

Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, July 2009

ROLE OF COMMUNITY STORES

The community store is the main food supply in remote communities (but other food outlets are also important). The evidence demonstrates that improved store manager attitudes and practices can directly improve quality of the food supply and increased turnover of healthy foods. This "whole of store" approach results from:

- attention to adequate provisioning of recommended foods
- in-store good food promotion and consumer education
- improved store infrastructure (for storage and display)
- improved transport and delivery of food to store

As has been demonstrated with Outback stores, this approach takes good organisational know how, resources and commitment.

ROLE OF STORE LICENSING

We believe that in a largely non-competitive environment, a level of government intervention is necessary to ensure protection of the rights of the consumer, people's rights for food security, and the practice of good retail practice standards.

ADDRESSING THE AFFORDABILITY GAP

The current Australian government initiatives to address inequities in food security between remote and non-remote Australians, though commendable, have a prime focus on improving the availability and quality of the store food supply, but will not address the affordability gap.

We are currently doing some work to determine the cost of meeting dietary recommendations for people in a remote community, based on current store food costs. Preliminary analysis suggests that a healthy diet costs more than the current diet. People already spend a large portion of their income on food.

ROLE OF INCOME MANAGEMENT

Income management may have a role for some people, but on the whole may not be supporting better food choices. We have preliminary data that suggests that people are spending more money on white goods and non-food items, but tobacco and fruit and vegetable sales remain unchanged.

Key recommendations

That the Australian government consider:

1. The establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system that provides:
 - a. timely feedback to store managers and the community on the quality of the food supply and
 - b. data to evaluate the impact of government initiatives such as income management and store licensing that go beyond current reporting of anecdotal information or store manager reports.
2. Strategies to subsidise the cost of healthy foods that are of direct benefit to the consumer. These could include the subsidisation of freight; capital improvement grants; income subsidies to be spent on healthy food.
3. Training and continuing education and support for store managers with the establishment of a national store manager register
4. The continuation of the store licensing initiative with an emphasis on supporting and strengthening community participation in the store enterprise.

What Menzies can offer

1. Input into the development of a monitoring and evaluation system
 - a. We have developed an automated tool as part of the RIST project to track the turnover of key foods
 - b. We have NHMRC funding to test the feasibility of using key indicator data to support communities to improve the food supply and food access.
2. We have the expertise to evaluate the impact of interventions on the food supply and food security.

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Background

DIET AND POOR HEALTH

One in five Indigenous Australians in remote communities run out of food and do not have money to buy more. Poor nutrition is estimated to contribute to over 16% of the burden of disease for Indigenous Australians.

Insufficient fruit and vegetables intake alone accounts for:

- ❖ 3.5% of the total disease burden for Indigenous Australians;
- ❖ 18% of the cardiovascular disease burden; and,
- ❖ 5% of the health gap.

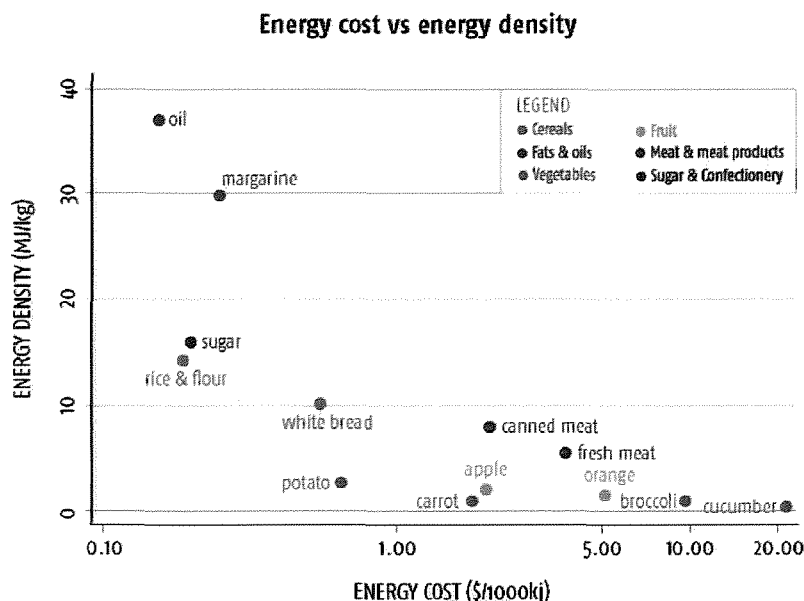
The supply of, and access to affordable and quality food is critical to Closing the Gap.

PEOPLE HAVE NO CHOICE - BUSTING THE MYTH THAT PEOPLE CHOOSE UNHEALTHY FOODS

Our research shows that across 6 remote stores in Australia, the purchased diet was high in refined cereals and sugars (mainly table sugar, soft drinks and cordial) and low in fruit and vegetables. *Bread, flour, milk and soft drinks made up half of the calories available through the store food supply.*

- These dietary patterns are consistent across communities and have changed little over 30 years
- People are filling up on foods that cost much less per calorie than the healthy, nutrient-rich foods we promote, such as fresh fruit, vegetables, lean meat and fish (Figure). When budgets are constrained, quality is compromised before quantity as consumers maximize calories.

FIGURE: DOLLARS PER CALORIE BASED ON STORE SALES DATA FOR STUDY COMMUNITY



Key finding: Not surprising people in poverty have the worst diets — good food costs more

Added to the problem of the high cost of food, Indigenous Australians in remote communities are even more disadvantaged because of the limited supply of good food and because of access issues.

Adequate and good quality food has to be available at all times, and also has to be affordable. Access issues also need to be addressed, such as – housing (food storage and food preparation), good food promotion, transport services to stores, food budgeting support.