

Supplementary Questions: Inquiry into Food Production and Supply in NSW

1. You highlight that the supply of food to Aboriginal communities is unaffordable and unstable due to high food costs in regional and remote areas, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental challenges (AHMRC pp3-4). Can you comment more on this, and on your suggestions to address it?

There are a number of factors affecting food supply to Aboriginal communities in regional and remote areas including (but not limited to):

- **Higher food costs**
 - The cost of fresh produce in regional and remote areas are significantly higher than in urban areas. As outlined in the National Aboriginal Health Plan 2021-2023, the cost of groceries can be 60 percent higher in remote areas across Australia than in urban areas¹.
- **Poor infrastructure**
 - This refers to both household and community infrastructure. A lack of adequate household infrastructure such as working refrigerators, stovetops and storage negatively impacts Aboriginal households' ability to engage in healthy eating.
 - These households have difficulty withing cooking, storing or preparing food, and as a result often opt for less nutritious options that are quick and easy.
 - According to the AIHW, 21 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households do not have adequate household infrastructure. This number is likely to increase with remoteness and in overcrowded households².
- **Environmental challenges**
 - Severe weather events and natural disasters (i.e. bushfires and floods) disrupt supply chains and consequently, access to food. During these times, food costs increase due to transport infrastructure damage and disruption to agriculture.
 - An example of this were the recent Northern NSW floods during which communities experienced significant infrastructure damage and many were cut off from supply lines. These floods highlighted our food insecurity with images of fresh produce being dumped because of flood damage; empty supermarket shelves and local groups delivering meals to affected areas using jet skis and helicopters to feed desperate communities.

Food insecurity does not have a single solution as the sustainability of the wider food system must be considered. These challenges require long term and stable investment into

¹ https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/12/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-plan-2021-2031_2.pdf

² [2.02 Access to functional housing with utilities - AIHW Indigenous HPF](#)

locally-based solutions to food production and supply. Moreover, investment to address structural inequities such as housing and employment. Development of a robust food security strategy that coordinates action from all levels of government is necessary to improve food security.

2. Can you tell us about the benefits of locally controlled sources of fresh produce, like community gardens and allotments, to address food security and provide nutritious, fresh food for regional and remote communities? How can government better support these solutions to food supply? (AHMRC p7)

Access to locally grown produce removes barriers related to transportation that can inflate cost as they localise the supply chain. Community led programs such as community gardens can improve fresh produce intake within communities. They can also be tailored to meet the unique dietary needs of different Aboriginal communities

There are existing models across the state that could be drawn from. For example, Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation has developed community garden program which works in conjunction with the Koori Community Kitchen on site. The initiative has developed the community's skills in healthy food preparation and practices, and led to an increase in fruit and vegetable intake. This program had began as a partnership between the ACCHO and LHD and has benefited from long term funding that has allowed the community to take ownership over the program.

Not only do these programs increase the availability of fresh produce without the cost barrier, but they can also embed cultural components and highlight Indigenous knowledge by exploring native grains and practices, improving health outcomes, community connectivity and creating opportunities for local economic development.

There have been several other ACCHOs who have established local food programs, yet they were unable to provide long term benefits due to short funding cycles. This is a consistent barrier for locally-led programs to provide long-term advances in food security. Government needs to invest in long term, stable funding to ensure that these programs can effectively meet their intended outcomes.

3. You note the need for a standalone food security strategy, particularly as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (AHMRC pp5-6). Could you talk more about what elements the strategy should include, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

A food security strategy must take a systems approach and focus on building a sustainable, culturally appropriate, and equitable food system to meet both nutritional need and food preferences. As noted in our submission, there are many cross-cutting issues which impact food security. Should the NSW Government pursue the development of such as strategy, it should consider a wide range of issues including:

- underlying structural issues such as poverty and housing which require robust housing and employment solutions;
- addressing supply chain vulnerabilities;
- food system resilience in the face of natural disasters and other crises (including the role of the food relief system);
- the impact of environmental challenges on the food system (this should include climate change action); and
- the role of culture in the food system (embedding cultural knowledge and practices); and
- policies to support healthy food choices.

Ultimately, such a strategy must take a whole of systems lens and establish multi-pronged solutions. There is potential to draw work that has been done in other jurisdictions and internationally. For example, in early 2022 the Canadian government developed the *Food Policy for Canada*, its first food policy which provides a roadmap for a sustainable, healthy food system for the country. It also has a dedicated focus on Indigenous food systems. Part of its implementation includes the establishment of a Food Policy Advisory Council and \$134.4 million investment to support food policy priorities.

4. You comment that appropriate housing and social policy can enable food system resilience and help to address food insecurity from the bottom up. Could you comment further on this? (AHMRC p6)

As outlined above, housing and poverty are key contributors to food insecurity. Without suitable housing, people are unable to prepare, store or cook foods in their home. Further to this, housing cost limits access to food. Aboriginal people are more likely to require housing assistance and less likely to own homes than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Within housing tenure data, it was found that 68 per cent of Aboriginal people rent their homes while those who reside in social housing contributes to half of this proportion³. Higher housing costs place additional financial strain on families, which limits the disposable income available for groceries. This encourages purchasing of pre-packaged foods that tend to be less nutritious and cheaper.

5. You recommend that the NSW Implementation Plan on Closing the Gap put forward initiatives to address food insecurity to improve outcomes for Indigenous health (AHMRC, pp5-6). Do you have any suggestions for initiatives that could be covered in the plan?

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap and subsequently NSW Implementation Plan on Closing the Gap have a significant focus on improving health outcomes for Aboriginal communities. Notwithstanding, the NSW Implementation plan only includes two initiatives which are targeted towards food security and nutrition. These include the **NSWALC & Woolworths Pilot Grocery Delivery Program Pilot project by NSW** in which the Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) to extend Woolworths food delivery services to additional towns,

³ [Indigenous housing - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au)

where they currently do not deliver. Moreover, the **Initiatives to prevent obesity** which seeks to implement targeted initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and adults to reduce the prevalence of obesity, and prevention of childhood obesity.

The plan should be expanded to acknowledge the critical role that access to and availability of food plays in Aboriginal communities. Actions should not only be health specific but should span across other Priority Reform areas and Socio-economic target. It is the view of the AH&MRC that such initiatives would need to be developed in consultation with Aboriginal communities, but examples could include:

- Initiatives to support affordable housing for Aboriginal people, with an emphasis on regional and remote communities (links with Target 9)
- Initiatives to support nutritional education under (links with Target 1)
- Initiatives to support Aboriginal farming and agriculture under (links with Target 15)
- Investment in community-based food initiatives which support Aboriginal food self-determination
- Investment in infrastructure in Aboriginal communities, with an emphasis on regional and remote areas

6. Your submission highlights the impact of underlying socioeconomic factors on food security in Indigenous communities, particularly access to infrastructure and quality housing. What changes to planning mechanisms would you suggest addressing these issues? (AHMRC p6)

Planning for affordable housing should consider inclusionary planning where “affordable” housing should be accessible for both low and moderate income earners. NSW planning mechanisms tend to focus on home ownership for moderate income earners while low income earners are limited to rental options. State and local government can adopt specific planning mechanisms that promote affordable housing ownership and focus on retaining affordable housing opportunities in communities.

Furthermore, affordable housing must come with a commitment of ongoing maintenance. As outlined above, access to functional housing with working utilities can be largely accounted for a lack of maintenance. This feeds into the wider issue of housing affordability, with flow on effects for food security.