

Thank you for taking the time to read our response to the Discussion Paper on the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities 2024.

- What does food security mean to you?

For First Nations People living in remote communities, food security encompasses more than just access to nutritious food; it is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, community well-being, and connection to country. It means having reliable access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food that aligns with dietary needs and cultural preferences. This is particularly challenging in remote areas due to geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and economic constraints. At Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council we work to address these challenges by collaborating with community stores to improve the availability and affordability of healthy food options, and to empower individuals with the tools and knowledge to make healthy and affordable food choices. To us, supporting household food security involves delivering educational activities like cooking classes, budgeting workshops and nutrition education activities, and increasing children and parents exposure to a wide range of fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

- How could food security be improved in your community?

At NPY Women's Council, we work across 26 remote communities in the tri state region of Western Australia, Northern Territory, and South Australia. Our insights are informed by our extensive experience in these communities, where we encounter many common food security challenges.

- Adoption and implementation of store nutrition policies as informed by Nutritionists/Dieticians/Public Health experts. For example the Mai Wiru Store Nutrition Policy developed by NPYWC for use in Mai Wiru stores in the APY

Lands. This policy, though comprehensive, is not mandatory to follow and is implemented by Mai Wiru stores to varying extents. The policy includes guidance on:

- **Store layout:** Prioritizing the visibility of healthy foods at the front while placing less healthy options toward the back.
 - **Cross-subsidization:** Implementing pricing strategies that make healthy food more affordable compared to unhealthy options.
 - **Sugar-free initiatives:** Promoting sugar-free alternatives and reducing the availability of sugar-sweetened beverages.
 - **Clear pricing:** Ensuring consistent and transparent pricing, with shelf prices that match the checkout prices.
- Regular and consistent public health initiatives encouraging healthy eating
 - Road access - this year, some communities on the Ngaanyatjarra lands missed deliveries because of the rain damaging the roads. The truck had to go through SA to get back to communities in WA, and by then, the food was days, if not a week, old. For food to get to communities, reliable roads are essential.
 - Co-design of food security strategies with the local community.
 - Store managers and boards of directors should be at the table and included in conversations around food security, as they will ultimately be the ones implementing nutrition policy.
 - Lee, Amanda J., et al. "Improving economic access to healthy diets in first nations communities in high-income, colonised countries: a systematic scoping review." *Nutrition Journal* 23.1 (2024): 10. NPYWC contributed to this scoping review which identified a number of promising initiatives to increase food security, including:
 - Providing a box of food and vouchers for fresh produce;
 - prescriptions for fresh produce;

- provision/promotion of subsidized healthy meals and snacks in community stores;
- direct funds transfer for food for children;
- offering discounted healthy foods from a mobile van;
- programs increasing access to traditional foods.
- Community co-design and empowerment, program promotion and targeting a wide range of healthy food items were identified as food security enablers.

The Child Nutrition Team recently conducted a survey across the remote NPY region to record the price of baby formula in community stores. It found that one tin of standard baby formula ranged in price from \$26.99 to \$51 across community stores, compared to \$20 in Alice Springs. These findings demonstrate the sometimes excessive cost of essential items, particularly for individuals on income support. See complete findings in the table below.

		PRICE		
COMMUNITY	STORE	Alula Stage 1 Newborn Infant Formula		
		Standard	Gold	Advance
Alice Springs	Woolworths	\$ 20.00	\$ 28.50	\$ 34.00
Kiwirrkurra	Outback	\$ 26.99		
Warakurna	Ngaanyatjarra Council	\$ 35.00		
Wanarn	Ngaanyatjarra Council	\$ 45.00		
Jameson	Ngaanyatjarra Council	\$ 51.00		
Warburton	Ngaanyatjarra Council	\$ 35.50		

Blackstone	Ngaanyatjarra Council	\$	38.50		
Docker River	Community store	\$	32.50		
Wingellina	Ngaanyatjarra Council	\$	40.00		
Pipalyatjara	Mai Wiru	\$	27.50		
Mutitjulu	ALPA	\$	29.30		
Amata	Mai Wiru	\$	27.50		
Imanpa	Outback	\$	26.99	\$	53.00
Finke	Outback	\$	26.99		
Pukatja	Mai Wiru	\$	27.50		
Fregon	Mai Wiru	\$	47.00		
Mimili	Outback	\$	26.99		

- What community strengths support food security?
 - Strong cultural practices in gathering, hunting and consuming bush foods to supplement a store based diet.
 - Community led nutrition initiatives and community events that integrate food provision and community connection.
 - Over the past decade, the NPYWC nutrition team, in collaboration with the University of Queensland, has conducted Market Basket Surveys in remote stores across the APY Lands to monitor the pricing of healthy versus unhealthy foods. Last year, an Anangu Research team was established, involving local community

members in recording price data in stores and engaging in store advocacy. This initiative not only enhanced local capacity in monitoring price data but also helped conceptualize the cost differences between a healthy and unhealthy diet. The findings indicated that a 'market basket' of healthy foods is more affordable than one filled with unhealthy options.

- Community endorsed store policies for quality and price control and implementation/monitoring systems.

- What do you think of the Focus Areas in the Discussion Paper?

The focus areas are broad and address varied and interwoven aspects of the food system. One additional sector which plays a role in supporting food security is remote schools. As mentioned in the discussion paper, remote schools typically provide breakfast and lunch for students. However the quality of the food offered varies greatly school to school, and meals often fall short of being nutritious and palatable. Childrens' exposure to a wide and diverse range of foods from a young age predisposes their dietary preferences later in life. Providing nutritious meals, and consistent exposure to new foods, particularly fruit and veg, during these formative years is vital to supporting healthy food choices throughout the lifespan. While many schools, such as those in the Northern Territory, do follow nutrition policies, the implementation and adherence to these policies vary significantly across different states, leading to inconsistent practices.

- What do you think of the Intended Outcomes in the Discussion Paper?

The intended outcomes are clear and holistic, and align with the focus areas.

- What do you think of the Potential Actions in the Discussion Paper?

Health

The discussion paper highlights the need for health services that support proper nutrition, yet it is critical that a wider range of services across the community collaborate to achieve this goal. Remote community health services often face significant challenges, including being overstressed and under-resourced, with high demand and a highly transient workforce. As a result, the capacity of these health services is frequently skewed towards treatment rather than prevention. For nutrition initiatives to have a broad and lasting impact, it is essential that health services do not operate in isolation. Instead, there must be a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach that integrates preventive measures with treatment, ensuring that nutrition programs are supported by the entire health system.

Stores

While providing nutrition education to community members is essential, it is equally important to support and educate store employees. Store managers, cashiers, and stockers should have a foundational understanding of nutrition, including how to prepare healthy takeaway meals and implement effective product placement strategies. This knowledge enables them to actively contribute to promoting healthier choices within the community.

Other Actions

The actions outlined in the paper are well-considered; however, developing a more detailed action plan with clearly defined steps and strategies could be beneficial in establishing a concrete path forward.

- Is there anything important missing from the Discussion Paper?

Nothing that hasn't already been mentioned.

- Is there anything in the Discussion Paper that should change?

On page 30 there is a minor error in the first paragraph of Overview/context, in this sentence: "For other communities, there is no store travelling outside the community is necessary to access food." Should it instead read: For other communities where there is no store, traveling outside the community is necessary to access food.