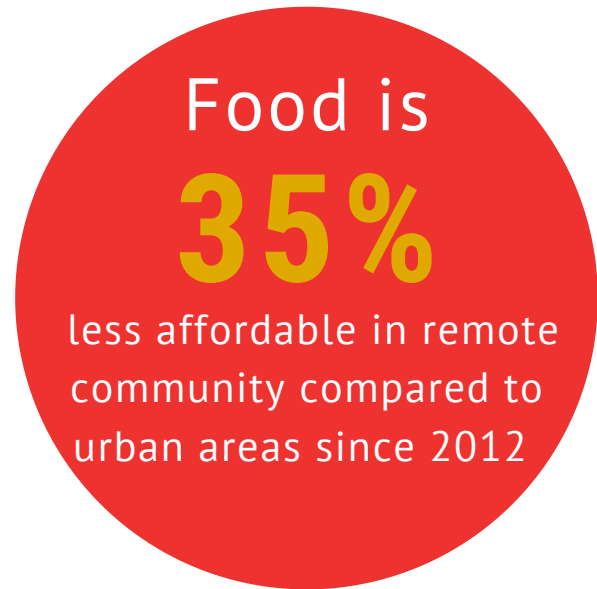
Adopting WACOSS approach to measuring food stress; greater than 25% of household income is needed to afford a basket of healthy food, all remote regions in the NT have a medium household income that food stress is experienced. Remote community households now require 35% more money than town households to afford the same basket of food compared to 2012.

Figure 9. 2012 to 2016 change in Market basket affordability for medium household income



With JobSeeker increases currently linked to the national consumer price index at a rate significantly lower than wages growth and price increases seen in the Northern Territory, as demonstrated in Figure 8 & 10, it has become harder for social welfare recipients to maintain food security as well as afford other critical needs such as housing, power and clothing.

The increase of social welfare payments could have significant health and education benefits through a reduction in the stress placed on communities. Raising the rate above poverty levels and indexing them to wage growth will better allow people to afford essential items and make healthy food choices that are economically accessible.



*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, AMSANT community consultation.*

Mind mapping and prioritisation activity at the Food Summit 2021



# LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION



***The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to provide long term investment in community controlled local food production and critical infrastructure to support greater food production, including the harvesting of traditional foods, in and around Aboriginal communities. This should include;***

***i. Funding for training for Aboriginal people linked to Agriculture jobs in and around Aboriginal communities.***

***ii. Assistance for Aboriginal communities to harvest traditional foods for community consumption and sale to both local and national markets.***

***iii. Provide investment into community controlled primary industries which provide economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities.***

Growing and harvesting more food in and around Aboriginal communities can play an important role in increasing access and availability of healthy food for the community. Harvesting and growing more food locally shortens the supply chain of fresh produce, lowering the cost and improving the quality and shelf life of the fresh food. By increasing the access and engagement in producing more locally grown food this can also support Aboriginal people's food sovereignty and ensure the food system is meeting the community's needs.

Participants at the Food Summit workshop and community consultations saw the need for more food production as not only an important aspect of increasing community food security but as an employment opportunity. It is clear the attractiveness of not only the increased access to traditional foods and healthy shop foods but the employment and health benefits from greater production and harvesting of food in and around remote communities has strong community support.

***You can't be what you can't see. So if we want our communities to be healthy we need to make healthy food available. Have people growing it and eating it fresh. – Nova Peris***



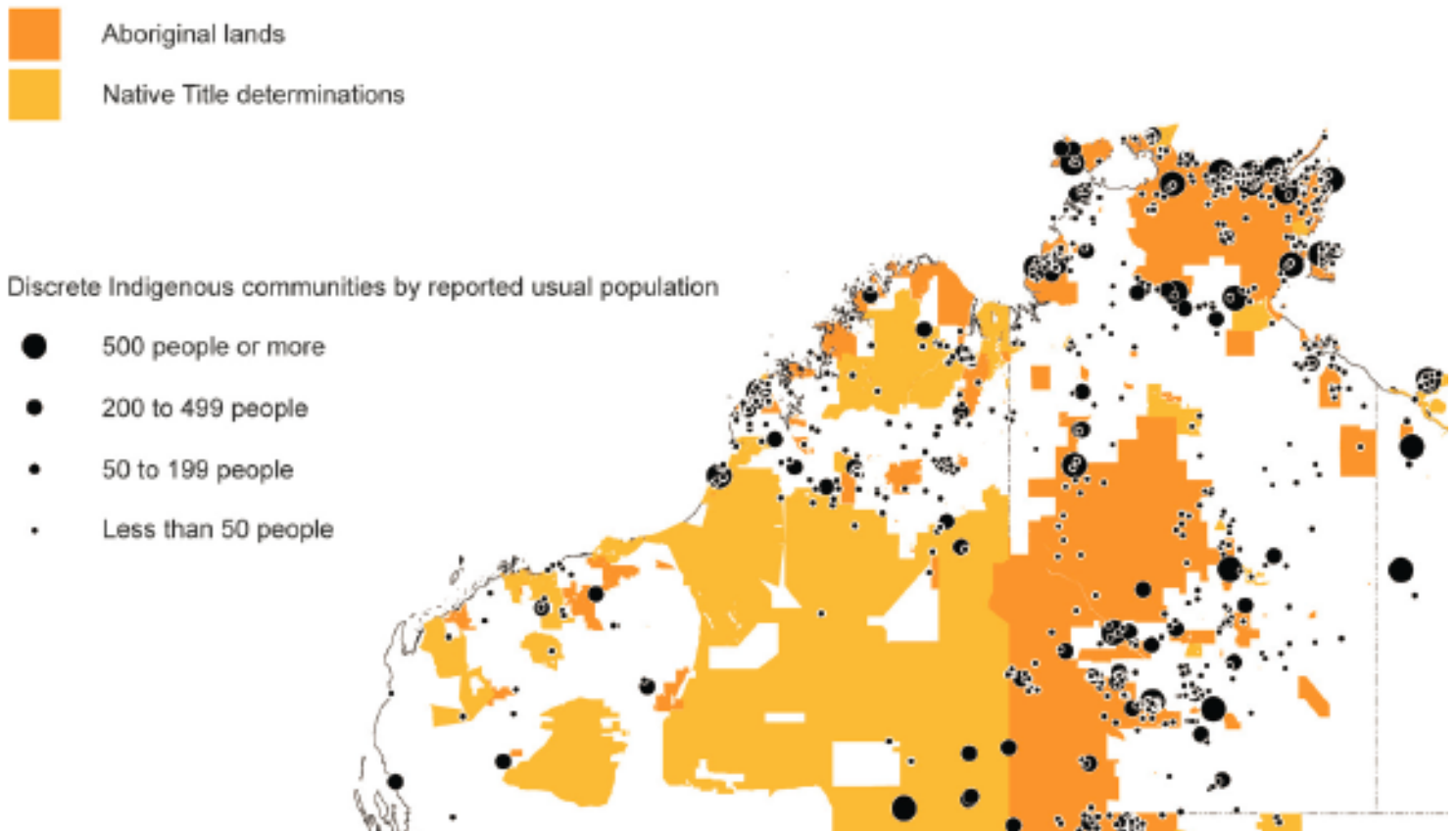
Nova Peris, Founder of the Nova Peris Foundation ,

However, there have been many attempts at developing community gardens/farms in the Northern Territory, most of which have been identified as failing due to lacking a systematic approach to the development, resources, marketing, management, sustainability and succession plans [23]. Most importantly its been found through this project those that have failed have often been driven by outsiders and lack true community leadership and control. These issues have previously been identified through projects like the Central Australian Growing to Grow (G2G) workshop in 2008 and the subsequent Scoping Study for the development of community farms/gardens in remote Aboriginal communities in Central Australia. However, what is clear from this previous work, the Food Summit workshop sessions and the AMSANT Aboriginal community consultation, undertaken as part of this project, is there is a strong desire to see more food grown locally in and around Aboriginal communities. While it has been shown by the previous work undertaken by Centrefarm this will not be viable for

all communities and there is a need for different models to be developed to ensure their success. But with a long term commitment from governments, strong links to local employment and a coordinated approach food production and harvesting will play an important role in supporting food security and food sovereignty for Aboriginal communities.

Growing and harvesting food in and around Aboriginal communities potentially has multiple benefits and cost savings through increased physical activity, improved access and affordability of healthy food, connection and management of land and the benefits to the whole community through social and economic opportunities. The food production could also be a major income stream for the community with flow on benefits to the economic opportunities. Throughout the Food Summit project example of successful food production by Aboriginal communities have emerged, these include Centre Farm's melon farm and WEP program and the Barwinuga ranger fishing program.

Figure 10. Northern Territory map of Aboriginal land and Aboriginal community location. Hunter B et al. 2012



# STORES

RAL STORE  
SOCIAL CLUB INCORPORATED

***The Northern Territory Government and Land Councils to review and develop a remote stores lease agreement that ensures the viability and sustainability of remote stores in line with other essential services.***

What has been clear from the significant amount of work undertaken over the last 2 years around food security in Aboriginal communities is the important role that stores play in helping to support and facilitate more food secure communities.

Community Stores are an essential service in Aboriginal communities that ensure year round access to essential grocery items and critical items like power cards. However, high overhead costs of running stores in remote communities have an impact on the price of produce within the store and the viability of all stores. These overheads due to small economies of scale, large distances from markets and high cost of maintenance services place many stores on the brink of collapse. Despite this community stores are often one of the few Aboriginal community owned businesses in a remote community and play an important economic and social role supporting sporting groups and other community initiatives and activities. Measures to reduce the cost of overheads on community stores are one way to reduce the cost of food in these communities.

While community owned stores provide an essential service to the community the cost of lease for these store doesn't always reflect this, often placing

increased financial burden on stores inhibiting them from implementing measures to reduce availability of high profit unhealthy food and increasing access and affordability of healthy foods. By reducing the cost of store leases in line with other remote community essential services stores will have greater flexibility to implement measures like ALPA's Healthy Stores 2020 initiatives that reduce the sale of sugar in remote community stores.

A review of the lease methodology to better align remote community owned store agreements with other essential service could ensure greater viability and sustainability of stores. Easing of overhead costs will allow stores to focus on playing a bigger role in support the health of community through increased access to healthy food.

Djamalaka Dhamarrandj ALPA boardmember



**The Australian Government to adequately fund and expand the remote stores licensing program by monitoring all food security aspects of remote stores; access, affordability, availability and safety of healthy food. Benchmarking should be used, working with the health sector, through the licensing program to provide information to store committees to support community decision making.**

While remote community members have regularly called for and implemented strategies to increase the price and reduce the promotion of high fat and sugar foods and drinks in their communities, better data is needed to help inform store boards and store managers about the successes and track these strategies.

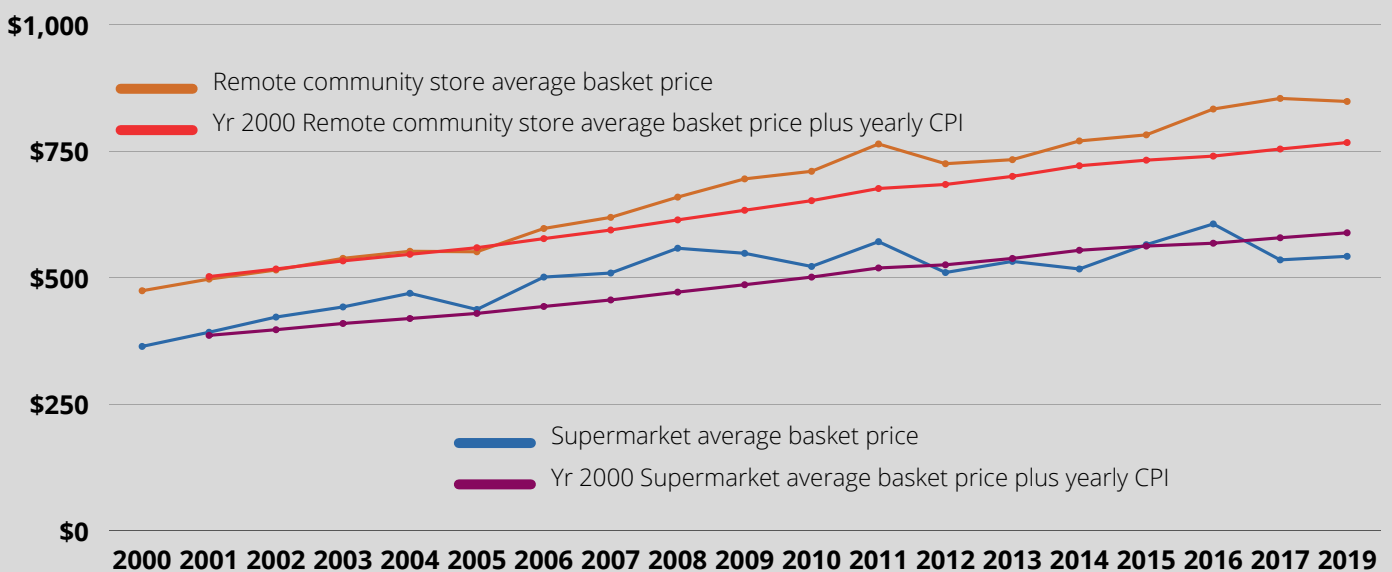
Presentation at the Food Summit about successful projects like Healthy Stores 2020 and Mai Wiru Food security project showed how multi-strategy, community-led store projects can reduce the intake of high fat and sugar foods and support communities to have improved access and consumption of healthy food. By informing store boards about how their store is tracking towards healthy store practices like production availability, price, promotion, and placement, store boards are better placed to work with managers to implement and continue developing strategies to support healthy eating within their community.

Throughout AMSANT's community consultation community members were keen to understand how their store was performing compared to other regions and what they could be doing better. Aboriginal community members are often left unsure how their store is performing on basic measures to support healthy behaviours despite communities wanting these enacted.

While some stores are leading the way nationally on creating health supporting environments others are seen to be inhibiting good food choices. By providing a benchmarking system for stores boards to review and make informed decisions on, all stores; private, community owned independent and group stores, will be able to show their communities how they are supporting food security through at the minimum providing 'reasonable ongoing level of access to a range of food, drink and grocery items that is reasonably priced, safe and of sufficient quantity and quality to meet nutritional and related household needs' [1].

A benchmarking program which provides easily accessible results for the community would allow stores achieving strong results for their community to promote their achievements and drive other stores to strive for similar outcomes through a community driven process. This process could make up part of a new stores licensing program.

Figure 11. Trends in cost of a basket of healthy food in remote stores and urban supermarkets verses Australian yearly CPI increases.



Delegates at the Food Summit including stores groups saw value in the Stores licensing scheme to ensure the improvements that have been made over the last decade are not lost. With the expiry of Stores licensing in 2022 under the Stronger Futures Act 2012, NIAA and the Aboriginal community controlled sector have a unique opportunity to review and strengthen the Store licensing program to ensure it is able to meet the new challenges from 2022 onwards. Current resourcing for Store licensing assessment and compliance has largely devolved to NIAA regional offices with limited support resulting in the reduction of activity in this area. While the monitoring and enforcement of store licensing has had mixed success over its existence, when well funded, it has played an important role in ensuring greater focus and structure for remote stores.

***The Australian Government to invest in the upgrade and expansion of community stores to allow for increased availability of fresh foods, including meat, fruits and vegetables, and healthy takeaway options.***

As remote stores infrastructure has improved greatly over the last two decades with this has been an increase in grocery range, changes in community expectation and improvement in technology over this same time period. Through AMSANT consultations and Food Summit workshops Aboriginal community members and services providers noted the need for the next step in investment in stores to ensure they are able to continue to meet the challenges of operating in remote communities and increasing access to healthy food into the future.

There are also still stories of remote community stores with broken fridges, insufficient space to stock even the basic grocery items and regularly broken down cool rooms from the Food Summit. This has meant some remote stores are unable to

ensure community food security, particularly in small standalone independent stores. This risk became an even bigger concern during the COVID-19 pandemic when community members were unable to travel outside their community and stores infrastructure was placed under increased stress due to the increased demands. An ANAO 2014 review of remote food security they found that the viability of remote stores is difficult due to the high overhead cost of running stores, and found that by stores introducing changes like the addition of takeaway, more floor space for stock and the installation of fuel pumps, could help support stores and make them more viable [35].

An investment fund and grant opportunities for stores, similar to those rolled out from 2012, could help target those stores with significant infrastructure upgrade needs and ensure community owned stores are able to improve their viability. Tying the implementation of policy ideas from Healthy Stores 2020 to funding will ensure infrastructure upgrades lead to improved food security through greater access and availability to affordable healthy food. The Healthy Stores 2020 Policy Actions have been developed particularly to support stores in remote Aboriginal communities to inform store nutrition policies and adopt healthier retail strategies.



Fogarty's store ALice Springs, 1928



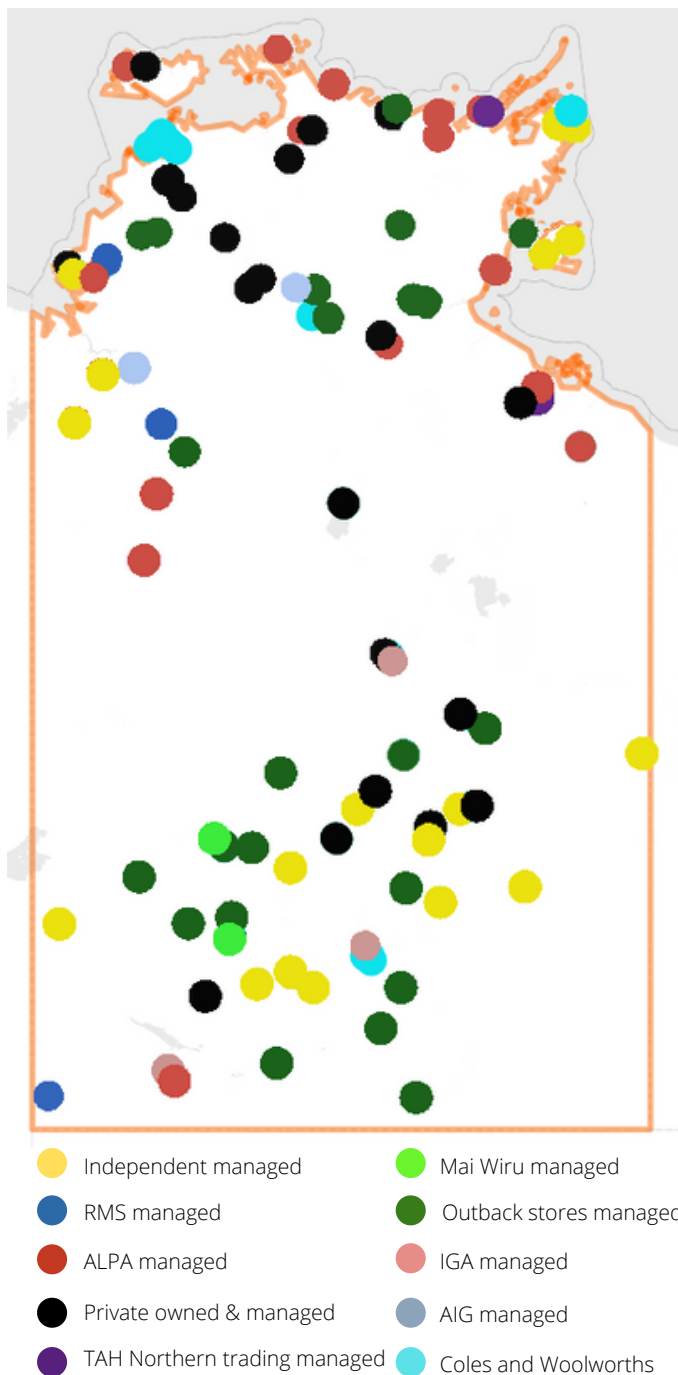
**The Australian Government to fund a feasibility study to determine the most practical way to implement a subsidy scheme that increases the availability of healthy food for people living in remote communities at a more affordable cost for consumers.**

Lowering the cost of fruits and vegetables for Aboriginal people was seen as an important measure to support better food security in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory throughout this project. While the divide between income and cost of healthy food can in some way be reduced through increased employment opportunities and increased social welfare payments, there will still be a need to further reduce the cost of fruits and vegetables in remote communities to be closer in line with prices in the Northern Territory's regional centres like Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.

Delegates at the Summit provided a number of ideas of how best to implement a subsidy that achieves the aim of reducing the cost of healthy food in remote communities. Direct to consumer, freight and store wage subsidies were all raised and warrant further investigation to determine feasibility, effectiveness and cost of implementation.

At present it is not clear what the most cost effective and efficient approach is. Therefore funding is needed to undertake a study to determine the best approach. This could build on existing knowledge in the space and provide stakeholders with a clear direction in how to implement and support a subsidy that benefits consumers most.

Figure 12. NT store location and management type



Alice Springs contains the only road and rail freight access point to southern food markets

**The Australian Government through its entities and the food industry to assist remote community stores to collaborate and develop partnerships with local food producers, wholesalers and other remote community stores to lower the cost and increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables within stores.**

The experience during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic showed that the larger Australian food retailers are willing to cooperate with the remote stores to ensure an adequate food supply for remote communities when demand for food throughout Australia was high leading to limited available stock for remote stores.

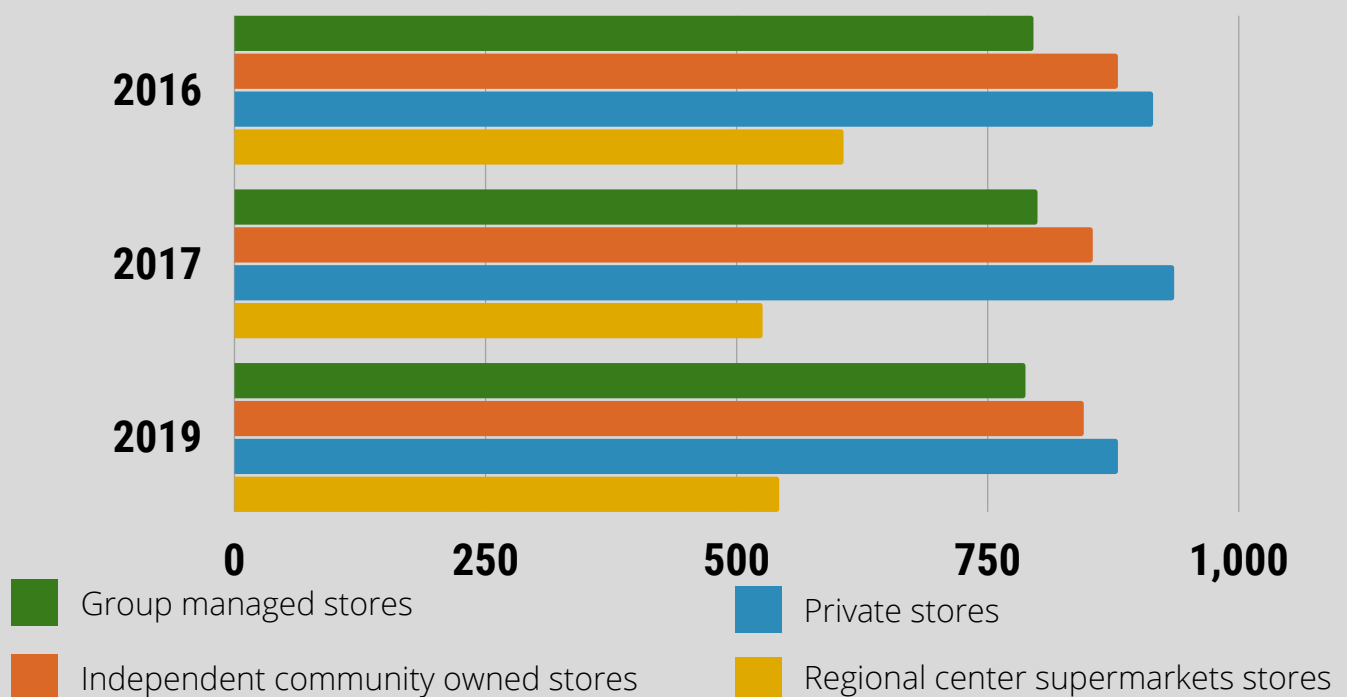
It's clear that by accessing increased buying power and industry support the availability and cost of healthy food in remote communities can be improved. The Northern Territory Market Basket data indicates that where stores are able to benefit through group buying and logistics the price of food to consumers is greatly improved, by as much as 13% [4]. Both government-backed and Aboriginal community owned store groups have shown over the last two decades that collective buying has increased buying efficiency through economies of scale leading to significant benefits for communities with group stores.

However, this alone has not been sufficient to combat the rising price of food in remote communities compared to urban centers.

While some communities may wish to maintain their independence into the future these stores can still be supported, along with group stores, through collaboration and coordination of buying and logistics by being provided access to the efficiencies of the large supermarket chains, manufacturers and wholesalers. As the remote stores sector is only 2% of the total Australian grocery market any private and government support to ensure supply is unlikely to have an impact of the wider market [24]. Government backed support and collaboration around supply issues to remote communities will reduce the cost of obtaining and transporting food to these communities reducing the cost of food to the consumer. As remote communities often act as isolated economies, with the majority of household income being spent within the community, this will likely mean consumers are able to buy greater amount of groceries.

Stakeholders, working through the establishment of a food security working group, could be tasked with developing these relationships and strategies to improve the price, quality and quantity of healthy food on an ongoing bases. This could be achieved through MOUs, policy changes and the establishment of business collaborations.

Figure 13. NT Market Basket Survey average basket price by store type



# NUTRITION WORKFORCE

***The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to invest in the development of a local community based workforce where community members are trained and adequately supported (by public health nutritionists/dietitians, Health promotion officers and Chronic disease workers) as local nutrition promotion officers. These Aboriginal health promotion officers should be involved in:***

***i. Community-wide nutrition promotion through use of local language, cook-ups, group education, hunting trips and education on traditional foods to children in schools with elders***

***ii. Store and food provision program assessments so as to provide information to operators on where improvements could be made for the promotion of healthy food and less promotion of unhealthy food in line with communities needs***

***iii. In partnership with stores, schools, rangers and local councils, set-up and maintain promotional activities that support access to traditional foods, nutrition education and knowledge sharing.***

Community led education and training was identified through all 5 workshop sessions to be critical to ensuring strong community engagement, understanding and benefit from any initiative implemented to support community food security.

It's been 20 years since the first NT Aboriginal Nutrition workshop was held in Katherine. At this workshop participants firstly recommended that there be funding for more positions for Aboriginal people working in the area of Nutrition in their communities. This included having a career structure for nutrition specialist health workers and community based nutrition workers. Unfortunately there has been little progress towards this recommendation with currently only one Aboriginal dedicated Nutrition position in the Northern Territory and no regular Nutrition training for Aboriginal Health Workers to upskill in this area. This is despite the fact nutrition plays a significant role in the major



health concerns of the community and features heavily in government preventative disease plans and strategies at both Territory and Federal levels.

The employment of Aboriginal people to deliver and support nutrition and health promoting education and activities is critical in ensuring nutrition messages are designed and delivered in a culturally appropriate way. The Food Summit workshop participants strongly felt community based nutrition roles to help support and facilitate the wide variety of nutrition education, promotion and activities that occurs in Aboriginal communities from a wide variety of organisation was needed.

**Building an Aboriginal Nutrition Workforce was the No 1. way of improving Nutrition knowledge and education**

Building a strong Aboriginal workforce in the nutrition space will ensure greater development of community led messaging on one of the top 3 leading reasons for the high burden of disease seen in our Aboriginal communities. With existing national support for an Aboriginal community based nutrition workforce there is an opportunity to follow a model similar to how tobacco and other drugs has been addressed in Aboriginal community using a strong community based workforce.

This workforce could help address the gap in Public health nutritionist/ dietitians in the NT. Currently in no NT region was there sufficient public health nutrition/dietitian positions provided to adequately meet community nutrition needs. In regions where Aboriginal community controlled health services exist this workforce was even smaller and reliant on short term funding opportunities.

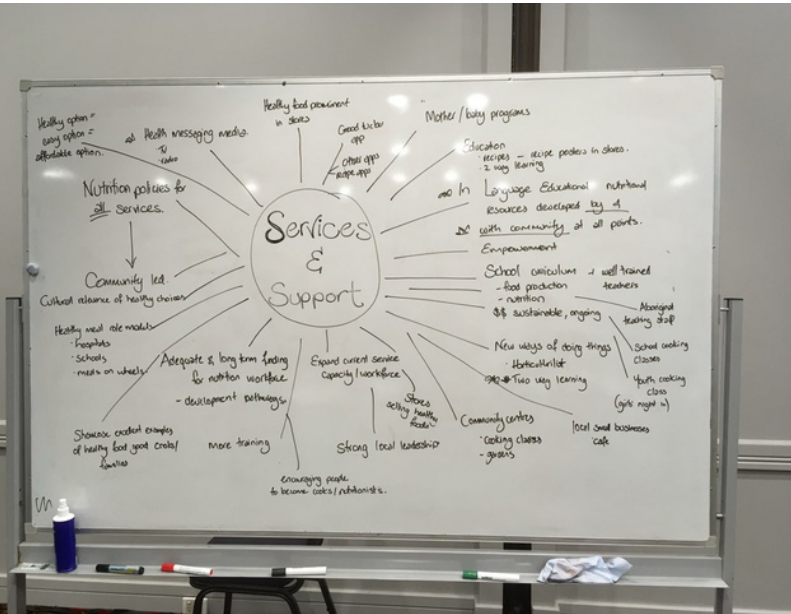
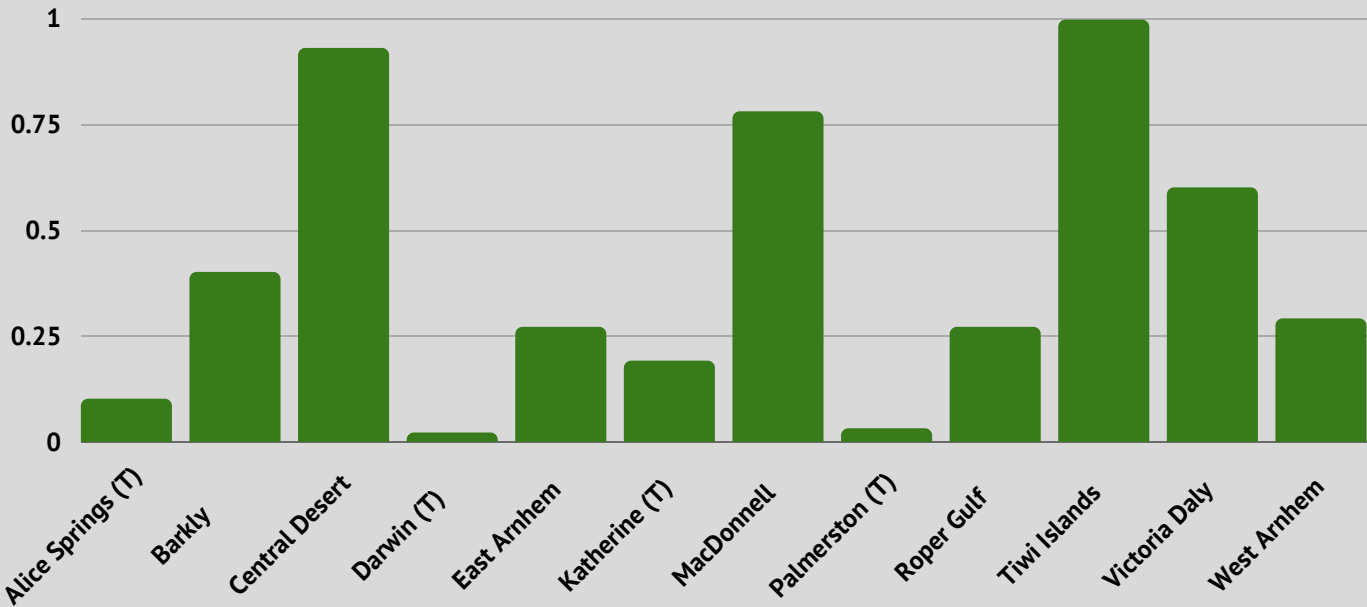


Figure 14. Public Health Nutritionist/ Dietitians per 1,000 population by NT regions



***From collaboration fostered through the establishment of a Food security working group and a community based workforces; Health, Education, Jobs services and Youth Services to work closer together to educate and develop the skills of young Aboriginal people in cooking, healthy eating and promoting healthy behaviours. These programs should aim to be led by Aboriginal people and using local languages to promote healthy living.***

Delegates at the Food Summit expressed the concern that while multiple sectors are working to provide and improve the nutritional intake of Aboriginal people, few of these services share and collaborate on nutrition education and food security initiatives. This is not a unique issue to this space but due to the important role that each sector plays in building good food security it does require a more concerted effort to overcome.

Greg Patterson, Foodbank SA CEO, Learning to use the bush wok at the Food Summit



Participants involved in the AMSANT consultation sessions were specifically asked how better collaboration could be achieved in this area, as it had been recognised early in the project the challenge this created. The formation of a multisector working group was identified as the most effective way of supporting collaboration, with strong communication channels both in and out of the group. A working group allows for the sharing of resources and knowledge that help build partnerships around initiatives where shared beneficial outcomes can be achieved.

Collaborative opportunities were identified through the Food Summit workshop sessions, particularly around running and developing cooking skills and health literacy in young Aboriginal people. This work could be driven by Aboriginal community based nutrition workers previously mentioned and provide the opportunity for local food knowledge and language to be developed with younger people in communities.

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

*Aboriginal community member,  
AMSANT Community consultation*

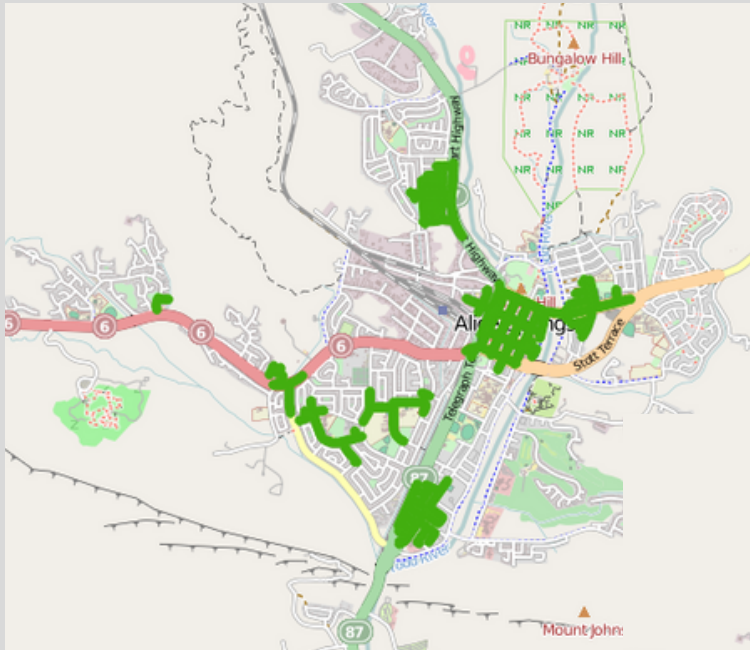
***All sectors working in and with Aboriginal communities to implement healthy food choices policies that support the health messages of local health services. Food made available through services should promote healthy eating practices and build on a healthy food environment.***

While those at the Food Summit recognised food security was more than just providing food to people and that the nutritional quality of this food is central to people becoming food secure, food provided to Aboriginal people does not always meet this standard. With a growing number of programs providing food to community members and currently limited nutrition support for these programs there is a need for all sectors to implement and follow some collective nutrition principles.

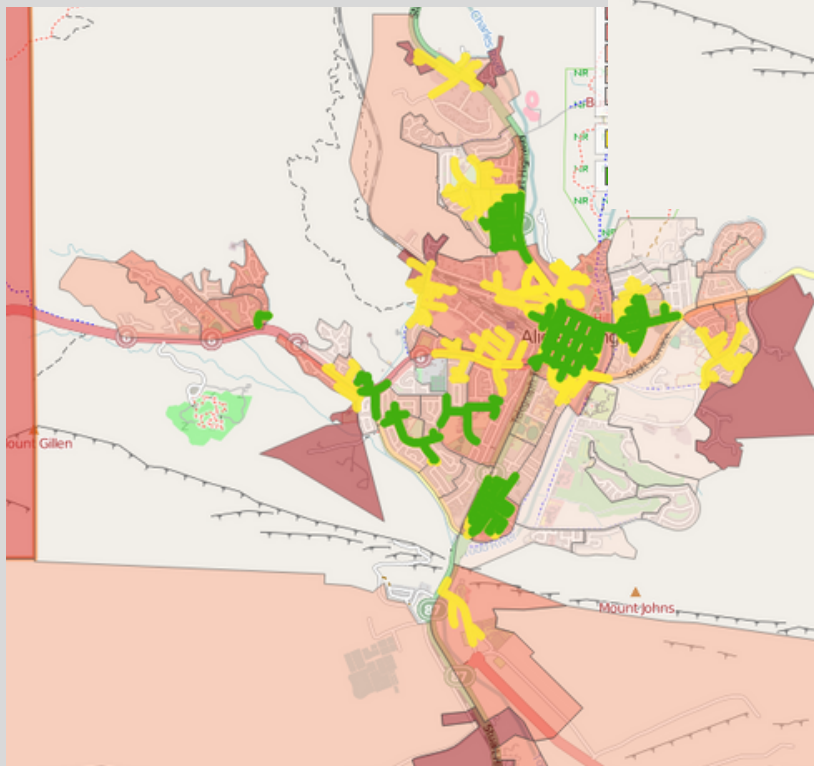
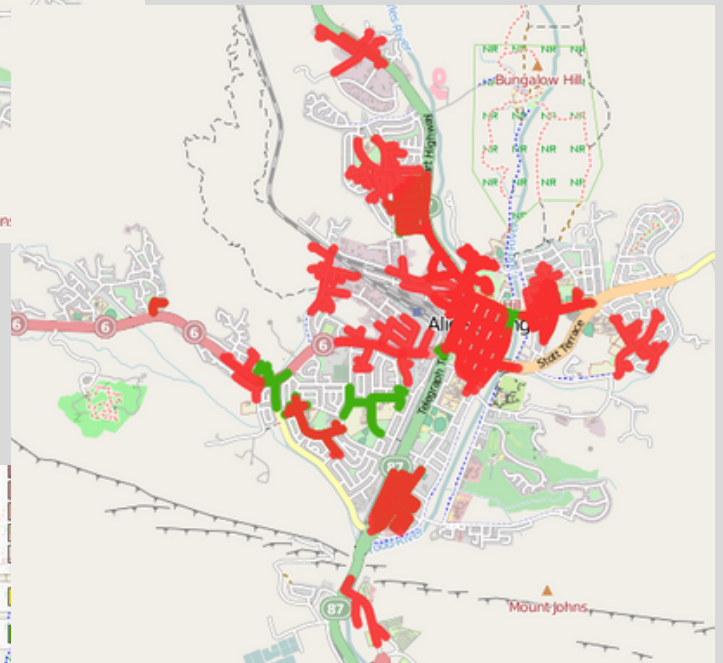
With some community members receiving up to 75% of their daily food intake from service providers there is a need to ensure health benefits are achieved through people becoming more food secure through these programs. It's also important all sectors consider the health impacts and behaviour modelling that food provided through their services creates.

Similar food charters, guideline and programs have been developed in other jurisdictions to improve the standard and nutritional quality of food provided to vulnerable populations. There is a valuable opportunity that exists through food programs and one off events to support vulnerable populations and improve their health outcomes through good nutrition and model good food practices.

Figure 15. 500m walking distance to Supermarket and fast food outlet Alice Springs location

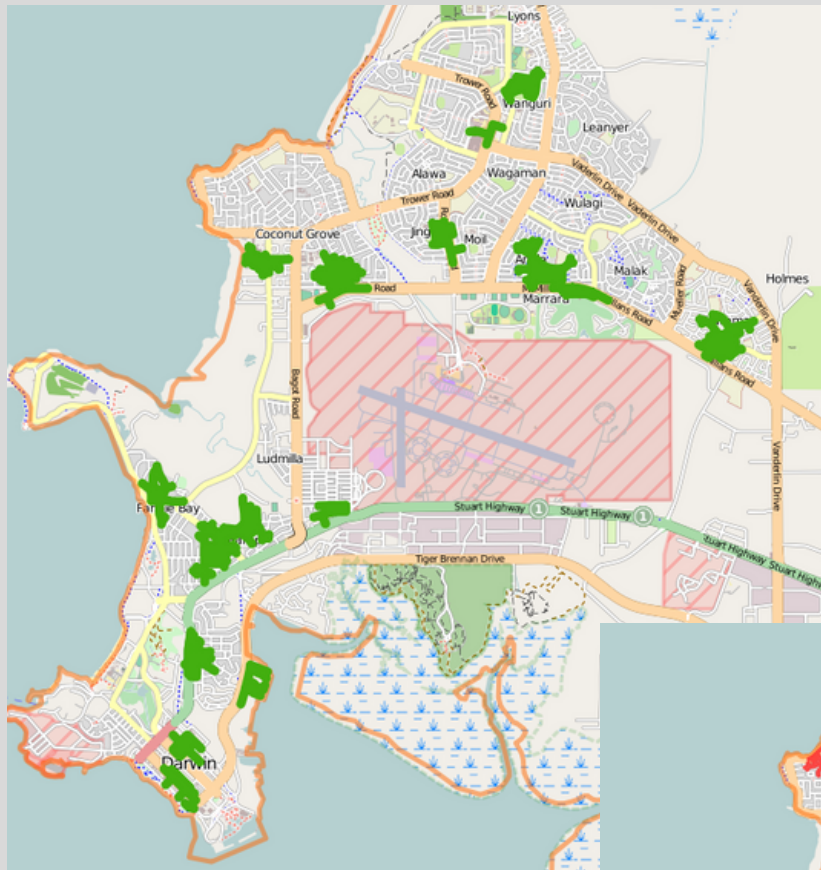


Those living in Urban areas such as Alice Springs and Darwin have considerable issues in accessing healthy food. Most supermarkets and stores which stock a adequate range of healthy food are surrounded by fast food outlets. Using 500m walking distance as a measure of accessibility fast food outlets are considerably more accessible to people.

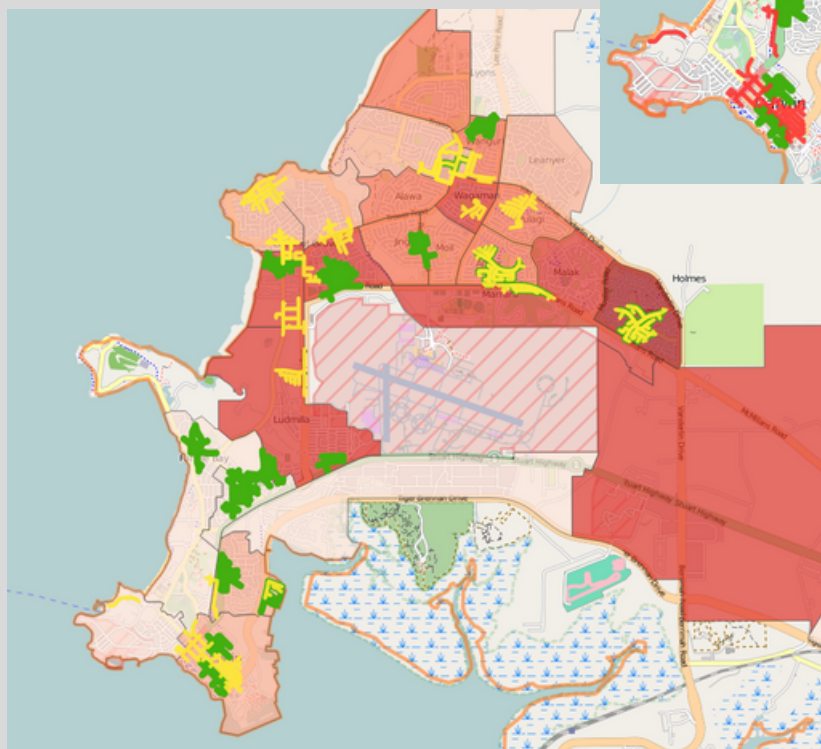
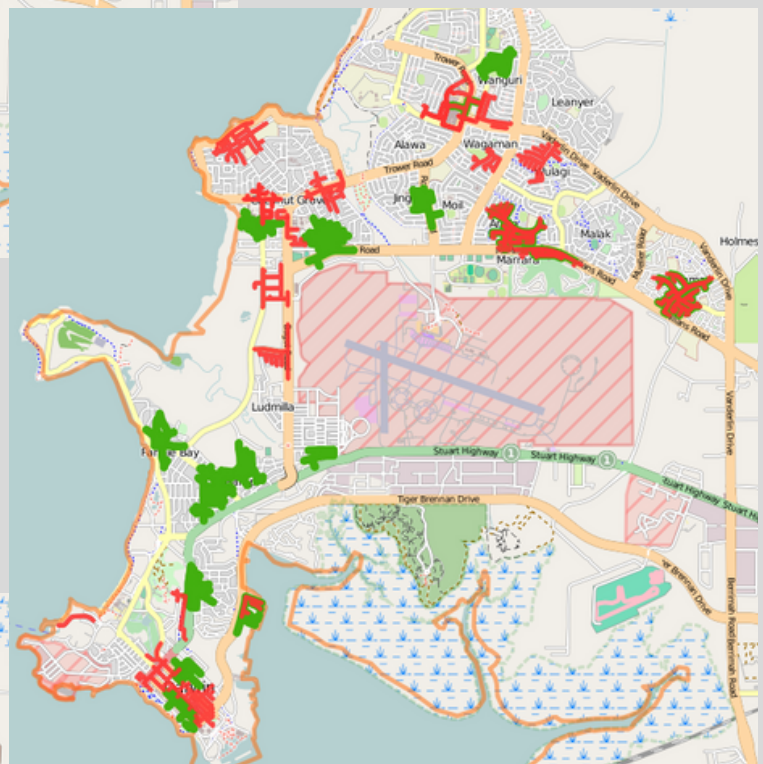


Fast food outlets predominate over stores that stock healthy food throughout Alice Springs. This is especially concerning considering the higher proportion of fast food outlets in or close to lower socio-economic areas.

Figure 16. 500m walking distance Supermarket and fast food outlet Darwin location



In the Darwin region fast food outlets locations indicate they are aimed at lower socio-economic areas. For Aboriginal communities like Bagot fast food was the only food outlet within 500m.



When comparing lower socio-economic areas like Karama to Parap, access to healthy food is often dominated by fast food outlets in lower socio-economic areas and less accessible.

Further mapping is needed to understand public transport access and shade provided along walking routes to fully determine the barriers inhibiting access. However, these maps indicate disadvantaged areas are inhibited in their access to healthy food at a greater level than high socio-economic areas.

# INFRASTRUCTURE



***The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to invest in safe, community acceptable and affordable water and power supply with the view of supporting healthy choices for community members through appropriate infrastructure. This should include;***

***i. Palatable community water sources to ensure easy access and increased consumption of water.***

***ii. The investment in community power infrastructure that led to the reduction in cost of power to households and allows for continual power supply to households for safe storage of fresh food.***

Palatable drinking water in all remote communities was raised at the Summit as a key factor to supporting the consumption of water over sugar sweetened beverages. Aboriginal communities have for decades recognised and undertaken initiatives to tackle the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages and its impact on people's health. However, without access to good quality, palatable drinking water these initiatives have often needed to spend considerable time promoting alternative sources of water at higher costs to community members.

From 2019-2020 Northern Territory Power & Water found 44% of remote community water supplies had at least one parameter above Australian Drinking Water Guidelines for Aesthetic, characteristics associated with the acceptability of water to the consumer in terms of appearance, taste and odour of the water [25, 26].



Sebella Turner, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress board member.



Adopting water security laws that include safe drinking water laws like other states, such as South Australia, this would assist in ensuring drinking water suppliers are accountable to remote community residents in complying with minimum drinking water quality standards. Over the same reporting periods mentioned above no urban water sources exceeded maximum levels for the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

Along with greater water security, one of the major issues raised at the Summit and throughout the Aboriginal community consultations that impacted on families' food security was power security and the reliability and cost of power in people's homes. Reports of regular power outages, inhibited access to power cards and issues related to overcrowding and power use were consistent across the whole of the Northern Territory in both remote and urban area.

With access to power by the majority of those at highest risk of food insecurity in the Northern Territory most likely to be governed by power cards, easy daily access to them is needed. Stories of people needing to take expensive taxi rides to town or nearby communities just to access power cards added an extra cost to securing power for households. These indirect costs place a significant burden on already stretched household incomes increasing people's risk of going without food. Investment in community power infrastructure that reduces these and other costs are needed. These cost saving for consumers will allow for great food security by reducing the financial burden on households to maintain power supply.

**44%**

of Remote Aboriginal communities in the NT had a least 1 adverse water quality test between 2018-2020 [25,26]



***The Northern Territory and Australian Governments to develop an investment fund and plan for the upgrading of roads, bridges and sea landings for remote Aboriginal communities and potential food production regions.***

For Aboriginal community members, Stores in both remote and urban settings, and community controlled agriculture ventures, infrastructure was the number one barrier to improved affordability, sustainability and growth. Higher freight cost to remote communities due to poor road conditions and barge landings mean higher costs for all involved in the NT food system. The need for stores to access specialist trucking and barge companies to freight stock out to community stores and the impact and cost these roads have on community members' ability to travel into towns to access alternative food sources is significant.

As far back as 1999, a Northern Territory Government inquiry into food pricing the committee noted; "There is considerable opportunity for growth in the Northern Territory's horticulture industry, but it is fragmented in nature with a lack of infrastructure that hinders continued development" [27]. This lack of infrastructure continues to hamper development and places high costs on Aboriginal communities in the NT. While plans like 'Develop the North' have identified and promised improved infrastructure to support growth, little benefit has been seen out of this for Aboriginal communities despite owning over 50% of the land in the NT.

However, new opportunities exist for both the Australian and NT Governments to take on this challenge and invest in upgrading of road and barge access throughout Northern Territory. These investments will support Aboriginal community to access and make available healthy food in a more efficient way and could also support greater economic participation for Aboriginal people in the Agriculture sector.



# FUTURE DIRECTION

*It's food that keeps our hearts healthy and stops diabetes from taking hold of our health. - Barb Shaw, Anyinginy health service CEO and AMSANT chairperson*

In the 11 years since AMSANT held the first Food Summit in Tennant Creek to discuss issues of food security for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, there have been many government inquiries, reviews and reports about issues related to food security in Aboriginal communities. However, few of these reports have given the community the voice that is needed to ensure lasting and strong community driven ways to make our communities food secure.

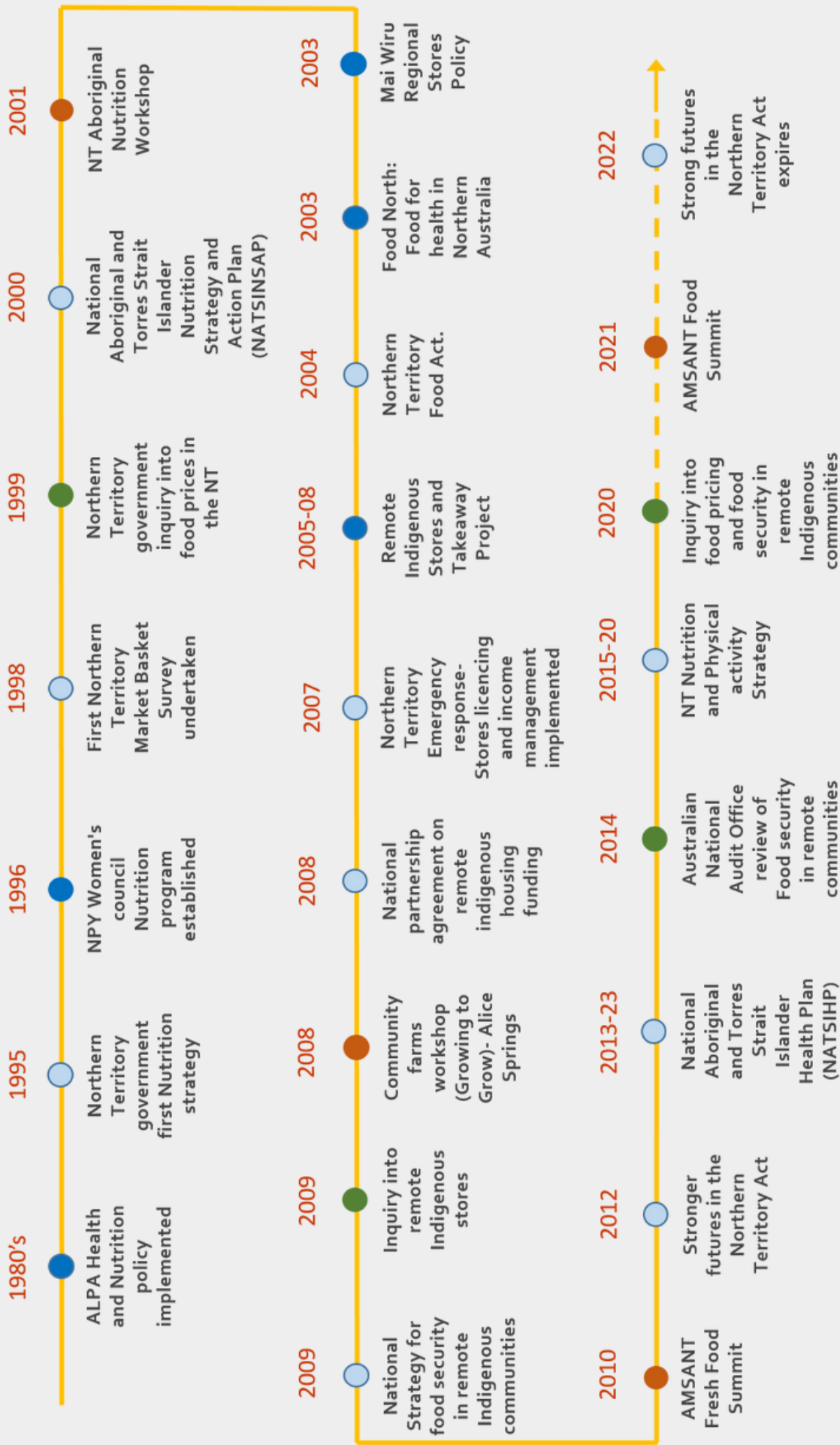
There is a recognition within Aboriginal communities and service providers that to truly address food security in our communities, we must address the underlying issues and barriers to ensure households have the income, infrastructure and support to access healthy food. This project aimed to build on this knowledge and what was learnt and discussed at the last Food Summit.

Throughout the AMSANT consultation process and during the Food Summit workshops, ideas about how best to support communities and influence change have come forward. It's hoped these ideas can now be embraced by governments and sectors involved in supporting the food security of our communities.

By implementing the policy ideas from this project and working across sectors, knowledge and resources can be shared to achieve a common goal. As has become clear from this project there is a strong interest and a level of involvement from almost all sectors working with Aboriginal communities to improve the availability and access of healthy food. By working on a common goal and set of policy ideas the issues and barriers identified can be overcome.

As has been identified throughout this report key opportunities exist over the next few years to implement these changes. These include the new focus of Closing the Gap and community led priorities, the expiring of government policies around housing and stores and the redevelopment of CDP.

This may be a once in a lifetime opportunity for governments and supporting sectors to work together on implementing a more comprehensive and complete approach to food security in Aboriginal communities.



Using the momentum generated from this platform and the establishment of a cross-sector food security working group, ongoing action can be undertaken toward the the key priority areas of this project:

- Aboriginal community control and supported governance
- Safe and sufficient housing
- Job opportunities and adequate income
- Food production and harvesting in and around NT communities
- Health focused stores
- and Services and infrastructure that support access and availability of healthy food

These priority areas will lead to an environment for strong food secure communities to be achieved by communities.

It's been close to 40 years since the first Aboriginal community-led healthy and nutrition policy was implemented in the NT. Over this 40 year time frame it has been community-led policy solutions that have endured and had the most success. It's hoped with this report's policy ideas that the next wave of community led solutions can be established, supported and lead to more improvements in the nutrition and health of Aboriginal people in the NT.



Ben Pike and Chips Mackinolty organisers of the 2021 and 2010 AMSANT Food Summits

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