



DISCUSSION PAPER

National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities

Document Purpose

This discussion paper outlines the context, challenges, and potential actions to improve food security outcomes in remote First Nations communities. It is intended as a starting point to shape discussion with First Nations people living in remote communities, Governments, and Industry in the remote food sector to inform the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities.

This paper is not intended to be prescriptive, and actions are not final nor binding. Through the consultation process, Strategy Partners are interested in testing the information in this document, as well as hearing new ideas and understanding implementation options. The Strategy will be finalised following these community consultations.


Acknowledgement

Strategy Partners acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures, and the Elders past, present and emerging.

Strategy Partners extend our deep respect and thanks to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working to improve food security in their communities. Whether by sharing knowledge with children or providing input to a national strategy, the impact is significant and has spanned many years.

["First Nations" is used throughout this document to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is used respectfully and with recognition First Nations people represent diverse communities, cultures, language groups and kinship systems throughout Australia].

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Introduction

The National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities (Strategy) responds directly to Recommendation 10 of the 2020 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities. It will coordinate action across Australia to address the unique and specific food security needs of First Nations people living in remote communities. Systemic barriers which are specific to remote communities will require targeted actions to overcome food insecurity.

Food security is absolutely essential for health and wellbeing. Without food security, people are vulnerable to chronic diseases, developmental delays, struggle to learn and have difficulty working. Food stress can strain personal relationships and negatively impact every aspect of life.

Although food insecurity is a national issue that disproportionately affects First Nations people in all communities (including urban, regional, and rural),¹ this Strategy specifically seeks to address barriers to food security specific to remote contexts. Barriers include absent or irregular commercial markets, complex access to land and waters, fragile supply chains, inadequate housing and storage, lack of community input, lack of consistent funding targeting food insecurity, long transport distances and related costs, lower incomes, higher expenses, seasonal isolation, unreliable access to water and electricity, and prohibitive repair and maintenance costs.

Healthy food in remote communities is often over 50 per cent more expensive,² inconsistently available and of lower quality than in urban or regional centres. Generally, higher prices are primarily a result of two factors: lower commercial purchasing power of remote suppliers and higher operational costs, including freight and repair costs.


In remote communities, 90 per cent of First Nations people live in households with an income similar to the poorest 16 per cent of all Australians.³ The combination of poverty and high food prices results in many remote First Nations households spending a large proportion of their income on food and contributes to stress about going without food. Low-income households tend to respond by adjusting the food budget, decreasing dietary variety and increasing the consumption of cheap, energy dense foods such as takeaways and other quick convenience foods.⁴

¹ Simone Sherriff et al., “Murradambirra Dhangaang (make food secure): Aboriginal community and stakeholder perspectives on food insecurity in urban and regional Australia,” *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1066 (2022): 14, <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-13202-z#citeas>.

² Department of Health, *Northern Territory Market Basket Survey 2021* (Northern Territory Government, 2022), 4, https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjspu/bitstream/10137/12272/2/NT%20Market%20Basket%20Survey%202021_Summary%20Report.pdf.

³ Francis Markham and Seán Kerins, “Policy responses to food security in remote Indigenous communities: Social security, store pricing and Indigenous food sovereignty,” *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*, Working Paper No. 4 (2020): 2, https://caep.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/8/Markham_and_Kerins_TI_4_2020.pdf.

⁴ Amanda Lee, Ann Bonson, and Jennifer Powers, “The effect of retail store managers on Aboriginal diet in remote communities,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 20, no. 2 (1996): 212, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1326020023039298?via%3Dihub>.



The COVID-19 pandemic, cost of living pressures, recent extreme weather events and global supply interruptions have compounded remote food security barriers and impacted remote communities' resilience to shocks. These events further emphasised the critical role that supply chains, infrastructure, freight, and market forces have on population health and nutritional outcomes.

While food security has serious impacts on health and wellbeing, the types of contributing factors which protect or adversely affect food security are broad and many sit outside the health sector. This includes First Nations knowledge systems, income, agriculture and land use, supply chains, housing and infrastructure, retail conditions, transport and freight, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk management. As a result, actions to improve remote food security must cross all levels of government (i.e., Commonwealth, state, territory, and local governments), as well as private enterprise and the not-for-profit sector.

Addressing the structural barriers to food security requires coordinated action across multiple sectors. This is recognised through the eight Focus Areas covered in this Strategy: Country; Health; Housing; Families and Community Infrastructure; Stores; Supply Chains; Healthy Economies; and Policies, Practice and Governance.

Success delivering the Strategy through a coordinated, rights based approach will meet Australia's commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 2 (Zero hunger: end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture).⁵ A rights-based approach led by First Nations people can better address the structural factors behind food insecurity, while removing stigma caused by ineffective frameworks that blame individuals.⁶

The actions in the Strategy will reflect the priorities of remote communities. Strategy implementation will rely upon guidance by community representatives and collaboration between all stakeholders.

What is Food Security?


A person is considered "food secure" when they have the physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (as defined by the United Nations Committee on World Food Security).⁷

First Nations people have defined food security as "when the food of our ancestors is protected and always there for us and our children. It is when we can easily access and afford the right non-traditional

⁵ Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Hunger for change: Addressing food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty* (Western Australian Government 2023), 7-9, [https://parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tailedpapers.nsf/displaypaper/4112328c3e40e68e40f5b7a3482589d70027ab44/\\$file/hungry+for+change+-+jsccyp+report+6.pdf](https://parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tailedpapers.nsf/displaypaper/4112328c3e40e68e40f5b7a3482589d70027ab44/$file/hungry+for+change+-+jsccyp+report+6.pdf).

⁶ Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Hunger for change: Addressing food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty*, 138.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Food security and Nutrition," accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/food-security/>.



food for a collective health 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”.⁸

Food security is influenced by six pillars: availability, access, stability, utilisation, agency, and sustainability.⁹

availability relates to the physical supply of food; comprising the quantity, quality and diversity of the food available. This means there is a diverse range of food available which is of an appropriate quantity and quality.

access relates to the physical and economic means to obtain appropriate, quality food. This means a person has the money and adequate resources to acquire food for a nutritious diet.

stability relates to a person’s access to food being secure at all times. This means even if a person has access to an adequate amount of food today, they do not have food stability if they have inadequate access on a periodic basis.

utilisation relates to the nutritional status of the food and the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food. This means a person has the ability to safely store and prepare meals that provide sufficient energy and nutrient intake through good feeding practices and diversity of diet.

agency relates to people having the ability to shape their own relationships with food systems. This means individuals and groups are able to exercise a degree of control over their own circumstances and provide meaningful input into the related governance processes.

sustainability relates to the practices within the food system that support the long-term regeneration of natural, social, and economic systems. This means present food needs are met without compromising future generations’ access to food.

Current Status

Although data is limited, conservative estimates suggest approximately 31 per cent of First Nations people living in remote communities are food insecure and these estimates can increase to over 80 per cent of First Nations people in some very remote communities (compared to between 4 per cent and 13 per cent of the general Australian population).¹⁰ Around 53 per cent of First Nations people in very remote Australia live below the poverty line.¹¹ It has been argued the high prevalence of poverty in remote First Nations communities is the greatest contributor to food insecurity in remote communities.

⁸ Menzies School of Research, “Developing a good food system in your community information,” *Information Sheet 1-Good Food Systems Overview* (2016), https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/252289_Information_sheet_1.pdf.

⁹ Jennifer Clapp et al., “Viewpoint: The case for a six-dimensional food security framework,” *Food Policy* 106 (2022): 1, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306919221001445>.

¹⁰ Mitchell Bowden, *Understanding food insecurity in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies (Southbank, 2020): 6; Julie Brimblecombe et al., “Mediators and moderators of nutrition intervention effects in remote Indigenous Australia,” *British Journal of Nutrition* 119, no. 12 (2018): 1424-1433, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29845901/>.

¹¹ Francis Markham and Nicholas Biddle, “Income, poverty and inequality,” *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*, Census Paper No. 2 (2016): 16, https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/CAEPR_Census_Paper_2.pdf.

Health Impact

Although there has been some incremental progress towards addressing food security over the past twenty years, rates of chronic diseases continue to rise. Without coordinated action, already unacceptable rates of diet related disease among First Nations people in remote communities will continue. For example:

- First Nations people over 30 years of age living in Central Australia have one of the highest rates of diabetes in the world, at around 40 per cent compared to around 4.5 per cent of Australians nationally.¹²
- First Nations children across Northern Australia experience one of the highest rates of type 2 diabetes in the world over the last 25 years.¹³
- First Nations people living in remote and very remote areas have rates of kidney failure that are up to 20 times higher than those of comparable non-Indigenous peoples.¹⁴ In particular, the Northern Territory (which has the highest proportion of First Nations people living in remote or very remote areas in any jurisdiction) has the highest rates of dialysis treatment for First Nations people.¹⁵
- The number of First Nations people on dialysis are growing significantly in some remote regions. For example, the rates of First Nations people on dialysis in Central Australia has increased by 42 per cent from 2009 to 2016.¹⁶
- First Nations children aged two years and over reported consuming nearly 50 per cent more sugar than the World Health Organization recommendation.¹⁷
- Around 14 per cent of First Nations children under five in the Northern Territory experience chronic malnutrition affecting growth (stunted) compared to around 2 per

¹² Matthew J. Hare et al., "Prevalence and incidence of diabetes among Aboriginal people in remote communities of the Northern Territory, Australia: a retrospective, longitudinal data-linkage study," *BMJ Open* 12, no. 5 (2022): 3-4, <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/12/5/e059716.full.pdf>.

¹³ Angela Titmuss et al., "Youth-onset type 2 diabetes among First Nations young people in northern Australia: a retrospective, cross-sectional study," *The Lancet: Diabetes & Endocrinology* 10, no. 1 (2022): 11, <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2213-8587%2821%2900286-2>.

¹⁴ Kidney Health Australia, "First Nations Australians," accessed December 16, 2023, <https://kidney.org.au/health-professionals/health-professional-resources/hp-resources-first-nations-australians>.

¹⁵ Australia and New Zealand Dialysis and Transplant Registry (ANZDATA), "ANZDATA 46th Annual Report 2023 (Data to 2022)," accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.anzdata.org.au/report/anzdata-46th-annual-report-2023-data-to-2022/>.

¹⁶ Menzies School of Research, *Central Australia renal study technical report update* (Australian Government, 2016), 41, https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/248898_Central_Australia_Renal_Study_Technical_Report_Update.pdf.

¹⁷ Amanda Lee and Kathy Ride, "Review of nutrition among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," *Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin* 18, no. 1 (2018): 3, https://healthbulletin.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2018/02/Nutrition-Review-Bulletin-2018_Final.pdf.

cent for Australian children nationally.¹⁸ Stunting leads to developmental delays and ongoing risk of illness and premature death, as well as obstetric complications in women.¹⁹

- According to the 2018-19 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, 42.9 per cent of very remote First Nations households experienced hunger (i.e., ran out of food and could not afford to buy more) and 51.7 per cent ran out of money for basic living necessities.²⁰

Remote First Nations Community

Strategy actions will be targeted to address market failures, high rates of poverty and isolation, high rates of health problems related to poor nutrition, and a lack of services and programs experienced in remote communities where food insecurity is most severe. These communities will predominantly fall within *very remote* classifications in national standards such as the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) (ABS) and Modified Monash Model. However, national classifications may not reflect the local food security experience.

Remote First Nations communities referred to in the Strategy are considered in line with the definition of a discrete community included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Targets 9a and 9b). It uses the ABS definition “a discrete community is a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (greater than 50 per cent of usual residents) by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people”.²¹

While the ABS is a useful guide, flexibility in remoteness definition is required to allow for local diversity and tailored implementation where actions make sense. A rigid, universal definition is not suited to the remote food security objectives of the Strategy.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap


The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) is a commitment between all Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks to work in partnership to transform the way governments work with and improve outcomes for First Nations people. One of the outcomes of the National Agreement is shared decision-making – “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are

¹⁸ Department of Health, *Healthy Under 5 Kids Program Growth and Nutrition Report: NT Annual Report 2018* (Northern Territory Government, 2018), 6, <https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjsipui/bitstream/10137/7522/1/2018%20Health%20Under%205%20Kids%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁹ World Health Organization, “Malnutrition in children,” accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/malnutrition-in-children>.

²⁰ Parliament of Australia, “Indigenous affairs,” accessed December 16, 2023, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview202021/IndigenousAffairs.

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Discrete Community*, (Canberra: ABS, 2016), <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/2901.0chapter29552016#:~:text=Discrete%20Community,-A%20discrete%20community&text=Discrete%20communities%20have%20populations%20of,council%20depots%20are%20usually%20present>.



empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.”

Shared decision-making is a fundamental principle of this Strategy. The 2023 Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan recognises remote food security as a national priority. More information on the National Agreement is available on the Closing the Gap website.

Closing the Gap Consultation and Engagement

Feedback on this Discussion Paper has been provided by the Coalition of Peaks and the Closing the Gap Partnership Working Group. This reflects the partnership approach to Strategy development, cross-jurisdictional responsibility for Strategy actions, and cross cutting outcomes between this National Strategy and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Before the Strategy is finalised, additional feedback from the Coalition of Peaks, Closing the Gap Partnership Working Group and the Closing the Gap Joint Council will be sought. Engagement at key development milestones ensures all Parties to the National Agreement are engaged on National Strategy development.

An overview of Strategy Alignment with the National Agreement is included at [Appendix One](#).

Strategy development process

The Strategy builds on significant remote community consultations and research undertaken in the past.

The Strategy is being developed in line with Closing the Gap Priority Reform One – formal partnerships and shared decision-making. The Strategy Partnership includes the Commonwealth Government working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations and State and Territory Governments. Partnership members are listed at [Appendix Two](#).

Consultation with remote communities and other key stakeholders through 2024 will inform the Strategy and define actions for implementation.



Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

There is a strong commitment from Strategy Partners to embed continuous improvement into the Strategy, including open-ended actions that can be developed and revised over time. The Strategy will be evaluated every three years and data captured and recorded in a way that is aligned with Closing the Gap principles, strength-based and meaningful to remote First Nations residents as well as non-Indigenous stakeholders with influence over funding and program decisions. This evaluation / Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach should work with First Nations led regional and local decision-making structures relevant to food security to ensure First Nations leadership throughout the process.

For Discussion – Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

How often should the Strategy be evaluated over the ten-year implementation period? What resources and governance mechanism need to be developed to support effective monitoring, evaluation and learning throughout implementation? What already exists?

National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities – Outline

Vision	Goal	Aim
Social, health, education, and justice equity through First Nations food security in remote communities.	Sustained improvements to First Nations food security in remote communities through actions that address the six pillars of food security: Agency, Availability, Access, Stability, Utilisation and Sustainability.	Food security in very remote First Nations communities at levels consistent with urban centres (<13%) by 2034.

Target Outcomes

Agency	Availability	Access	Stability	Utilisation	Sustainability
First Nations people in remote communities participate on their own terms and make meaningful decisions about food systems.	Remote communities contain sufficient quantities and varieties of food and essentials appropriate for cultural and nutritional needs.	First Nations people in remote communities have the means to acquire quality food and essentials appropriate for cultural and nutritional needs.	First Nations people in remote communities have access to quality nutrition at all times, without interruption.	First Nations people in remote communities are preparing and consuming foods that support long, healthy lives.	First Nations remote food security is long-term, measurable, and sustained by robust and adaptable systems.

Underpinning Principles

First Nations Agency	Health in All Policies	Systems Based	Collaborative	Measurable	Flexible
First Nations people shape Strategy development and implementation; actions promote and build on community strengths.	Improvements to the health and wellbeing of First Nations people living in remote communities is the primary objective of all Strategy actions.	Enables a long term, holistic systems approach to remote food security for sustainable action delivered over time.	Recognises success dependent on strong partnerships and shared effort between First Nations people, governments, and industry stakeholders.	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning built into Strategy design; remote communities centred in identifying outcomes and measures of success.	Embedded ability to adapt to local circumstances and changes over time.

Focus Areas

Country	Health	Housing	Families and Communities	Stores	Supply Chains	Healthy Economies	Policies, Practice and Governance
First Nations people are supported to increase participation in local food sourcing, production, distribution, and knowledge sharing (CtG Outcomes 15, 16)	First Nations people living in remote communities have equitable access to the nutrition needed for healthy lives (CtG Outcomes 1, 2, 4).	Remote Housing is sufficient for remote community residents to meet their food security needs (CtG Outcome 9).	First Nations families and communities have infrastructure, resources, and skills to safely and reliably store, prepare and consume nutritious food.	Remote stores provide quality, affordable nutritious foods and other essentials in store environments that encourage healthy purchases.	Supply chains are improved to provide more direct, cost-efficient, and resilient supply runs to remote communities.	First Nations people in remote communities have the same economic opportunities for food security as non-remote communities (CtG Outcome 8).	Initiatives are considered holistically in ways that support First Nations people living in remote communities to attain healthy lives and outcomes.

Intended Outcomes for each Focus Area

Focus Areas	Strategy Intended Outcomes
Country First Nations people are supported to increase participation in local food sourcing, production, distribution, and knowledge sharing (CtG Outcomes 15, 16).	Increase First Nations land and sea management activities to ensure the health, diversity, and resilience of environments, support stable wild food sources and reduce threats to food sources by climate change.
	Increase sustainable local food production initiatives in both traditional hunted and harvested foods and other locally grown food enterprises.
	Support intergenerational and on-Country food and nutrition knowledge sharing; including inter-community food trading and business networks.
Health First Nations people living in remote communities have equitable access to the nutrition needed for healthy lives (CtG Outcomes 1, 2, 4).	Nutrition education and health promotion in remote communities are adequately resourced and supported across the lifecycle.
	Preventative and specialised dietary health care in remote communities is adequately resourced and supported.
	Community leadership and control is prioritised in the design and delivery of all preventative and specialised dietary health care in remote communities.
Housing Remote Housing is sufficient for remote community residents to meet their food security needs (CtG Outcome 9).	Remote housing policies and programs deliver remote housing that is appropriately designed, built, renovated, and repaired in line with remote community food security and health needs.
	Remote community housing has the appropriate level of food preparation and cleaning equipment to maintain food security and food hygiene.
	Remote household access to reliable and affordable power and safe water is prioritised.
Families and Communities First Nations families and communities have infrastructure, resources, and skills to safely and reliably store, prepare and consume nutritious food.	Adequate funding for community-led shared infrastructure such as transport, meal preparation and service areas, and storage; including facilitating partnerships between community members and owners of existing facilities (e.g., stores, community kitchens).
	Ensure food services provided by remote social, education and community care services meet dietary and cultural needs of participants.
	Ensure locally and culturally appropriate food relief is available and accessible in remote communities.
Stores Remote stores provide quality, affordable nutritious foods and other essentials in store environments that encourage healthy purchases.	Develop national standards for remote stores, including benchmarking and needs based support to build capacity, and support implementation in each jurisdiction to improve food security.
	Support adequate remote store infrastructure, storage, power, and disaster resilience to ensure continuous supplies of food and other essentials in remote communities.
	Support remote stores to remain viable and provide affordable, healthy food whilst retaining and promoting community participation and control (CtG Outcome 17).
	Provide tailored, accessible support for community-led First Nations store governance, management and staff capability (local workforce).
Supply Chains Supply chains are improved to provide more direct, cost-efficient and resilient supply runs to remote communities.	Remote supply chains are effective, affordable, and flexible, including improved partnerships with remote First Nations people and resilience to disruption. Strengthen all-weather access infrastructure, reduce connection points, and shorten transport distances.
	Improve remote bulk purchasing, storage capabilities and timely distribution of quality food.
	Emergency and Disaster Risk Management policies are designed in partnership with First Nations people and effective at ensuring remote supply chains are resilient against disruption due to extreme weather or other disaster events, such as pandemic.
Healthy Economies First Nations people in remote communities have the same economic opportunities for food security as non-remote communities (CtG Outcome 8).	Increase remote training and employment programs and business opportunities conducive to food security, income, and health outcomes.
	Measure and provide for the realistic additional cost of food and essential groceries in remote social security and tax policies; and ensure support can be accessed by those in need.
	Facilitate and support community participation in Industry partnerships and create sustainable improvements to First Nations participation in the remote food sector.
Policies, Practice and Governance Initiatives are considered holistically in ways that support First Nations people living in remote communities to attain healthy lives and outcomes.	Ensure reliable and accessible remote First Nations food security data is in line with CtG Priority Reform 4, Outcome 17.
	Food Security Strategy governance, monitoring and evaluation linked to CtG Priority Reforms and Targets.
	First Nations governance systems and leadership are included across the food security system in line with CtG Priority Reforms 1 and 2.
	Ensure the Strategy connects with and informs related government policies and programs, without duplication.

Focus Areas for Discussion

Country

Goal: First Nations people are supported to increase participation in local food sourcing, production, distribution, and knowledge sharing (CtG Outcomes 15, 16).

Overview / context

Country is central to First Nations people's understanding of health, where health is understood as the social, cultural, and emotional wellbeing of the whole community. Improving on-Country and other local food sourcing, production and distribution will support healthy and diverse environments, and improve health through access to culturally appropriate, nutritious food.

Australia is a unique and diverse continent with over 6,500 traditional food varieties growing across its landscape. First Nations people have lived in harmony with this landscape since the beginning of time. First Nations knowledge systems, passed through generations, inform people on what to harvest, what to hunt, what to take, and what to leave. It is this deep knowledge and cultural identity that has kept First Nations people fed, sustained, and strong for over 60,000 years.

Many traditional foods are being recognised by wider national and international audiences as “super foods” for their versatility, flavour, and high nutritional content. And yet, the historical and pervasive impacts of colonisation and climate change have challenged First Nations people's access.²² For example, kangaroo was restricted for human consumption by the Health Departments in WA and other jurisdictions until recent years and could be the most sustainable meat trade in Australia. Consequently, restricted access to traditional foods and barriers to varieties of healthy food in remote stores have negatively impacted the dietary habits and health of First Nations people living in remote communities.²³

²² Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, *National Statement on Climate Change and Agriculture* (Australian Government, 2023), <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/farm-food-drought/climatechange/national-statement-on-climate-change-and-agriculture>; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Improving food and water security* (Australian Government, 2023), <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/climate-change/supporting-indo-pacific-tackle-climate-change/safeguarding-food-and-water-security>; Department of Health and Aged Care, *National Health and Climate Strategy* (Australian Government, 2023), <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-12/national-health-and-climate-strategy.pdf>; Rebecca Christidis et al., “Concerns and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples regarding food and nutrition: a systematic review of qualitative evidence,” *International Journal for Equity in Health* 20, no. 220 (2021): 1-19, <https://equityhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-021-01551-x>; Healthy Environments and Lives (HEAL) Network & Centre for Research Excellence in Strengthening Systems for Indigenous Health Care Equity (CRE-STRIDE), *Climate Change and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health* (Melbourne: Lowitja Institute, 2021), https://www.lowitja.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Lowitja_ClimateChangeHealth_1021_D10-1.pdf.

²³ Christidis et al., “Concerns and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples regarding food and nutrition: a systematic review of qualitative evidence”; Deanna Davy, “Australia's Efforts to Improve Food Security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples,” *Health and Human Rights* 18, no. 2 (2016): 209-218, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5394999/>.

There is substantial overlap between First Nations owned land, First Nations managed or co-managed land, and land subject to other special rights. As of 2016, the total area of land in the Indigenous estate in Australia was 438 million hectares (or 57 per cent of Australia).²⁴

The traditional foods sector provides an opportunity for First Nations people to use their traditional knowledge systems to improve financial independence and support on-Country activities that protect future sustainability.²⁵ The traditional foods sector must be based on strong community connection and collaboration in order to ensure the success of inter-community food trading and business networks.²⁶ In line with Closing the Gap Targets 15a and 15b, there is an opportunity for greater access to Country across privately-held lands, utilisation of traditional food sources and modern forms of food production by First Nations people:²⁷

- Target 15a: By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests.
- Target 15b: By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea.

Case Study – Caring for Country supports food security outcomes

The Indigenous Rangers Program, funded by the Australian Government, assists First Nations people to manage Country to deliver a range of environmental, cultural, social, and economic development outcomes.

The Indigenous Rangers Program supports genuine partnerships to empower First Nations people to manage Country in accordance with Traditional Owners' objectives, using traditional knowledge and cultural practices, combined with Western science. The program includes the ability to support First Nations communities to incorporate Traditional knowledge of food systems, and connection to Country and culture when engaging with food security planning.

Cultural and environmental activities carried out through the Indigenous Rangers Program, such as burning, weed management, feral animal control and Traditional knowledge transfer are vital to maintaining and

²⁴ Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, "Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate (2020)," accessed December 15, 2023, <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/forest-data-maps-and-tools/spatial-data/indigenous-land-and-forest#:~:text=The%20Australia%27s%20Indigenous%20land%20and,management%20and%20co%2Dmanagement%2C%20or.>

²⁵ Diane Jarvis, Kirsten Maclean, and Emma Woodward, "The Australian Indigenous-led bush products sector: Insights from the literature and recommendations for the future," *Ambio* 51, no. 1 (2022): 226-240; Adam D. Canning, "Rediscovering wild food to diversify production across Australia's agricultural landscapes," *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* 6 (2022): 1-15.

²⁶ Jarvis, D., Maclean, K., and Woodward, E. (2022) 'The Australian Indigenous-led bush products sector: Insights from the literature and recommendations for the future', *Ambio*, 51(1): 226-240; Canning A. (2022) 'Rediscovering wild food to diversify production across Australia's agricultural landscapes', *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 6: 1-15.

²⁷ Closing the Gap, "Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes," accessed December 16, 2023, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>.

accessing bush foods. Through the Indigenous Rangers Program, initiatives relating to First Nations communities are approached in a localised, and strengths-based manner.

The scope of the Indigenous Rangers Program enables participants to carry out activities related to food security if the activities align with Traditional Owners' objectives and the Indigenous Rangers Program funding outcomes. This includes, but is not limited to:

- contributing to the maintenance and improvement of environmental and cultural heritage; and
- supporting Indigenous peoples to engage in activities that strengthen connection to country.

A significant aspect of the Indigenous Rangers Program is that projects are community-led and thus, Rangers are able to respond to emerging community priorities. For example, during a time of food insecurity for the community, in particular for Elders, in April 2020 during COVID-19 restrictions, the Gamay Rangers led the Community Mullet Run, which is an annual cultural fishing activity at Yarra Bay. Following the event, the Rangers cleaned, packaged and delivered fish to Elders and vulnerable members of the community to support them in being food secure during an uncertain time (from [2022 Stories from Country](#)).

In another food related community project in the Torres Strait, the Mura Buway Rangers regularly undertake work with My Pathway (job seeker) participants to plant, harvest and perform general maintenance on the Saibai Mekem Garden. As the long tradition of subsistence gardening in the Saibai community has become less common with the establishment of the local store, the creation of the Saibai Mekem Garden in 2015 has been an opportunity for the community to revive and promote traditional gardening methods and share harvest amongst the community (from [2022 Stories from Country](#)).

Through the Indigenous Rangers Program, funding can be used to meet the needs of the community through caring for country, including successfully supporting traditional food practices.

On-Country food activities and businesses are most successful when locally led and developed in partnership with communities. First Nations led research and policy development can also inform on-Country food production and harvesting enterprises. Any initiative to develop such enterprises must be First Nations led and aligned with Closing the Gap principles at all levels to maximise the probability of success and ensure initiatives are culturally sensitive and aligned with traditional practices.

For example, Indigenous Ranger programs can play a major role in food security through revegetating, cultivating, and protecting native plant and animal species, collecting, and distributing bush food to Elders and other community members, and passing traditional knowledge onto future generations.²⁸

There is growing recognition that First Nations environmental leadership benefits all people in Australia through combining traditional knowledge and Western science to care for land, sea, and culture, as well as strengthening national biodiversity, climate resilience, and carbon neutral industries. There are 127 Indigenous Rangers programs across Australia including Commonwealth, State and Territory Programs. There is potential for greater collaboration and synergies in this space with the aim of improving food security.

²⁸ Department of Health and Aged Care, *National Health and Climate Strategy*, 1.

Related Strategies and Policy

- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care National Health and Climate Strategy
- NIAA Indigenous Rangers Strategy

For Discussion – Country

The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes

- Increase First Nations land and sea management activities to ensure the health, diversity, and resilience of environments, support stable wild food sources and reduce threats to food sources by climate change.
- Increase sustainable local food production initiatives in both traditional hunted and harvested foods and other locally grown food enterprises.
- Support intergenerational and on-Country food and nutrition knowledge sharing; including inter-community food trading and business networks.

Potential Actions

- Work with communities to develop locally relevant, accessible information and training resources to increase traditional and other on-Country food sourcing, production, processing, and distribution.
- Expand Land and Sea Management Programs to map, protect and sustainably manage traditional food sources.
- Work with communities to identify opportunities and support the development of sustainable local food production: assist in establishing First Nations led traditional foods production businesses (e.g., startup loans and governance support); through market gardens or other food industries such as agriculture and aquaculture.
- Work with communities to develop effective, sustainable models for local food processing / preparation and implement in partnership with communities (including infrastructure requirements).
- Support communities to develop and implement networks for the safe distribution of food sourced / produced / processed locally.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure Elders and other knowledge holders are supported to build and maintain community knowledge and capacity of traditional food sourcing, preparation, and consumption.

Questions

- Do you agree with Country as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?
- Is there anything important missing?
- Are there any risks or negative consequences?
- Does anything need to change?

Health

Goal: First Nations people living in remote communities have equitable access to the nutrition needed for healthy lives (CtG Outcomes 1, 2, 4).

Overview / Context

There is a direct link between food security and health outcomes. The impact of food insecurity in remote communities includes limited access to nutritious, culturally, and dietary appropriate food, which consequently leads to unacceptably high rates of diet-related chronic diseases, poor wellbeing and mortality for First Nations people. Poor nutrition is associated with multiple health conditions, including low birth weight and ill health in infancy and childhood, coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Health impacts also include obesity and malnutrition as a result of consuming large quantities (relative to more nutritious food) of high calorie, nutrient-poor foods (e.g. simple carbohydrates and processed meats) that cost less than nutritious whole foods (e.g. lean meats, wholegrains, fruits and vegetables).²⁹ Obesity is a key risk factor for the development of diabetes, which is strongly correlated to poor nutrition and food insecurity. People who are food insecure are often obese, as well as malnourished. Accordingly, First Nations people living in remote communities continue to experience unacceptable rates of diet-related diseases. For example:

- Chronic disease contributes around 70 per cent of the health gap between First Nations and the general population.³⁰
- Of the 41,500 First Nations women who gave birth in 2017–2019, nearly 31 per cent were obese, 25 per cent were overweight, and 6.8 per cent were underweight.³¹ However, the proportion of First Nations women who were underweight pre-pregnancy was much higher for very remote areas at 10.1 per cent, compared to 5.9 per cent in major cities.³² There is an increased risk of poor short and long term outcomes for the baby if the mother is either underweight or significantly overweight.³³

²⁹ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, *Summary of nutrition among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* (2020): 16, https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/healthinfonet/getContent.php?linkid=642619&title=Summary+of+nutrition+among+Aboriginal+and+Torres+Strait+Islander+people&contentid=40271_1.

³⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australian Burden of Disease Study: Impact and cause of illness and death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2011 - Summary report* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2016): 12, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/cc89e730-603b-4d0b-ab4e-785af05ccad8/19665-bod-atsi-summary.pdf?v=20230605164100&inline=true>.

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Key factors contributing to low birthweight among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2022), 10, https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/getattachment/bf116c5d-8fa3-4b7b-b182-6860ea4495a9/birthweight-fa_ihpf_100-may22.pdf.

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Key factors contributing to low birthweight among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies*, 10.

³³ Department of Health and Aged Care, “Pregnancy Care Guidelines: Weight and body mass index,” Australian Government, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/pregnancy-care-guidelines/part-d-clinical-assessments/weight-and-body-mass-index>.

- Childhood anaemia is associated with slower cognitive and motor development in children.³⁴ Children who are anemic and/or malnourished are often lethargic and lack concentration, which contributes to learning difficulties at school.³⁵ Additionally, ear infections are common in children with anemia, which reduces their ability to hear and learn at school.³⁶
- For First Nations children aged six months to five years in the Northern Territory, 14.3 per cent were anemic on the most recent test in 2021 and 27.3 per cent were anemic at any time during that year.³⁷

Nutrition education combined with action to address structural barriers to food security can help people access appropriate food to improve dietary intake,³⁸ as well as health and wellbeing. For example, the availability of community kitchen models (including cooking demonstrations and classes) brings people together on a regular basis to plan, cook and share healthy affordable meals.³⁹ Benefits include improving participants' food security through developing cooking, shopping, and budgeting skills, as well as providing opportunities for social interaction. To ensure success, it is critical these projects are locally relevant and community-led.

Furthermore, there is a need to create opportunities for the First Nations workforce to undertake vocational education and training (VET) and tertiary level training in nutrition. This includes creating job opportunities for local First Nations people to be trained and supported to work in nutrition with their local communities and create additional opportunities for a dedicated First Nations nutrition workforce.

Primary prevention to improve food security and nutrition in remote First Nations communities is likely the most cost-effective strategy to reduce diet-related disease and improve the health of First Nations people. This requires:

- Policy development based on evidence-based nutrition interventions.
- Coordinated, well planned, cross-sector action, and employment in nutrition promotion, health education and food security.
- Supported food literacy for families experiencing food insecurity and poverty.
- Actions that address the social and commercial determinants of food insecurity.

Preventing ill health from food security will also improve the preparedness and resilience of First Nations communities to the impact of climate change, as chronic disease increases vulnerability to high temperatures and other adverse climate conditions.

³⁴ World Health Organization, "Anaemia in women and children," accessed February 5, 2024, https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/anaemia_in_women_and_children.

³⁵ Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Hunger for change: Addressing food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty*, 31.

³⁶ Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Hunger for change: Addressing food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty*, 31.

³⁷ Rowena Boyd et al., *Trends in the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Key Performance Indicators 2010-2021* (Casuarina: Northern Territory Government, 2023): 46, <https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prod/ispui/bitstream/10137/12549/1/Northern%20Territory%20Aboriginal%20Health%20Key%20Performance%20Indicators%20Report%202010-2021.pdf>.

³⁸ Better Health Channel, *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*, <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/ottawa-charter-for-health-promotion>.

³⁹ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, *Summary of nutrition among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, 18.

Case Study – Miwatj Health shaping a community food security strategy

Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation (Miwatj) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service providing primary and public health care services across six remote communities and the township of Nhulunbuy in East Arnhem Land. In 2019, Miwatj received funding to hire their first Public Health Nutritionist. This position led the development of Miwatj's first Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (FSNS) 2020-2024 through staff and community consultation. Using this strategy, Miwatj was able to secure a two-year food security grant to develop a Nutrition Team and implement key projects within the strategy in partnership with the Miwatj Yolŋu Public Health workforce. This included establishing an in-house clinical dietetic and public health nutrition services to drive place-based, co-designed nutrition resources and education activities, nutrition training resources and sessions for Yolŋu community-based staff, further community consultation and food systems projects including working with remote stores, schools, and youth programs.

Prior to Miwatj establishing a Nutrition Team, some communities in East Arnhem received clinical dietitian services for one day every six months. This was contracted to an external service. The visiting dietitian changed regularly and often did not have a sufficient understanding of Yolŋu culture or strong relationships with community members. Culturally appropriate resources were limited and not specific to East Arnhem. Since the establishment of the Nutrition Team, each community receives multiple dietitian days every one to three months depending on the size of the community. Dietitians visit the same communities, have strong relationships with Yolŋu staff and community members, and have developed resources in collaboration with communities in Yolŋu Matha (language). All dietitians complete cultural induction delivered by Miwatj and prioritise continued learning of Yolŋu ways of being and doing, adapting their messaging and service delivery to better suit this, including working alongside Yolŋu staff members where possible.

Ongoing implementation

Several community members have expressed desire to work with the Nutrition Team in a nutrition specific role. The Nutrition Team currently partners with Yolŋu staff in other programs who provide excellent support, however, are limited in the time they can dedicate to nutrition. A Yolŋu nutrition workforce is an imperative next step to increase Yolŋu community control and ownership over the program as well as improved outcomes in the food security and nutrition space. While this a priority, sourcing appropriate funding is a significant challenge and adequate, long-term funding is required to continue this work and ensure the sustainability of a successful and impactful program.

Related Strategies and Policies

- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031
- Closing the Gap Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care National Health and Climate Strategy
- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care National Preventative Health Strategy 2021-2030

For Discussion – Health


The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes

- Nutrition education and comprehensive health promotion programs in remote communities are adequately resourced and supported across the lifecycle.
- Preventative and specialised dietary health care in remote communities are adequately resourced and supported.
- Community leadership and control is prioritised in the design and delivery of all preventative and specialised dietary health care in remote communities.

Potential Actions

- Implement recruitment, retention, and career progression strategies to build a sustainable nutrition and health workforce on-the-ground in remote communities.
 - Work with Universities and First Nations Registered Training Organisations to develop a vocational First Nations nutrition workforce pathway linked to ongoing employment.
 - Work with Community Development program (soon to be replaced by the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program) providers and other local employment service providers to ensure people living in remote communities have the opportunity to pursue careers in the health and food sectors.
- Provide professional development that supports remote health workers to provide services in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health model of care.
 - Integrate First Nations perspectives and knowledge into remote health and nutrition training programs.
- Strengthen the provision of comprehensive and culturally appropriate nutrition and life skills education, such as cooking and budgeting, into school-based primary and secondary education and into remote employment service activity and training opportunities.

- 
- In line with Closing the Gap Outcome 2, ensure remote health services are sufficiently resourced to provide culturally appropriate, comprehensive and accessible support for expectant parents and young children.
 - Strengthen formal referral systems to ensure client dietary needs are met in multi-disciplinary care settings, for example between remote First Nations Medical Services and aged care facilities or when people are traveling for care in regional or urban centres.
 - Develop and implement locally relevant, culturally appropriate and community-controlled nutrition projects to increase healthy food choices and behaviours in remote communities?

Questions

- Do you agree with Health as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?
- Is there anything important missing?
- Are there any risks or negative consequences?
- Does anything need to change?

Housing

Goal: Remote Housing is sufficient for remote community residents to meet their food security needs (CtG Outcome 9).

Overview / context

The condition of housing has a strong correlation with the health of people. The availability, condition and setup of accessible remote housing is fundamentally linked to food security outcomes. Without a place to safely and reliably store, prepare and consume nutritious meals, it can be the logical choice to consume nutritionally poor readymade options. In addition, irregular household access to essential services such as electricity to enable appropriate storage of foods and clean water to wash and cook foods can result in food wastage, loss of income and health complications.

Housing must be affordable, culturally and physically appropriate, hygienic, safe and secure. As household size in First Nations communities is driven by kinship connections and a culture of sharing accommodation, household composition is highly variable.⁴⁰ First Nations people living in remote areas have higher rates of household overcrowding than those in non-remote areas. In 2021, the proportion of First Nations people living in appropriately sized housing ranged from 88 per cent in major cities to 45 per cent in very remote areas.⁴¹

Poor infrastructure is a major barrier to food security. This includes overcrowding and lack of appropriately designed, constructed and maintained houses that provide for the safe storage, preparation and consumption of food. Major structural problems in First Nations households (affecting food storage, preparation and cooking) are common in remote areas (41 per cent) and very remote areas (49.6 per cent).⁴² Well maintained culturally appropriate housing that is not overcrowded can support families and communities to keep children safe and secure, reduce household conflicts, maintain hygiene and other healthy living practices such as household cleanliness, and support nutrition through capacity to store, prepare and cook food.⁴³

Furthermore, climate change exacerbates barriers to food security caused by poor infrastructure, crowding, and limited access to electricity and water. Homes that lack structural integrity, appropriate design and insulation are more expensive to keep warm or cool and operate essential health hardware, such as refrigerators. As parts of rural and remote Australia experience warmer temperature and more extreme heat as a result of climate change, it becomes even more crucial to address the intersections between housing and

⁴⁰ Suzanne Bryce et al., "Maitjara Wangkanyi: Insights from an Ethnographic Study of Food Practices of Households in Remote Australian Aboriginal Communities," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 21 (2020): 17. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33153133/>.

⁴¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Summary report 2023* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2023), 54, <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/getattachment/4a44660b-5db7-48d0-bcec-1e0a49b587fc/2023-july-ihpf-summary-report.pdf>.

⁴² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Housing circumstances of First Nations people," accessed February 5, 2023, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-housing#_Housing_quality.

⁴³ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voice): Securing our rights, securing our future report* (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020), 288. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/wiyi-yanu-u-thangani>.

food security.⁴⁴ Improved housing and living environments can lead to improvements in health status and reduce the risk of disease and injury.

Related Strategies or Policies

- Closing the Gap Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Housing Sector Strengthening Plan
- Closing the Gap Housing Policy Partnership
- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care National Health and Climate Strategy

For Discussion – Housing

The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes

- Remote housing policies and programs deliver remote housing that is appropriately designed, built, renovated, and repaired in line with remote community food security, cultural, family and health needs.
- Remote community housing has the appropriate level of food preparation, storage, and cleaning equipment to maintain food security and food hygiene.
- Remote household access to reliable and affordable power and safe water is prioritised.

Potential Actions

- Build resources and provide the strong evidence base for remote housing policies and programs to include conditions co-designed with communities to support food storage and meal preparation.⁴⁵
 - Work with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to review and update the Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey in partnership with First Nations Housing Peaks to assess housing for food security needs; as well as identify coordinated data collections options for housing delivered or maintained by state or territory governments, or independently.
 - Analyse the network of agencies responsible for food utilisation in remote homes; support strong collaboration with First Nations Community Controlled Organisations to improve service delivery and coordination in housing and maintenance.

⁴⁴ Simon Quilty et al., “Climate, housing, energy and Indigenous health: a call to action,” *Medical Journal of Australia* 217, no. 1: 12, https://www.mja.com.au/system/files/issues/217_01/mja251610.pdf.

⁴⁵ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory* (2021), Recommendation 5, <https://www.amsant.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Food-Summit-Report-V2.pdf>.

- o Support remote housing providers to co-design with communities the provision and maintenance of food storage and cooking facilities at appropriate standards for food security.⁴⁶
- Support the establishment and resourced delivery of an effective, locally based First Nations housing maintenance workforce.⁴⁷
- Provide affordable, safe, and reliable electricity in all remote community housing, with implementation based on need not population size.⁴⁸
- Provide affordable, safe, and reliable water for all households in remote communities, with implementation based on need not population size.⁴⁹

Questions

- Do you agree with Housing as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?
- Is there anything important missing?
- Are there any risks or negative consequences?
- Does anything need to change?

⁴⁶ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 5 and 6.

⁴⁷ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 5 and 6.

⁴⁸ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 17; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2020), Recommendation 15, https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/02_Parliamentary_Business/24_Committees/243_Reps_Committees/Indigenous/Food_pricing/Report.pdf?la=en&hash=13F5E4BE6B2757223211A7C5E0353BDD9DCDBD14.

⁴⁹ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 17; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, Recommendation 15.

Families and Community Infrastructure

Goal: First Nations families and communities have infrastructure, resources, and skills to safely and reliably store, prepare and consume nutritious food.

Overview / context

For First Nations families and communities in remote areas to be food secure, they need to have the infrastructure, resilience, resources, services, and skills to be able to safely and reliably store, prepare and consume food that is nutritionally and culturally appropriate.⁵⁰ Access to support and protection in emergencies is also critical to meet immediate needs and get back on track.

Infrastructure

The service quality of infrastructure in remote areas is often poor with some remote areas facing significant infrastructure deficits.⁵¹ Some remote communities have intermittent electricity, do not have access to reliable and safe water and wastewater services, and have limited telecommunications coverage. For example, over 500 First Nations communities lack regular water quality testing.⁵² Consequently, First Nations communities in remote areas are receiving drinking water with levels of arsenic, fluoride, nitrate, sodium, and uranium that are above safe levels as per the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.⁵³ There is opportunity for flexible community-led shared infrastructure to assist remote communities in becoming food secure and ensure drinking water health standards are met.

Developing and investing in shared spaces within communities for meal preparation services can provide temporary support to households where kitchen facilities require repair, whilst also providing culturally appropriate modes of cooking and knowledge sharing.

Another opportunity is supporting transport of community members to access food. It is important community infrastructure is tailored to the needs of each community as a one-size-fits-all approach does not capture the nuances of each remote area's challenges.

Community food gardens are commonly proposed as a strategy to address high fruit and vegetable prices in First Nations communities.⁵⁴ They can provide a variety of benefits, including learning opportunities through


⁵⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voice): Securing our rights, securing our future report*, 288.

⁵¹ Infrastructure Australia, *Reforms to meet Australia's future infrastructure needs: 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2021), 168, https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2021%20Master%20Plan_1.pdf.

⁵² B.M.J. Kalpana Balasooriya, Jay Rajapakse, and Chaminda Gallage, "A review of drinking water quality issues in remote and indigenous communities in rich nations with special emphasis on Australia," *Science of The Total Environment* 903 (2023): 8, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969723051847>.

⁵³ Kolbe, Sandi, "Gaps to fill to ensure safe drinking water for First Nations communities," Water Services Association of Australia, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.wsaa.asn.au/news/gaps-fill-ensure-safe-drinking-water-first-nations-communities>.

⁵⁴ New South Wales Centre for Public Health Nutrition, *Food Security Options Paper: A planning framework and menu of options for policy and practice interventions* (Sydney: NSW Department of Health, 2003), 31.



integration of nutrition and food related activities into school curriculum.⁵⁵ However, the feasibility of a community garden would differ for each remote area. The largest challenge faced by remote garden projects is ongoing operations, rather than establishment, and success is highly dependent on local circumstances and leadership. Communities must be involved in the choice of what local food enterprises to pursue, noting community gardens are only one approach and best practice is to use multicomponent interventions with strong community leadership.⁵⁶

Social Support

People interact with different social, educational and community care services at different times in their lives. These services have the potential to support improved food security by meeting the dietary and cultural needs of their participants. For example, a healthy catering policy for a sporting club can improve the food environment and support participants to access dietary and culturally sound food while attending sporting and other social events.⁵⁷

In an educational service, the provision of a school breakfast and lunch program can be a key source of food and nutrition for school-aged children in the community.⁵⁸ Although programs that provide school breakfast and/or lunch can be an effective mechanism to increase food security, meals programs should be accompanied by action to address the underlying causes of food insecurity in remote communities, with community support for these programs.

People may also come into contact with community care and/or aged care services as their needs change over the course of their lives. As many people accessing caring arrangements are unable to complete or struggle with activities of daily living (e.g., cooking), it is important that community and aged care support services encourage healthy food choices and support access to nutritionally diverse and culturally sound foods. This may involve capacity building of care staff, the strengthening of partnerships to optimise shared infrastructure across organisations and programs, or the support of food security and nutrition frameworks suitable for First Nations people in remote areas. This includes support for First Nations people in remote areas that need to travel (whether for secondary education, health, and medical related reasons) or for other commitments away from their homes.

Crisis and Disaster Resilience

In emergencies, access to appropriate support is essential to meet immediate needs and get back on track. Vast distances and limited access to services can hinder the provision of essential services in remote contexts. It also makes it difficult to assess the need within remote community populations, coordinate between service providers, and evaluate the suitability of food relief in remote contexts.

Different people have different needs at different times when it comes to emergency and food relief. Common triggers for accessing emergency and food relief services include disaster events and domestic and family violence. Examples of food relief in these circumstances include providing meal packs to isolated families

⁵⁵ Lee and Ride, "Review of nutrition among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," 22.

⁵⁶ Lee and Ride, "Review of nutrition among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," 22.

⁵⁷ Lee and Ride, "Review of nutrition among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," 22.

⁵⁸ Menzies School of Health Research, *An Evaluation of the School Nutrition Projects in the Northern Territory: Final Report*, (Darwin: Australian Government, 2017), 5, <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/snp-report-eval-2017-final.pdf>.

during a flood event, financial counselling for individuals experience hardship, or utilities vouchers for a family escaping domestic violence.

Organisations across Australia draw on Commonwealth, state and territory government funding and philanthropic support to delivery their programs and meet the needs of vulnerable people. Ensuring culturally appropriate support is available for First Nations people living in remote communities will ensure equitable access to emergency assistance, in line with Closing the Gap Priority Reforms. However, it is important to recognise food relief on its own has not been shown to reduce food insecurity at a population level, as the food relief system is not equipped to address the structural factors behind food insecurity.⁵⁹

Case Study – Culturally responsive Education and Training Resources

Miwatj Public Health Nutritionists are responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Miwatj Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (FSNS). One of the key projects in the strategy was to develop a series of Train the Trainer Resources. A Kidney Health and Nutrition flipchart was developed as part of this project in collaboration with the Miwatj Renal and Public Health Teams and clinical staff to ensure accurate and consistent messaging was used across each service area. Yolŋu staff provided significant input to ensure the resource was culturally responsive and shared information in a way that made sense to Yolŋu mala (people). The flip charts are used as an educational tool to train Miwatj staff across a range of nutrition topics. The Renal Team use this chart extensively to educate internal and external staff and provide education to community members on kidney health and manyamak ŋatha (good food).

Flip charts are an excellent tool for providing training and education to staff members, continued learnings across Miwatj programs shows a need for more engaging health education and promotion. The use of ‘Feltman’ has been an excellent tool to deliver engaging health education. Developed by Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Feltman is a diabetes education tool. The Nutrition Team worked closely with Public Health teams and Aboriginal Health Practitioners to upskill Yolŋu staff to deliver diabetes education in Yolŋu Matha using Feltman. Community consultation identified that community members wanted more community-based health education and promotion and wanted to understand the type 2 diabetes dhäwu (story) in detail and the impact of ŋatha (food) on diabetes. People reported constantly hearing the message that ‘sugar is bad’ but were not sure why and what it does in the body. Initial trials using Feltman to explain the diabetes dhäwu received very positive feedback and increased community understanding of type 2 diabetes. Feltman can be used to tell a range of health stories including anaemia which is highly prevalent in the region.

⁵⁹ Tahna L. Pettman et al., “A Food Relief Charter for South Australia – Towards a shared vision for pathways out of food insecurity,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 12 (2022): 2, <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/12/7080>.

Related Strategies and Policies

- Department of Social Services Review of Financial Wellbeing and Capability Programs
- Productivity Commission 2024 Inquiry into National Water Reform

For Discussion – Families and Communities Infrastructure

The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes

- Adequate funding for community-led shared infrastructure such as transport, meal preparation and service areas, and storage; including facilitating partnerships between community members and owners of existing facilities (e.g., stores, community kitchens).
- Ensure food services provided by remote social, education and community care services meet dietary and cultural needs of participants.
- Ensure locally and culturally appropriate food relief is available and accessible in remote communities.

Potential Actions

- Introduce a flexible fund to support place-based food security projects in remote communities, community-led and tailored to local need. The fund could support projects such as sustainable power, storage solutions, transport, local food production, and ongoing maintenance.⁶⁰
- Support communities to work with service providers to ensure foods served by community-based programs, such as aged care, meet the dietary and cultural needs of the participant.⁶¹
 - Assess service provider food-storage, preparation, and cooking facilities; provide support where required for facilities to meet community needs and requirements of the Food Standards Code.
 - Facilitate collaboration and coordination between locally grown food programs and community care services.

⁶⁰ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, Recommendation 13; Health and Wellbeing Queensland, *Gather + Grow Action Plan 2023-2026* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2023), Action 3.3, <https://hw.qld.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Gather-Grow-2023-2026-Action-Plan.pdf>; Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 2.

⁶¹ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 14 and 16.

- Develop financially accessible solutions to provide culturally and dietary appropriate meals for First Nations children and young people.⁶²
- Undertake analysis of the emergency and food relief system in remote communities to implement suitable, culturally appropriate relief models for remote contexts, whilst also addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity.
- Support communities to establish community-led food relief systems and undertake awareness campaigns on how these services can be accessed.⁶³
- Deliver community-led education and skills development linked to food security and nutrition outcomes, such as budgeting, cooking and food hygiene.

Questions

- Do you agree with Families and Community Infrastructure as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?
- Is there anything important missing?
- Are there any risks or negative consequences?
- Does anything need to change?

⁶² Council of Australian Governments, *National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2009), Action 4; Health and Wellbeing Queensland, *Gather + Grow Action Plan 2023-2026*, Action 4.4.

⁶³ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 2 and 16; Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Security in the Northern Territory: Consultation analysis and discussion paper* (2021), 8, <https://www.amsant.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Community-Consultation-Results-and-Discussion-Paper-V2.pdf>.

Stores

Goal: Remote stores provide quality, affordable nutritious foods and other essentials in store environments that encourage healthy purchases.

Overview / Context

In many communities, one store often meets all food and essential grocery needs of community members and the nearest alternative may be hundreds of kilometres away on unsealed, damaged and/or seasonably inaccessible roads. For other communities, there is no store travelling outside the community is necessary to access food.

There are currently over 200 stores servicing remote communities across Australia. Most estimates suggest between 90 and 95 per cent of food eaten in remote First Nations communities is food purchased in the store, with traditional foods contributing a small but critical addition to people's dietary intake.⁶⁴ Overall, the remote stores landscape supports an estimated 150,000 First Nations Australians who live across more than 1,200 remote and very remote communities.

Similar to commercial businesses nationwide, remote stores operate under a range of ownership and operating models. This includes community ownership and control, hybrid, and fully independent models. The products offered range from full grocery stores to convenience and takeaway services. The ownership, management and ethos behind remote food retailers influences the quality and cost of products available in store, for example through access to bulk pricing discounts or implementation of nutrition and pricing policies.

Many remote community stores reduce prices on healthy products such as fresh fruit and vegetables to help make these products more affordable and encourage good nutrition. These lower prices are offset by charging more for unhealthy discretionary products such as full-sugar soft drinks and confectionary.

Case Study – ALPA Community Controlled Organisation benefiting the community through community-controlled governance

The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) was formed in 1972 as a collective of community-controlled stores in East Arnhem Land. Since then, ALPA has been financially independent, owned by Yolŋu members and governed by a Yolŋu Board of Directors. The modest surplus funds generated from store operations benefit the community, providing financial assistance for cultural ceremonies, nutrition programs, education support, medical escorts, and community events.

In 2002, ALPA expanded outside its member stores to operate, client stores on behalf of, and in partnership with other Indigenous community organisations. The model gives these communities access to ALPA's systems, processes, financial management, training, nutrition program and group purchasing. This

⁶⁴ Lee, Bonson, and Powers, "The effect of retail store managers on Aboriginal diet in remote communities," 212.

partnership approach allows these communities to maintain ownership and control of their retail business but with the expertise and support of an experienced Indigenous business partner.

ALPA currently operates in 24 remote communities across a 1.2 million km² footprint. ALPA has over 1200 employees with over 80 per cent being First Nations people in our retail operations.

In the 1970s, the ALPA board recognised the importance of accredited training and development for its team, and with support from the Queensland Retail Training Institute began a program of in-house training. The training school at Galiwin'ku was built to support this. ALPA became a Registered Training Organisation in 1992 and remains committed to team training. Over 1500 of ALPA remote Indigenous team members have completed apprenticeships or qualifications through ALPA.

The foundation of ALPA was to ensure reliable access to food and essential goods as a basic human right. ALPA has done this for more than 50 years with little or no government funding. ALPA is acutely aware of the significant role they play to support food security in the communities they service. Under the leadership of the ALPA Board of Directors, they strive to improve access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods. Improving affordability, whilst maintaining financial viability, continues to be a key focus for ALPA.

The ALPA Board of Directors understand the link between diet and disease and prioritise health in their Health and Nutrition Strategy and Policy. ALPA strives to provide affordable healthy options to customers and self-fund a freight subsidy in the member stores on a range of healthy fresh, frozen, chiller and grocery items. ALPA have implemented a freight subsidy on fresh fruit and vegetables to support consumption. In the last financial year, ALPA member stores freight subsidy equated to \$750,000. Within ALPA member stores, healthy food subsidies have been in place since the 1980s. The freight subsidy is completely independent of government funding.

Case Study – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community voices leading the call for change in remote food supply

The Northern Territory Government is developing the legislative structure within the NT Remote Stores Program via the Food Act 2004 (NT) following the sunset of the Stronger Futures in the NT Act 2012. An opportunity to strengthen regulation to improve healthy food environments in line with community voice and evidence was recognised in this transition.

The Coalition for Healthy Remote Stores comprises 15 Aboriginal-led, Aboriginal-community controlled and non-government, retail and health organisations, research institutes and universities, who recognise the critical role that food retail stores have in preventing and managing chronic disease. The Coalition formed to collectively advocate to the NT Government for four key asks to be mandated which aim to modify the store environment to restrict the promotion and placement, and reduce the sales of, unhealthy foods and drinks:

1. No promotional activity on unhealthy food and beverages
2. No availability of unhealthy food and beverages in high traffic areas
3. No placement of sugary soft drinks of more than 600ml in refrigerators

4. Less than 40% of refrigerator facings made up of sugar sweetened beverages.

These asks were informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander store owners and retailers, who are leading the way in developing evidence and creating policy to enable healthy food retail environments in remote communities, and recommendations in the Healthy Stores 2020 Policy Action Series. The series, co-designed by 30 storeowners, retailers, government and non-government personnel and researchers from the Northern Territory and North Queensland, outlines best practice actions for healthy stores in remote communities, informed by locally developed and internationally recognised evidence, including from the Healthy Stores 2020 trial. These strategies have been shown to significantly reduce sugar purchases without impacting store profit.

The united voice from the Coalition, with strong representation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote community store boards and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations sent a clear endorsement to the NT Government to embed these asks in regulation. The government has formally acknowledged it intends to include two of the Coalition asks as regulated standards and two as guidelines in the policy framework for the NT Remote Stores Program. These changes will ensure all remote communities in the Northern Territory will benefit, making it easier for community residents to access healthier options in remote stores and to promote nutritious, healthy diets. The Coalition asks are scalable and warrant investigation across all states.


Coalition membership includes: The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation, Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, Menzies School of Health Research, Healthy Living NT, Indigenous Allied Health Australia, The University of Queensland, Monash University, Deakin University (GLOBE), Food for Health Alliance, Public Health Association of Australia, Diabetes Australia, Heart Foundation.

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The relationship between a remote community store and the community it serves differs in a number of important ways from retailers in regional and urban settings:

- In some communities, the store has a local committee that oversees the operations of the store and provides direction to the store manager. A store management company might be selected by the community to help with the operation of the store, which can occur in community-controlled stores as well as private stores.
- Well-managed community stores have an important role as a primary local employer and stimulation for the local economy, acting as the conduit for broader economic and business opportunities.
- Remote community stores also often act as the communities' social hub, supporting social interactions between community members, as well as fulfilling needs such as banking, fuel



supply and community programs. This is a complicated balance as social objectives can be contradictory to commercial objectives, for example upward pressure on pricing to fund social projects.

- Operational challenges are greater: remote markets are smaller, purchasing power is lower, supply is less reliable, operating costs are higher, competition is lower, retaining quality staff is harder, and stores can be less viable.
- Stores need to balance the competing priorities: provision of healthy food, profitability, and supporting community participation and empowerment. Stores must be supported across these three important functions which may cause competing demands at times.
- As the only local retailer, remote stores often stock a limited range of consumer goods such as clothing, household hardware, electronics and toys, readymade takeaway meals, or fuel.
- Takeaway businesses and food vans operate in some communities and can provide some essential groceries. It is important takeaway outlets are included in food security strategies to ensure better nutrition outcomes for communities.

Around two thirds of stores servicing remote First Nations communities are community-owned. The majority of these are owned by First Nations corporations established under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (Cth) and are guided by a local store management committee which oversees store operations.

Store management companies provide access to bulk purchasing discounts, financial management and retail expertise and nutrition specialists. Around half of remote stores and three quarters of community owned stores are managed by store management companies, such as the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA), Community Enterprise Queensland (CEQ), Island and Cape Retail Enterprises, Mai Wiru, and Outback Stores Pty Ltd. These store management companies support development and implementation of store policies, training and employing local managers and staff, engagement with store boards, presentation of financial information and community support through return of profits and investing in social outcomes.

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) Food Summit Report highlighted the important role remote stores play in improving food security and called for greater community control and engagement in issues related to the ownership, management and governance of these stores.⁶⁵ From the consultations, community members expressed their concerns that privately owned and run stores made communities more food insecure and that these stores limited people's ability to have a say about how a store should be run to meet the needs of the community.⁶⁶ This is supported by the Northern Territory Market Basket survey, which revealed that community owned stores were 9 per cent cheaper than private stores and community managed stores were 13 per cent cheaper than private stores.⁶⁷ For example, remote stores groups such as ALPA were put forward as success stories where community control and leadership in remote stores

⁶⁵ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, 18.

⁶⁶ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Security in the Northern Territory: Consultation analysis and discussion paper*, 31.

⁶⁷ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, 18.

often led to greater employment opportunities, economic empowerment, and increased availability and access to healthy food.⁶⁸

Case Study – Store pricing policies to promote better food security

Outback Stores Pty Ltd (Outback Stores) was founded in 2006 in response to a need to improve the health of First Nations people in remote Australia by addressing nutrition-related health problems, unreliable food supplies and the closure of local stores due to poor governance and/or build-up of debt.

Since then, Outback Stores has provided a fee-for-service management contract to support local community stores. Outback Stores supports remote communities who require food security. This includes underpinning financially unviable stores to ensure they remain open, recognising that for many communities, the community store is the only way to access food and basic necessities.

Outback Stores also supports stores to become self-sufficient and profitable. If a store is commercially self-sufficient, the store owners work with the store committee to decide how to spend the profits for the benefit of the community. Additionally, one of Outback Stores' key objectives is to ensure there is a wide range of nutritious and affordable grocery items available consistently in stores. As such, Outback Stores supports initiatives to improve nutrition and promote healthy food choices.

One way Outback Stores does this is through maintaining strong pricing policies. This pricing architecture includes matching ten key fruit and vegetable lines against major metropolitan retailers with all other fresh fruit and vegetables maintained as close as possible. Additionally, everyday affordability is prioritised through their 'Community Choice' range keeping key staple items priced within 25 per cent of major corporate retailers. Healthier options such as 600ml water are priced at \$0.99 and no sugar/diet soft drinks are at least 20 per cent cheaper than their full sugar varieties.

Through the pricing policies, not only are communities encouraged to make healthier choices, they are supported to do so through the lower prices in comparison with less healthy, full sugar options.

Case Study – Sugar Reduction Success in Mimili – Store Governance

Outback Stores works together with local Indigenous store owners to improve the health outcomes of remote communities they operate in. This foundation is supported through the Outback Stores' Nutrition Policy. This policy outlines retail strategies that improve the store environment in influencing purchasing behaviour to promote healthier choices. These strategies are done in partnership with the local store directors and in some cases, store directors implement stronger strategies that exceed the Nutrition Policy standards.

The Mimili Maku Aboriginal Corporation is a key example of this, implementing a bold strategy to remove all full sugar soft drinks from sale. Together with the wider community, the store directors prioritised health outcomes as they were aware of how these drinks were one of the top sources of sugar consumed

⁶⁸ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, 18.

and linked to poor health and chronic disease. While this policy didn't happen overnight, the store directors, together with Outback Stores demonstrated a commitment to implementing and monitoring the progress of this strategy. Over the initial twelve-month implementation period the store significantly reduced the sugar sold through full sugar soft drinks with purchases shifting towards healthier alternatives. Importantly, overall store profits did not decrease during this period and all profits went back to the community. Mimili Maku store directors hope to continue the quest to educate and support store related strategies that support the health of the community alongside the support of Outback Stores.

This good news story showcases how strong store governance and community leadership can enable key policy decisions to drive improved health outcomes. Additionally, strong policy decisions that drive positive health outcomes can at the same time maintain strong commercial principles to support the commercial viability of stores.

To address food security issues for First Nations communities in the Northern Territory, the Commonwealth established the Community Store Licensing Scheme to improve the quality, availability, and accessibility of healthy food in remote store environments. The Scheme ran for ten years under the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* (Cth) (SFNT Act). As the SFNT Act sunset in July 2022, the Northern Territory Government has assumed responsibility for remote stores licensing.

The store licensing scheme aims to ensure remote stores have sound financial management practices, are supported by high quality governance and the range and quality of goods is of a reasonable standard. Evidence has indicated the licensing scheme improved food security in the Northern Territory. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights in its 2016 *Review of Stronger Futures Measures* reported that food security measures continued under the SFNT Act are likely to promote the right to an adequate standard of living (including the right to food).⁶⁹ A national voluntary Industry Code for remote stores, leveraging the achievements of the remote store licencing scheme in the Northern Territory, could contribute to improving food security in remote areas across Australia.

⁶⁹ Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, *2016 Review of Stronger Futures measures* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2016), 13, https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/Committees/Senate/committee/humanrights_ctte/inquiries/stronger_futures_2/Final_report/2016_Review_of_Stronger_Futures_measures.pdf?la=en&hash=35F698B74D855DD56FCB5F2710C74679A4D06AD3.



Case Study – Non-for-profit community store at Roebourne

The Ieramgadu Store is a unique, Traditional Owner-led social supermarket that addresses food security issues within the Roebourne community. It operates by rescuing food from major supermarkets in nearby towns and distributing it free to vulnerable community members. Additionally, under its social enterprise model, the store offers a range of discounted goods to local residents while others pay full price. This initiative was born out of a deep awareness of the social and economic disadvantages faced by the Roebourne community, particularly the First Nations people. COVID-19 highlighted the need for a Traditional Owner-led solution to food security that aligns with cultural values and emphasises sharing and community wellbeing. What sets the store apart is its inclusivity; it is accessible to anyone in need.

Regional Food Security Contributions

While the initiative's primary focus has been improving food access and affordability, overall, it has positively impacted the liveability of the Roebourne community, fostering a sense of pride and well-being among its members. The initiative's holistic approach aims to address food security at a systems-level and advocates for Traditional Owner-led solutions while simultaneously engaging with larger stakeholders to address the social and economic disadvantages at the root of food insecurity.

Partnering Organisations

There are key corporate partners who have supported the store since inception. The organisation collaborates with a diverse range of partnering organisations including Second Bite, Woolworths, and Sodexo. These partnerships vary in their level of engagement, with some, like Second Bite, assisting to establish food rescue operations. Engagement with corporate entities, such as Woolworths, has led to increased food donations, including fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, the organisation's memorandum of understanding with Sodexo reflects a commitment to working together to enhance food security in areas in which Sodexo operate.

Related Strategies and Policies

- Northern Territory Remote Stores Licensing

For Discussion – Stores

The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes

- Develop national standards for remote stores, including benchmarking and needs based support to build capacity, and support implementation in each jurisdiction to improve food security.
- Support adequate remote store infrastructure, storage, power, and disaster resilience to ensure continuous supplies of food and other essentials in remote communities.
- Support remote stores to remain viable and provide affordable, healthy food whilst retaining and promoting community participation and control (CtG Outcome 17).
- Provide tailored, accessible support for community-led First Nations store governance, management and staff capability (local workforce).

Potential Actions

- In partnership with remote stores and First Nations health organisations, co-design and implement a national Industry Code for remote stores, including benchmarking against other stores and a support package where required to meet required standards.
 - The Code will detail both minimum food security standards and best practice to meet remote community food security needs. Periodic assessment of performance will be benchmarked against other stores and reported back to store owners, managers, and Boards.
 - The Code will be supported by a suite of capacity building measures designed to encourage continuous quality improvement, including support for health in-store environments that promote healthy food purchases.
- Invest in the capability of community stores to support healthy in-store environments, promote healthy food options, and increased availability and affordability of healthy foods.⁷⁰
- Support greater First Nations community involvement in the governance, management, and local staffing of remote community stores.
 - Provide assistance and incentives, where required, for First Nations store owners, managers and Boards to develop remote store policies that support food security outcomes, e.g., store employment, nutrition and pricing policies, financial management and governance practices.
- Work across Governments, inclusive of community engagement and input, to integrate food security as a key part of crisis preparedness planning frameworks and review options for effective short-term food relief during response and recovery.

⁷⁰ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendation 11; Health and Wellbeing Queensland, *Gather + Grow Action Plan 2023-2026*, Action 3.2 and 4.4.

- Develop a nationally consistent response for remote community stores to access essential support and provide food and other essential groceries during crisis, unplanned or extended supply chain interruption, and seasonal isolation.
- Provide access to support for financially unsustainable stores identified as an essential source of food and groceries, allowing for flexible community-led store management.
- Collect data and evidence about the availability, accessibility, and affordability of healthy home products in remote stores to establish a baseline measure and promote increased availability of whitegoods, cooking and cleaning products.
- Expand remote resident access to food retailers through the establishment of transport assistance and food delivery services, particularly for remote communities without a local store.⁷¹
- Develop and implement a nationally consistent, price monitoring and comparison mechanism across all remote community stores.
- Price Watch will monitor the impact of investment intended to reduce prices, direct attention where needed, and provide pricing information to inform community decision-making.⁷²

Questions

- Do you agree with Stores as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?
- Is there anything important missing?
- Are there any risks or negative consequences?
- Does anything need to change?

⁷¹ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Security in the Northern Territory: Consultation analysis and discussion paper*, 22.

⁷² House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities*, Recommendation 2.

Supply Chains

***Goal:** Supply chains are improved to provide more direct, cost-efficient and resilient supply runs to remote communities.*

Overview / Context

Disruption to the supply chain is more likely to occur in remote and very remote First Nations communities and the vast distancing adds significant fuel and freight costs to the price of goods. This is due to pressure points caused by vast distances, complex connection points and transport routes, geographical and seasonal isolation, inadequate storage infrastructure, poorly maintained freight infrastructure, and exceptionally high operating, repair, and maintenance costs.

Freighting goods to remote communities is a long and challenging high-cost process reliant on weather and the condition of road, rail, and barge access. Limited options and inadequate local storage capacity can limit remote community access to stock reserves that protect against supply shocks or replenish supplies following severe weather events or supply chain disruptions.

Case Study – Prolonged seasonal isolation impacts food security in remote communities

Lajamanu Store is owned by the Lajamanu Progress Aboriginal Corporation (LPAC). The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) manage the store on behalf of the LPAC. Lajamanu is a community on the edge of the Tanami desert in the NT (pop 800), which historically does not get cut off by wet weather like many other Top End remote communities.

The community can be accessed from Katherine via the sealed Buntine Highway and then via 100 km of unsealed road (travel time is around 6 hours from Katherine). However, for the last two years the community has been cut off for over four months at a time partly due to the condition of the road. Following the 2023 wet weather events, the store added an extra freezer container to increase the store's total cold storage capacity.

At the end of March 2024 Lajamanu had been cut off for 3 months due to flooding from overlapping weather events. The storage capacity for this store is equivalent to 6 weeks of stock. Supplies had reached critically low levels, and it was unlikely the road would be open for another 4 weeks. Weekly flights of fresh produce had continued through this period when the road was closed. Air freight is expensive (approx. \$11,000 each flight) and the available planes are not fit for purpose, with small passenger planes (max weight 900kg of stock) being utilised to get stock into the community.

The Northern Territory Government (NTG) monitors food security across remote communities to ensure access to essential goods. ALPA contacted the NTG regarding food security in areas affected by prolonged road closures.

NTG worked with ALPA in March to facilitate additional air freight (\$210,000) of essential goods to the community (on top of what LPAC had already funded at significant cost). The store usually receives 40-60 pallets a week per by road for a population of around 800 people. Small charter planes (refuelling in Kununurra WA – 800 km one way) were arranged for 11 consecutive days, to secure supply of essential items. This continued until restorative works were completed to allow specialised high clearance 4WD trucks to access the community. Delivery by these specialised trucks were utilised once in February and again in April at a cost \$40,000 to the LPAC.

Consequently, severe weather events (e.g., tropical monsoons, floods, and bushfires) and poorly maintained freight infrastructure can limit food supply in remote communities for a prolonged period of time and increase the likelihood of an event turning into a disaster. Therefore, the Strategy actions aim to ensure remote community residents have access to critical supplies to mitigate the adverse effects of supply chain disruptions and reduce prices.

There is a need to focus on local and regional food systems, improve access to local or regional food supplies and increase local food production to ensure sustainability and reduce reliance on long distance freight.

Case Study – Community-led enterprises creating community ‘supply chains’ to provide access to fresh, affordable food

With access to fresh, high quality, affordable food becoming increasingly difficult, some remote communities have taken it into their own hands to create their own food ‘supply chains’. For example, the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation’s Bawinanga’s Tucker Run provides a mobile shopping service for people who are living on the homelands surrounding Maningrida.

This supply of food and essentials is for some people the only way they are able to regularly buy groceries. During the dry season, the Tucker Run travels weekly across two days to eleven homeland outstations. In the wet season, the Tucker Run charts a plane to deliver essential supplies to homeland residents who are cut off from other suppliers by rivers or floodwaters.

The Bawinanga Tucker Run is a significant alternative that provides options to remote communities that do not have a local store. This community led enterprise to revise their ‘supply chain’ supports many people who would otherwise struggle to access fresh, quality, affordable food, particularly during wet season. Further information on Bawinanga’s Tucker Run is available on [their website](#).

Case Study – Government and Industry working together to create better outcomes for community

In response to COVID-19 related supply chain issues in remote First Nations communities, the National Indigenous Australians Agency established a Remote Food Security Working Group (FSWG) in April 2020. The FSWG brings together Commonwealth, state and territory governments, remote store management

companies, wholesalers, and freight and distribution companies to identify and address barriers in the remote supply chain.

The FSWG was a primary mechanism to respond to supply chain and retail challenges experienced in remote communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, 'panic buying' in major cities and town centres led to lower or zero stock of certain items in remote communities. Through the FSWG, support from food and grocery wholesalers, manufacturers and suppliers prioritised the allocation of stock for remote communities. This meant remote communities were able to receive their regular supply of certain goods without stock shortages due to panic buying experienced in some regional or urban locations.

Additionally, the FSWG was able to work with state and territory governments to support the transport of stock to remote stores through biosecurity boundaries and to provide solutions to other local supply issues. In a time where the majority of the country was 'shutdown' this was a significant outcome for the FSWG to ensure remote communities continued to have access to food and essentials.

The FSWG has since expanded its scope to include remote food security risks as a consequence of events including but not limited to other pandemics, natural disasters and seasonal changes. The Group continues to meet regularly to share information and identify actions to improve the supply of food and essential items in remote communities.

Related Strategies and Policies

- 2019 National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy
- 2023 Aviation White Paper
- 2023 Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding
- 2023 Infrastructure Policy Statement
- 2023 Review of National Natural Disaster Governance Arrangements

For Discussion – Supply Chains

The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes

- Remote supply chains are effective, affordable, and flexible, including improved partnerships with remote First Nations people and resilience to disruption. Strengthen all-weather access infrastructure, reduce connection points, and shorten transport distances.
- Improve remote bulk purchasing, storage capabilities and timely distribution of food.
- Emergency and Disaster Risk Management policies are designed in partnership with First Nations people and effective at ensuring remote supply chains are resilient against disruption due to extreme weather or other disaster events, such as pandemic.

Potential Actions

- Provide remote communities with findings of the 2023-2024 supply chain study. Work with First Nations people, communities, and other sector specialists to implement actions to improve resilience and deliver sustainable price reductions on healthy essential items in remote community stores.
- Develop a long-term cross-government investment plan to upgrade road, air, and sea transport infrastructure that support food security in remote First Nations communities.
 - Include consideration of food storage and distribution centres closer to remote communities to increase access to bulk pricing, protect against supply interruption, and provide a facility for local producers to distribute to local communities.
- Assist remote community stores to collaborate and develop partnerships with local food producers, wholesalers, and other remote community stores to lower the cost and improve the quality and variety of food in stores.
 - Encourage food and grocery manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and producers to provide lower prices to remote stores on core items agreed with remote First Nations communities.
 - Identify opportunities to increase remote retailer access to a greater number of wholesalers to improve resilience, increase range and foster competition.
 - Facilitate and provide assistance to increase cooperative purchasing amongst remote stores to reduce prices and improve the quality and range.
 - Assistance to improve and monitor food handling and temperature control in the transportation of foods.
 - Support stores to improve communication with customers for greater transparency on pricing policies, including how rebates are accessed and utilised.
- Ensure Emergency and Disaster Risk Management policies include supply chain management and food security measures suitable for remote contexts.
 - Local Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Plans are designed in partnership with remote community residents, representative organisations, service providers and emergency response organisations.

Questions

- Do you agree with Supply Chains as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?
- Is there anything important missing?
- Are there any risks or negative consequences?
- Does anything need to change?

Healthy Economies

Goal: First Nations people in remote communities have the same economic opportunities for food security as non-remote communities (CtG Outcome 8).

Overview / Context

The direct link between individual and household income and ability to be food secure highlights a need for real jobs, proper wages, and decent conditions in remote economies. Socioeconomic factors (social determinants) contributes to 34 per cent of the total health gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians, including household income and employment and hours worked.⁷³ In some First Nations communities, an estimated 34-80 per cent of household income is required to purchase food for a healthy diet, compared to 30 per cent for the lowest income families more generally, and 14 per cent for the average family.⁷⁴

Lower on average incomes paired with significantly higher food and grocery costs can mean purchasing sufficient culturally and dietary appropriate food is not feasible. First Nations people living in remote communities have reported having to regularly choose between paying for food and paying for other essentials, such as electricity and other utility bills.

Socioeconomic disadvantage is more prevalent amongst First Nations people and in very remote areas.⁷⁵ Around 53 per cent of First Nations people in very remote Australia live below the poverty line.⁷⁶ As such, for many First Nations people living in remote communities, food choices are based on the costs rather than nutritional or cultural value. Without a reliable and appropriate level of income, it can be the logical choice to consume cheaper food and drinks which are nutritionally poor and calorie dense.

Additionally, there are limited employment opportunities in remote and very remote areas. Remote and very remote areas have the widest gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, with only 30.2 per cent of Indigenous young people fully engaged in employment, training and education compared to 81.7 per cent for non-Indigenous young people.⁷⁷ Consequently, this low level of engagement puts young First Nations people at risk of poor long-term employment and income outcomes.

Where remote employment programs exist, there have been diverse experiences of and variable outcomes from programs supporting remote food security. While improvements have commenced through the New Remote Jobs Program, actions in this Strategy seek to continuously improve training and increase employment opportunities.

⁷³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Summary report 2023* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2023), 14.

⁷⁴ Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Hunger for change: Addressing food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty* (Western Australian Government 2023), 22.

⁷⁵ Productivity Commission (2020) *Productivity Commission Study Report: Remote Area Tax Concessions and Payments*, Australian Government.

⁷⁶ Markham and Biddle, "Income, poverty and inequality," 16.

⁷⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "2.06 Educational participation and attainment of adults," accessed February 5, 2023, [https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-06-educational-participation#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20only%2030.2%25%20of,people%20\(Productivity%20Commission%202023\).](https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-06-educational-participation#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20only%2030.2%25%20of,people%20(Productivity%20Commission%202023).)

Case Study – Supporting meaningful employment to also support food security in community

The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) delivers remote employment programs through a community-controlled method. ALPA designs programs with communities to ensure community priorities are being responded to and the needs of the community are better met. For some communities, food related initiatives have improved food security and showcased the linkages between employment opportunities and food security.

In Gunbalanya, ALPA supported a program where around 150 nutritious ready-made subsidised meals were provided each night. This program provided 20 part-time jobs to prepare and distribute the meals, with a nutritionist informing recipes to ensure the meals provided are healthy. The ingredients were sourced from the local store, local meatworks and ALPA's wholesale arrangements. This program was successful; however, is currently on hold whilst staffing and commercial kitchen availability is settled.

In Minjilang, ALPA supports work on the farm growing mango, sweet potato, herbs, and fresh flowers. Not only does this initiative support employment, it also provides produce to the community at much cheaper prices than produce shipped in from interstate.

In Milingimbi, Traditional Owners allow the community to fish under their licence, excluding commercial licenses. ALPA purchases the catch and workers are supported to process and on-sell the fish to stores, cafes and the community cooking program, with ALPA also assisting with cold chain and licensing issues. Localising the supply chain has reduced shelf prices with, for example, Barramundi fillets in Milingimbi being cheaper than urban and regional areas.

Through community-controlled employment, ALPA is able to provide meaningful employment and upskilling opportunities to the community. In turn, these ventures are able to support the community in becoming more food secure through improving local food production and supply.

As cost of living is significantly higher in remote and very remote areas, it is important employment opportunities provide an appropriate level of income. When employed, remote First Nations people tend to earn lower incomes than both non-Indigenous Australians and non-remote Indigenous Australians.⁷⁸ An appropriate and fair level of income in comparison to cost of living is essential in supporting food security.

In addition to low employment opportunities in remote areas, business opportunities are also often deficient or absent. Support is required to establish and foster sustainable business opportunities in community-controlled food security industries. This would significantly improve food security outcomes through providing economic opportunities for First Nations communities, supporting remote business and in turn, creating more jobs.

Due to the limited employment and business opportunities in remote and very remote areas, income support through Government social security payments may be the only available income for certain households. However, the timing of the payments and the amount received impacts the type and amount of food

⁷⁸ Productivity Commission, *Remote Area Tax Concessions and Payments: Productivity Commission Study Report Overview* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2020), 41, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/remote-tax/report/remote-tax-overview.pdf>.

individuals and households purchase. Inherently, the income support payment schedule may determine for households when, and how much, food can be purchased.⁷⁹

In addition to the income support payment through Services Australia, the Remote Area Allowance is a regular extra tax-free welfare payment for persons living in remote areas. Currently, a single person living in a remote area receives \$18.20 per fortnight in addition to their welfare payments. This allowance aims to meet the additional costs associated with living in remote areas; however, does not accurately reflect the higher cost of living in remote Australia.

Raising cash income levels in remote communities through employment and business opportunities and income support payments would support people in remote areas becoming food secure by allowing them to locally purchase more healthy foods at the significantly higher prices.

International examples suggest a sugar tax may be effective reducing consumption of sugar sweetened beverages while raising revenue to subsidise healthy food and other essential groceries.⁸⁰ The World Health Organisation states a minimum tax of 20 per cent is required to have a meaningful health effect.⁸¹ A combined tax-subsidy approach is supported by several leading Australian Health Associations and has been found to be effective at improving diets and population health outcomes, including rates of dental cavities, diabetes, and obesity.⁸² Many remote stores implement similar pricing policies that offset lower pricing on healthy food and essentials with higher pricing on discretionary products, such as soft drink. A recent systematic review of interventions to improve food security for First Nations communities in high-income, colonised countries found limited impact from two trials that aimed to reduce the cost of healthy foods in remote stores in Australia.⁸³ This may be due to the limited size and duration of the subsidies (ranging from 10-20 per cent), with the authors suggesting that larger discounts were required.⁸⁴ However, it is important to note that larger cross subsidies are likely to be unaffordable for remote stores without government support.

⁷⁹ Suzanne Bryce et al., "Maitjara Wangkanyi: Insights from an Ethnographic Study of Food Practices of Households in Remote Australian Aboriginal Communities," 16.

⁸⁰ Falk Schwendicke et al., "Effects of Taxing Sugar-Sweetened Beverages on Caries and Treatment Costs," *Journal of Dental Research* 95, no. 12 (2016): 1327-1332; Adam Briggs et al., "Health impact assessment of the UK soft drinks industry levy: a comparative risk assessment modelling study," *The Lancet Public Health* 2, no. 1 (2017): E15-E22, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(16\)30037-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(16)30037-8/fulltext); Milica Jevdjevic et al., "The caries-related cost and effects of a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages," *Public Health* 169 (2019): 125-132, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30884363/>.

⁸¹ Australian Medical Association, *A tax on sugar-sweetened beverages: Modelled impacts on sugar consumption and government revenue* (Canberra: Australian Medical Association, 2021): 4, <https://www.ama.com.au/sites/default/files/2022-10/A%20tax%20on%20sugar-sweetened%20beverages.pdf>.

⁸² Stephen Duckett and Hal Swerissen, *A sugary drinks tax: Recovering the community costs of obesity* (Grattan Institute, 2016): 39, <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/880-A-sugary-drinks-tax.pdf>; Mark L. Niebylski et al., "Healthy food subsidies and unhealthy food taxation: A systematic review of the evidence," *Nutrition* 31, no. 6 (2015): 787-795, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0899900714005486>; Tony Blakely et al., "The effect of food taxes and subsidies on population health and health costs: a modelling study," *The Lancet Public Health* 5, no. 7 (2020): E404-E413, [https://www.thelancet.com/article/S2468-2667\(20\)30116-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/article/S2468-2667(20)30116-X/fulltext).

⁸³ Amanda Lee et al., "Improving economic access to healthy diets in first nations communities in high-income, colonised countries: a systematic scoping review," *Nutrition Journal* 23, no. 10 (2024): 6, <https://nutritionj.biomedcentral.com/counter/pdf/10.1186/s12937-023-00895-0.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Amanda Lee et al., "Improving economic access to healthy diets in first nations communities in high-income, colonised countries: a systematic scoping review," 24.

For Discussion – Healthy Economies

The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes

- Increase remote training and employment programs and business opportunities conducive to food security, income, and health outcomes.
- Measure and provide for the realistic additional cost of food and essential groceries in remote social security and tax policies; and ensure support can be accessed by those in need.
- Facilitate and support community participation in Industry partnerships and create sustainable improvements to First Nations participation in the remote food sector.

Potential Actions

- Review the Remote Area Allowance and provide the evidence base for payments to meet the food security needs of people living in remote communities, in line with higher cost of living in remote regions.
- Ensure social support packages for remote community residents, such as home care or disability support, include the necessary supports to meet client food security and dietary needs.
- The Australian Government to establish a National Sugar Tax and utilise the revenue to provide community-level food security; healthy food subsidies; health reinvestment; access to drinkable water.
- Implement a flexible remote training and employment program that delivers improved remote food security and nutrition outcomes. Employment may include food production workers, preparation and distribution of meals, plant and/or animal-based agriculture, kitchen repair and other maintenance work.
 - Support First Nations Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations to deliver both locally appropriate and accredited training. Support linkages between training providers to improve access and delivery.
- Consult with communities to develop an effective package of support to increase sustainable First Nations participation in community-controlled food production and food security-based businesses.

Questions

- Do you agree with Healthy Economies as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?
- Is there anything important missing?
- Are there any risks or negative consequences?
- Does anything need to change?

Policies, Practice and Governance

Goal: Initiatives are considered holistically in ways that support First Nations people living in remote communities to attain healthy lives and outcomes.

Overview / Context

There is currently an absence of cohesive policy or governing oversight to improve food security in Australia, at either Commonwealth or state and territory levels.⁸⁵ For First Nations people, this means pervasive gaps in the policy and governance systems needed to coordinate community-led solutions and facilitate multi-sector responses to improve food security in remote communities. There is also a lack of reliable, relevant, and consistent data collection on First Nations food security in remote communities.

Remote food security actions must be developed and delivered in line with Closing the Gap Priority Reforms: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making (1); Building the Community Controlled Sector (2); Transforming Government Organisations (3) and Shared Access to Data and Information at the Regional Level (4).

This Strategy seeks to ensure First Nations governance systems and leadership are included across the food security system and are at the core of policies and programs. For best results, actions must allow for true representation of remote First Nations governance systems, leadership, and local decision-making in both contemporary and traditional contexts. This could occur through regional food security groups if these were appropriately resourced to participate in implementation and evaluation of the Strategy.⁸⁶

Case Study – Western Australia Food Stress Index Data and Evaluation mechanism

The Food Stress Index (FSI) provides a measure of the likelihood that households in a geographic area are vulnerable to food stress, using a range of variables to create a single indicator. A similar concept to housing stress, food stress occurs when households need to spend ≥ 25 per cent of their weekly disposable income on food. The index gives a realistic, place-based indication of the risk of food insecurity by area. Importantly, the FSI found 40 to 100 per cent of households are at risk of this serious public health issue in some WA regional and remote local government areas.

⁸⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, *Australian Food Story: Feeding the Nation and Beyond Inquiry into food security in Australia*; Committee on Environment and Planning, *Food production and supply in NSW* (NSW Government, 2022), <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/ladocs/inquiries/2841/Report%20-%20food%20production%20and%20supply%20in%20NSW.pdf>; Health and Wellbeing Queensland, *Gather + Grow 2023-2032 Queensland Remote Food Security Strategy* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2023), <https://hw.qld.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Gather-Grow-2023-2032-Queensland-Remote-Food-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, *Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory*, Recommendations 15.

In 2020, FSI guided cross-sector emergency food responses to Australian catastrophic bushfires, cyclones, storms and floods, and supply issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Western Australian Food Relief Framework Working Group then called for food baskets listing the types and amounts of food needed for each household in a local government area. This allowed the sector to see and understand the quantum of food needed as well as the specific social and economic factors driving food insecurity in each region. Case studies explored the impact of using the FSI for food assistance and disaster preparedness and highlighted: the value and importance of ongoing intersectoral collaborations for food security; that the FSI is effective in building the capacity of a range of stakeholders to respond efficiently and effectively; and recommended upscaling the FSI to increase the effectiveness of the Australian response. Its impact suggested a paradigm shift in understanding, expressed here:

“It’s changed the way we understand food insecurity. ... Now they understand what food stress is, it’s a pre-step to food insecurity. They understand more clearly that people experiencing food stress and insecurity need an appropriate response across nutrition, across chronicity. Yeah, I think it’s just changed everything.”

A Victorian FSI was prepared during COVID-19 lockdowns and a partial WA update was undertaken in 2023⁸⁷. To find out more about the FSI in action, watch the short video⁸⁸ [here](#). To explore the FSI in more detail online visit the Tableau website⁸⁹ [here](#). The Protocol to develop the robust index is available [here](#).

Case Study – Generating co-designed evidence to improve food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The Remote Food Security Project resulted from a call to action by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs); Apunipima Cape York Health Council in Queensland and Central Australian Aboriginal Congress in the Northern Territory, who identified food security in remote communities as a priority for action. Together with The University of Queensland, a co-designed research project¹ was implemented to determine community-led solutions to improve food security in Cape York and Central Australia. Across a two-year research project, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, staff and/or community members at every level of project governance, and with community-based researchers, a range of data were collected to inform these solutions.

The impact of healthy food affordability on food security and diet quality were first considered using validated tools. The cost and affordability of a healthy diet for families receiving social security income was measured by collecting food prices in stores using Healthy Diets Australian Standardised Affordability Protocol, a tool to assess diet cost and affordability based on a reference household. Food security status of 291 families was assessed using a modified version of the 18-item United States Department of Agriculture Household Food Security Survey, to determine the prevalence of families experiencing high, marginal, low and very low food security. Diet quality of 477 women and children was explored using the Menzies

⁸⁷ <https://www.wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/F-Food-Stress-Index-Update.pdf>

⁸⁸ <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/13/6960>

⁸⁹ <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/tim.landrigan/viz/WAFoodStressIndex/TheFoodStressIndex>

Remote Short-Item Dietary Assessment tool, which assessed intake of core and discretionary food groups compared to the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

To learn about the lived experience of food insecurity, and proposed solutions to improve food security, in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 parents/carers of young children across both regions. Additionally, 25 parents/carers participated in a photovoice project. Participants photos and stories highlighted what makes it easier or more difficult to have food for their families and proposed solutions to be implemented or explored further.

Community leaders then considered the evidence generated, and determined priorities and solutions that would have the greatest impact on food security in their community. Representatives from 10 communities across both regions then came together to collectively determine priorities and solutions, and consider advocacy options, to inform a community-led framework and policy translation plan.

The data, generated locally within communities and across regions, using participatory methods which aligned with ACCHO values, provides communities with evidence to inform solutions to support efforts to create local change and to advocate for policy change to improve food security for remote communities.

References/links:

1. [Communities Setting the Direction for Their Right to Nutritious, Affordable Food: Co-Design of the Remote Food Security Project in Australian Indigenous Communities - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

Remote Food Security Project partners include: Apunipima Cape York Health Council, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, The University of Queensland, Monash University, Menzies School of Health Research, Dalhousie University

For more information: megan.ferguson@uq.edu.au

This project is funded by a NHMRC Targeted Call for Research grant (GNT1179848). 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.

An effective Strategy requires effective foundations. Actions in this section aim to enable First Nations leadership, data access, partnership, and shared decision-making to improve remote food security. It ensures Closing the Gap Priority Reforms are embedded throughout Strategy implementation and evaluation.

Case Study – Update on the Food and Water for Life Project Community Surveys

Improving food and water security in Walgett has been a long-term priority for the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) and UNSW Sydney due to the degradation of local rivers and poor access to safe drinking water and nutritious food.

A Food Forum held at Walgett Community College in 2019 brought together community stakeholders to learn from and act on community concerns around food and water security. Following this, the Walgett Food and Water for Life program was established, led by local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) and DEG, in partnership with

UNSW and The George Institute for Global Health (TGI). The aim of the Food and Water for Life program is to enable community-led sustainable food and water initiatives that are run by and employ Aboriginal people and ensure healthy drinking water and fresh nutritious food produced locally for years to come.

This work was boosted by a five-year National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant (2021–2025) *Food and Water for Life: co-creation and evaluation of sustainable innovations to strengthen food and water security*, the objectives of which are to learn from experiences of food and water insecurity in other communities, establish a framework and tools to strengthen the program, and evaluate the program's impact on food and water security, nutrition and wellbeing in Walgett.

To better understand experiences of food and water security in Walgett, community surveys were conducted in 2022. Ethical approval was obtained from AHMRC and UNSW. The survey was conducted by WAMS and DEG staff supported by TGI and UNSW. Data was collected using the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) and the Household Water InSecurity Experiences (HWISE) scale. The surveys were conducted with Aboriginal people, aged 18 or over, living in Walgett. Nearly half (46%) of the 251 participants experienced food insecurity and 44% experienced water insecurity, rates comparable to many low- and middle-income countries and far higher than national-level estimates in Australia. The results also showed a strong relationship between experiencing food and water insecurity, reflecting the knowledge of the interconnection between food and water for Aboriginal people in a river community and the collapse of the river foods systems.

The Food and Water for Life program is an example of building community-led solutions to a serious systemic issue, with lessons for other communities and contexts. The activities within the program range from enabling individuals to make different choices that can improve their and their families' health, to collaborating with retailers and agencies to work differently to support that change, as well as ensuring the accountability of those with the power and responsibility to ensure Aboriginal people in Walgett and elsewhere have access to safe drinking water and nutritious food, advocating for essential infrastructure and systemic change. It is ground up, long term and holistic, demonstrating the value of supporting existing community-controlled organisations to lead the work they know is needed and sharing that work with others.

Further information can be found [here](#).

Related Strategies and Policies

- 2022 NSW Committee on Environment and Planning inquiry into food production and supply in NSW
- 2023 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture inquiry into food security in Australia
- 2023 The Second National Action Plan: To implement the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework

For Discussion – Policies, Practice and Governance

The Strategy Partners ([Appendix Two](#)) developed the following draft intended outcomes and actions for public feedback and discussion. These discussions will shape the National Strategy.

Proposed Intended Outcomes


- Ensure reliable and accessible remote First Nations food security data is in line with CtG Priority Reform 4, Outcome 17.
- Food Security Strategy governance, monitoring and evaluation linked to CtG Priority Reforms and Targets.
- First Nations governance systems and leadership are included across the food security system in line with CtG Priority Reforms 1 and 2.
- Ensure the Strategy connects with and informs related government policies and programs, without duplication.

Potential Actions

- Establish a national remote food security governance body – with community controlled peak organisations as equal partners – responsible for oversight of Strategy implementation, supporting collaboration between sectors and developing action plans to improve remote food security.
 - Consider establishing a First Nations Food Security Peak Body *or* CtG Policy Partnership
- Reform Government processes to ensure policies and programs related to remote food security are developed and co-designed with First Nations people.
- Establish regional Food Security Working Groups and community-based Food Security Workforces, Health Providers, Education, Training and Service Providers ensure that Closing the Gap Priority Reforms and Targets are being met.
- Embed achievement against the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms in the Terms of Reference for the Remote Food Security Working Group and/or other remote food security-related Industry partnerships.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the statistical collections used by Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments to measure remote food insecurity in remote communities.
 - Identify areas for improvement and implement adjustments to enhance the reliability and comprehensiveness of remote food insecurity data; ensure data is provided in a way that meets the Closing the Gap obligations.
- Develop a framework to support monitoring, evaluation, learning and revision throughout implementation of the Strategy in line with CtG Priority Reforms, including aligning with community perspectives in defining measures of success and incorporating risk-based approaches.
- Support First Nations food security data collected, stored, and reported in line with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4 and undertaken by First Nations Community Controlled Organisations in line with Priority Reform 2, where viable to do so.

Questions

- Do you agree with Policies, Practice and Governance as an important Focus Area?
- Do you agree with the intended outcomes and draft actions?
- How well do the draft actions meet the intended outcomes?

- 
- Is there anything important missing?
 - Are there any risks or negative consequences?
 - Does anything need to change?



Glossary of Terms

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – The Australian Government acknowledges there is no single Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture or group and there are many diverse communities, language groups and kinships throughout Australia. For the purposes of the Strategy, the terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, First Nations people, and Indigenous Australians are interchangeably and respectfully used.

Closing the Gap – A commitment by all Australian governments to improve the life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A national integrated Closing the Gap strategy has been agreed through the National Federation Reform Council, previously known as the Council of Australian Governments.

Commonwealth – The legal entity of the Commonwealth of Australia, created by the Australian Constitution. The term may also be used to differentiate the Australian Government from state and territory governments.

Food Production – includes community and market gardens and food industries such as aquaculture

Food Processing – preparing food for safe consumption and distribution

Food security – All people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

Food Sourcing – includes hunting, fishing, harvesting etc.

Food system – The complex interconnected activities that bring food to people. Food is produced, harvested, or slaughtered; cleaned and often processed in some way; stored, packed, transported, traded; marketed and sold to people for preparation in their own homes or in a range of commercial or institutional food services. Any food loss and waste is repurposed or disposed of.


Healthy eating – Eating a variety of nutritious foods each day that give you the nutrients you need to maintain your health and reduce the risk of diet-related chronic diseases, in line with Australian Dietary Guidelines.

Joint Council – The Joint Council on Closing the Gap. This is the Ministerial Council on Closing the Gap, with representation from all levels of government and the Coalition of Peaks. Further details on the Joint Council can be found in the Partnership Agreement.

National Agreement – The National Agreement on Closing the Gap was signed by all Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks in July 2020. It sets out commitments for all Australian governments to work together with First Nations people to overcome the inequality experienced by First Nations people and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.

Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap – Formal Partnership Agreement between the Commonwealth Government, state, and territory governments, the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and the Australian Local Government Association. Governments shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak representatives to develop a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Resilience – The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform, and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management.



Self-determination – Self-determination is a collective right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to control their own life and determine their own political, economic, social, cultural, and economic needs.

Strengths-based – A strengths-based approach involves recognising, fostering, and building on a person's skills, capacities, and competencies. This approach recognises that each person already has skills and expertise in relation to their lives, and their families. It aims to enhance motivation, participation and realisation of identified goals and positive outcomes.

Unhealthy food and drinks – Discretionary food and drinks that are energy-dense, nutrient-poor, high in added sugars, saturated fat and/or added salt and are not necessary for a healthy diet, as described in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

Wellbeing – In broad terms, social and emotional wellbeing is the foundation for physical and mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is a holistic concept which results from a network of relationships between individuals, family, kin, and community. It also recognises the importance of connection to land, culture, spirituality, and ancestry, and how these affect the individual. Social and emotional wellbeing may change across the life course: what is important to a child's social and emotional wellbeing may be quite different to what is important to an Elder. However, across the life course a positive sense of social and emotional wellbeing is essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to lead successful and fulfilling lives. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's understanding of social and emotional wellbeing varies between different cultural groups and individuals.

Appendix One – Strategy Alignment with Closing the Gap

- Priority Reform 1. Formal partnerships and shared decision-making
Priority Reform 2. Building the community-controlled sector
Priority Reform 3. Transforming government organisations
Priority Reform 4. Shared access to data and information at a regional level

- Outcome 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives.
- Outcome 2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong.
- Outcome 4 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years.
- Outcome 5 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential.
- Outcome 8 – Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
- Outcome 9 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.
- Target 9b: By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:
 - within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard.
- Outcome 13 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe.
- Outcome 14 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.
- Outcome 15 – People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical, and economic relationship with their land and waters.
- Target 15a: By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests.
- Target 15b: By 2030, a 15 per cent increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea.
- Outcome 16 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.
- Outcome 17 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.



Appendix Two – Strategy Partner Membership

Co-Chair: The National Indigenous Australians Agency
Co-Chair: Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service
NSW Aboriginal Affairs
NT Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet
QLD Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and Arts
WA Department of the Premier and Cabinet
SA Attorney-General's Department
Aboriginal Health Council South Australia (Since July 2023)
Aboriginal Health Council Western Australia (Since July 2023)
Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (Since July 2023)
Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council NSW (Since July 2023)
Aurukun QLD Community Representative (since December 2023)
Pormpuraaw QLD Community Representative (since December 2023)
Nhulunbuy NT Community Representative (since December 2023)

Appendix Three – Resources and References

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