



8 December 2022

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into food security in Australia

The Remote Food Security team, a collaborative conducting food security research with remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, welcomes the opportunity to make a Submission to the Inquiry into food security in Australia, released on 26 October 2022.

Thank you for considering our response. For further information, please contact:

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Response to the Inquiry into food security in Australia

We focus our response on the **impact that supply chain distribution has on the cost** and availability of food on people's lives in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The cost of healthy food in remote communities is **impacted by factors such as the cost of food to the store, of freight, and of operating stores in remote Australia [1, 2]**. These factors result in the high food costs observed in remote communities [3-5] and contribute to the high prevalence of food insecurity experienced. Many storeowners and operators implement measures to make healthy foods cheaper [6], but there is only so much they can do. **Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be a focus in the Inquiry due to the high rates of food insecurity experienced.** Leaders in remote communities and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and remote retail providers who work with them, have a crucial role in developing solutions which will address the cost of healthy food and improve food security.

Recommendations:

A: Action to address the cost of food to the store, of freight and of operating stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be considered a priority in relation to addressing food insecurity in Australia.

B: Addressing factors which cause food insecurity, including cost and affordability of a healthy diet through income and food cost measures, is crucial in improving food security.

About the Remote Food Security research collaborative

This response is submitted on behalf of the institutions and organisations involved in the Remote Food Security project. This team comprises of members from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations in Queensland and the Northern Territory and Australian and international Public Health academics, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous.

About the Remote Food Security study

We report unpublished data produced as part of this NHMRC funded study conducted in Central Australia and Cape York. Phase 1 aimed to evaluate the impact on food security, diet quality, and affordability of a healthy diet of price discounting healthy foods for women and children. Phase 1 was conducted in 8 communities in 2021 and included 294 households involving 477 pregnant or breastfeeding mothers, and children six months to five years of age. Phase 2, due for completion in early 2023, aims to learn from community members of their proposed solutions to improve food security, to inform a community-led food security framework. Here we report preliminary results from Phase 1 of relevance to the Inquiry.

Remote Food Security study baseline results

1. Food cost and affordability in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The cost and affordability of diets in study communities was estimated using the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healthy Diets ASAP tool [7]. This tool uses real store food prices to estimate the cost of a healthy diet, as well as the current diet (based on the type of diet reported in the 2011/2013 National Nutrition Survey). Given costs more than 25% of income are considered to result in 'food stress', and more than 30% are considered 'unaffordable', these results indicate that the cost of a healthy diet (and of the current diet) is unaffordable for residents of remote communities who receive welfare income (Figure 1). These costs are more unaffordable for residents of remote communities than for those on the same income living in major centres.

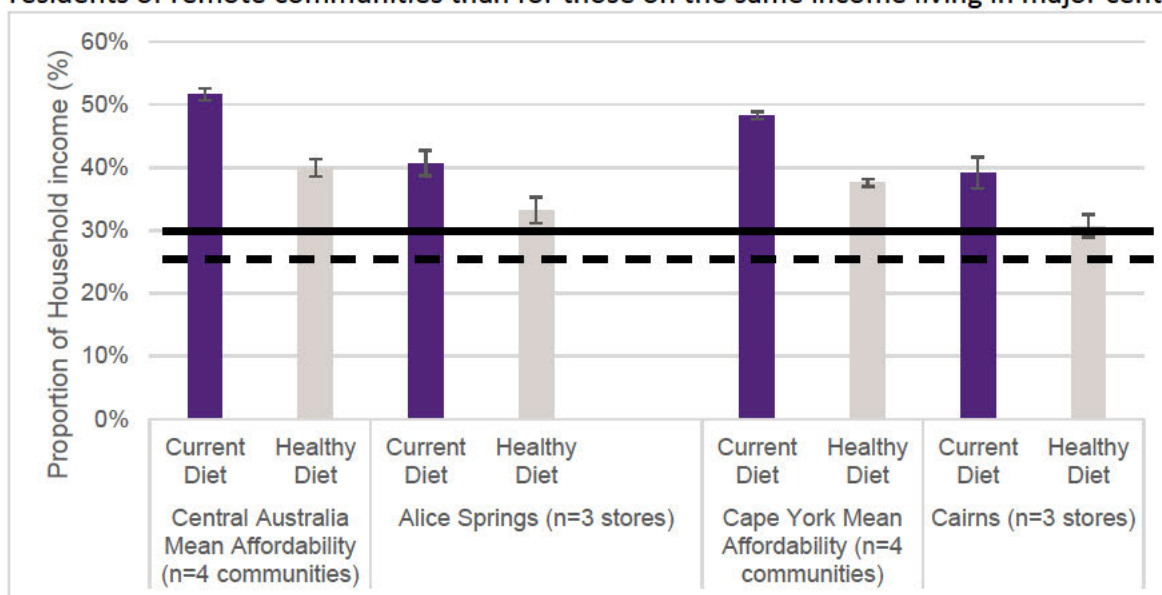


Figure 1. Affordability of current and healthy diets for people receiving welfare only income, estimated using Healthy Diets ASAP in 8 study communities, compared with affordability in the nearest major centres.

2. Food Security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The high cost of food is known to contribute to food insecurity [2]. Using a version of the United States Department of Agriculture 18-item Household Food Security Module [8] with modifications informed by Australian research [9], our data indicate >75% households with pregnant or breastfeeding women, or young children, experience food insecurity. This is more than double the nationally reported rate of 31% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities [10, 11], and vastly higher than for the Australian population (4%) [12].

Table 1. Food security status of Remote Food Security Study households

Food security category	n (%)
High food security	71 (24%)
Moderate food security	80 (28%)
Low food security	59 (20%)
Very low food security	81 (28%)

3. Diet quality in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Food insecurity is known to impact on diet quality [2]. In this study, we report diet quality results which do not align with Australian recommendations for good health and contribute to the greater burden of disease (2.3 times) experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared to non-Indigenous Australians [13].

Table 2. Caregiver or self-reported intake compared with the Australian Dietary Guideline (ADG) recommended intakes from all study communities, by age group

Age	< 2 years		2-5 years		Adults	
Food or food group	Serves, mean (SD), n=108	ADG serves*	Serves, mean (SD), n=202	ADG serves*	Serves, mean (SD), n=161	ADG serves*
Vegetable	1.3 (0.9)	0.4-3.0	1.4 (1.0)	2.5-4.5	1.8 (1.3)	5.0-7.5
Fruit	1.0 (0.9)	0.07-0.5	1.8 (1.3)	1.0-1.5	1.1 (1.1)	2.0
Grain	3.1 (1.6)	2.5-4.0	3.8 (1.2)	4.0	4.9 (1.9)	8.5-9.0
Meat	1.1 (0.6)	0.5-1.0	1.5 (0.5)	1.0-1.5	3.1 (1.3)	2.5-3.5
Dairy	2.0 (1.6)	1.0-1.5	2.4 (1.4)	1.5-2.0	1.9 (1.4)	2.5
SSBs^	0.3 (0.4)	0.0	0.5 (0.6)	0.0	0.8 (0.9)	0.0
Discretionary	1.9 (1.4)	0.0	3.1 (1.5)	0.0-1.0	3.6 (1.7)	0.0-2.5

Green cells indicate study participants were on average meeting the recommended intakes, yellow they were close to meeting, and red they were far from meeting recommended intakes | * ADG, Australian Dietary Guideline recommended daily serves for each age group, for each food or food group, recommended intakes for children 7-12 months have been adjusted for weight equivalents | ^ sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs)

4. Interpretation

The cost of a healthy diet (and of the current diet) is unaffordable for residents in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who receive welfare income. The cost of a healthy diet is more unaffordable for residents in remote communities, than for those on the same income living in Alice Springs and Cairns. This contributes to the very high rates of food insecurity reported in this study (76%), which is more than double the nationally reported rate of 31% and impacts on diet quality. **Factors which impact on the supply chain distribution and then the cost of healthy food in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be considered a priority for this Inquiry.**

Acknowledgement

This project is funded by a NHMRC Targeted Research grant (1179848). The contents of the published material are solely the responsibility of the Administering Institution, a Participating Institution or individual authors and do not reflect the views of NHMRC.

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