



BENCHMARKING FOR HEALTHY STORES

PROJECT NEWSLETTER 4 - DECEMBER 2023



HI THERE!

Welcome to the long overdue 4th edition of the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores Project Newsletter. It has been another busy year for the project and you can find out more about what's been happening below!

PROJECT PROGRESS

FEASIBILITY STUDY

Twenty-nine feasibility interviews have been completed between April and September this year with those involved (including store directors, store managers, area managers, stores nutritionists and public health nutritionists) in testing the Benchmarking model. This gave opportunity for the research team to have some fantastic conversations whilst in community during the data collection period. Special thanks to Associate Investigator Eddie Miles who supported the research team with feasibility interviews in Central Australia.

Our newest Benchmarking team member, Dr Asnake Irenso, has been leading the analysis of the interviews using the Normalisation Process Theory. This analysis will help provide valuable insights into the long-term sustainability and extended use of the Benchmarking model, as well as suggestions for improvement.

(See our profiles at the end of this newsletter to find out more about Asnake and the expertise he brings to our team!)



Monash team members, Asnake & Amanda with AI Eddie enjoying the red dirt and blue skies of Central Australia!

DATA COLLECTION - SECOND TIME AROUND!

In July and August this year, 11 partner nutritionists and 5 members of the research team hit the ground in remote communities all over the NT to collect Benchmarking data in 29 participating stores and 5 regional centres. It was a massive team effort to complete Store Scout App practice assessments and collect Store Scout App validation data, Healthy Diets ASAP pricing data and NT Market Basket Survey pricing data across these many remote locations.



Monash team members, Asnake & Emma up in the Top End



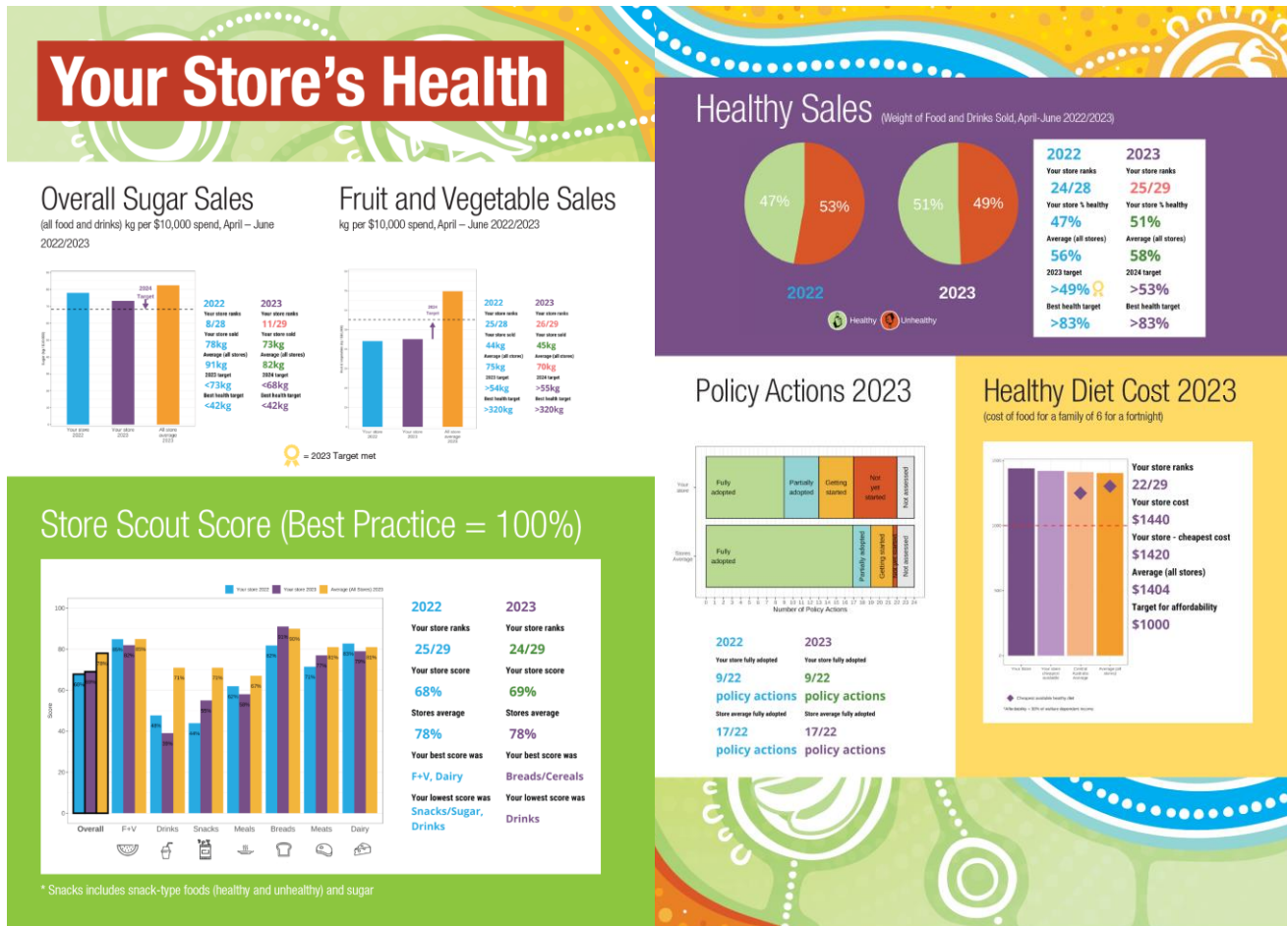
Monash team members, Meaghan and Amanda in Central Australia



2023 BENCHMARKING REPORTS

Our second lot of Benchmarking feedback reports were released to strategy stores and the nutritionists working with them in mid-October this year. It was a huge effort involving our research team, data scientists, business analyst and graphic designer to bring a wealth of data together and turn these reports around within a tight timeframe.

The Benchmarking Co-design Committee informed the reconfiguration of our baseline report layout to include additional data points so stores can see how they are tracking over time, and this year we also had Price indicator to include. Here's a snapshot of a mock report 'dashboard' for 2023:



Stores Nutritionists and Public Health Nutritionists from our partner organisations are now having meetings with store directors and/or managers to discuss the results of the Benchmarking assessment and co-design an action plan with the aim to strengthen their store's health practices prior to the final assessment in July-August 2024.

NEW OFFICIAL PROJECT PARTNERS

The Benchmarking for Healthy Stores Multi-Institutional Agreement has been executed and we are excited to officially welcome Katherine West Health Board Aboriginal Corporation, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation and Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation on board as project partner organisations. We look forward to continuing to work with you!



PRICING TASK GROUP

This year we included a Pricing indicator to benchmark stores on food pricing, based on The Healthy Diets Australian Standardised Affordability and Pricing protocol (Healthy Diets ASAP).

This task group put a huge amount of thought and discussion into co-designing the most effective methodology for collecting both [Healthy Diets ASAP](#) and [NT Market Basket Survey](#) price data in remote stores in the Northern Territory participating in the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores project to allow comparison of protocols. In addition to developing this pricing data collection protocol, the group also contributed to:

Cheapest Available Healthy Diet cost by transport mode, 2023
(cost of food for a family of 6 for a fortnight)



- Development of a modified paper Healthy Diets ASAP data collection tool and protocol to target cheapest available product options for the healthy diet
- Modification of a Market Basket Survey pricing e-survey tool in REDCap to capture product prices not included in the Healthy Diets ASAP web portal
- Determining key pricing indicators to feedback to stores (healthy and cheapest available healthy diet costs), comparators (all stores average, regional average and affordable healthy diet costs)
- Informing supplementary pricing indicators to provide more in-depth information for stores (comparisons by geographic region, primary transport modality and competition status, and to regional centres)
- Development of pricing data visualisation for the Benchmarking reports and supplementary pricing reports
- Co-authoring an abstract titled “Affordability of healthy diets in Northern Territory remote communities and regional centres” which has been accepted for presentation at the 2024 Food Governance conference in Sydney

Thanks to all who have contributed to this task group– the time and expertise you gave was invaluable in making all of this work possible. Special mentions go to our University of Queensland collaborators, Emeritus Professor Amanda Lee and Dr Meron Lewis who brought a wealth of expertise on use of the Healthy Diets ASAP protocol to the project, and Adam Barnes (NT Health) for informing the NT Market Basket Survey data collection.

RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

The Benchmarking team and collaborators had a strong presence at the Australian Public Health Conference in nipaluna/Hobart in September. Several abstracts related to Benchmarking for Healthy Stores were presented, including:

- **Dr Meaghan Christian (Monash University)** - Co-design of Benchmarking Reports for Healthy Remote Stores in Australia
- **Molly Fairweather (Monash University)** - Benchmarking for continuous improvement in food retail environments: A systematic scoping review
- **Dr Emma Mc Mahon (Menzies School of Health Research)** - Development of indicators from food purchasing data to drive health-enabling retail practice



Catching up with CI Megan Ferguson over a delicious meal

Many other team members and project collaborators from around the country were in attendance and/or presenting on other exciting work, and it was great to catch up in beautiful nipaluna and of course check out the local food scene!

Project Lead Julie Brimblecombe presented on the Benchmarking Model as part of the Centre for Research Excellence in Food Retail Environments for Health (RE-FRESH) workshop.

Further Benchmarking work has been accepted for presentation at the Food Governance conference in Sydney in February 2024 which we look forward to sharing, and we hope to see some of you there!



Meaghan, Molly and Emma presenting at the Australian Public Health Conference

WHAT'S NEXT?

NEW TASK GROUPS FOR 2024

With the wrap up of our Pricing Task Group in 2023, we have recently commenced two new task groups to continue into 2024. The Global Rating Task Group will inform the co-design and piloting of a global rating scheme for healthiness of remote stores based on the Benchmarking assessment indicators. The Community Feedback Task Group will inform the co-design of resources to support visual communication and documentation required for store managers, store owners and/or nutritionists to communicate Benchmarking report results with the wider community (where desired by store owners). These groups have already commenced work and we look forward to progressing these tasks in the new year.

TRIAL ANALYSIS

In early 2024, we will have preliminary results on the Benchmarking trial, including effect of the Benchmarking approach on the primary outcome of free sugar sales, as well as secondary outcomes, including sales of discretionary products sales of core products, total sodium from all products sold, and healthy and unhealthy product sales. We will also see whether Benchmarking influenced policy adoption and store practice. Watch this space!

POLICY ANALYSIS

In 2024, using feasibility data and the value-for-money assessment, we will determine how best to continue Benchmarking if found to be of value. The policy analysis will explore how best to deliver the benchmarking model in to the future. Interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders including store owners/directors, senior retailers, government and non-government employees across jurisdictions.

UPCOMING PROJECT DATES - 2024

Activity	Date	Location
Benchmarking Action Plan / Implementation period (S)	January – June 2024	Remote NT
2024 Store Sales Data Collection first contact for stores (C)+(S)	January 5, 2024	Email
Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting	February 1, 2024	Zoom
Economic Analysis Usual Practice (C) & Implementation (S) Resource Surveys	March, May, July 2024	e-survey
Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting	April 11, 2024	Zoom
Feasibility/Policy Interviews (S)	May - July 2024	Phone/ Zoom
Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting	June 6, 2024	Zoom
2024 Data Collection Training for Nutritionists	June 14, 2024	Zoom

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to our: Monash Research Team- Assoc Prof Julie Brimblecombe (Project Lead), Ms Amanda Hill (Project Co-ordinator), Dr Meaghan Christian, Dr Asnake Irenso, Ms Emma van Burgel and Ms Molly Fairweather.

Partner organisations- Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation, Katherine West Health Board Aboriginal Corporation, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, NT Health – Barkly, Big Rivers, Central Australia & Top End regions, and Outback Stores Pty Ltd.

Chief Investigators- Assoc Prof Julie Brimblecombe (Monash University), Dr Emma McMahon (Menzies School of Health Research), Dr Leisa McCarthy (Menzies School of Health Research), Dr Megan Ferguson (The University of Queensland), Prof Bronwyn Fredericks (The University of Queensland), Ms. Nicole Turner (Indigenous Allied Health Australia), Emeritus Prof Amanda Lee (The University of Queensland), Prof Joanna Batstone (Monash University), Assoc Prof Christina Pollard (Curtin University), Prof Louise Maple-Brown (Menzies School of Health Research).

Associate Investigators- Ms. Khia De Silva (Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation), Dr. Simone Nalatu (Health and Wellbeing Queensland), Mr. Adam Barnes (NT Department of Health), Ms. Clare Brown (Apunipima Cape York Health Council), Mr. Eddie Miles (Menzies School of Health Research), Prof Ross Bailie (University of Sydney), Prof Marjory Moodie (Deakin University), Prof Anna Peeters (Deakin University), Assoc Prof Gary Sacks (Deakin University).

INTRODUCING...

This time, we're introducing the leads of various components of the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores project!

PURCHASING LEAD– CHIEF INVESTIGATOR DR EMMA McMAHON

Emma is a Research Fellow at Menzies School of Health Research supported by The Centre of Research Excellence in Food Retail Environments for Health ([CRE-REFRESH](#)). Her post-doctoral research has focused on strategies and tools to support health-enabling food environments in remote stores to improve nutrition and health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities. Emma is leading the sales data analysis and purchasing indicator assessment for benchmarking.

What's your hidden talent? Hula-hooping! I have been hooping from around 2005 when I was working at a primary school in out-of-school-hours care. I've just picked it up again in the last 2 years. It's a really good cardio workout and for getting outside a bit every day. (To see what hula-hooping involves, you can check out Emma's TikTok video [here!](#))

What's your career highlight? Being able to work with people I really like, who are good at what they do and really generous with sharing that expertise. I know that's not one thing, but for me, that makes work so much more enjoyable!

What's your most memorable meal? When I was in Kyoto with my husband for our 10-year anniversary, we went out for a traditional dinner, Obanzai Ryori, a set menu with about 10 courses. The place we went was a little house, we weren't even sure it was a restaurant until we walked in. When we arrived, I asked if it was ok if I don't eat seafood- they said yes, which I later realised was probably out of politeness, as the chef had to make extra dishes for several courses! We sat at the kitchen bar and talked to the chef – he sailed from Osaka to Sydney in the 80s! By the end they didn't want us to leave and were giving us shots of sake. They gave us sake and fans to take home- I still have those fans.



Emma in front of Mount Maunganui, NZ (where she has family ties)



PRICING LEAD – DR MERON LEWIS

Meron is a Research Fellow at the University of Queensland, where she has been working since completion of her PhD. Meron started her learning journey completing a Bachelor of Science at the University of Melbourne, before being invited to undertake Honours in Chemistry. After working in the field in Australia and overseas, she returned to study a Bachelor of Health Science (Nutrition & Dietetics)(Hons) at the Queensland University of Technology, which led her to find her 'calling' in food pricing research. Meron is leading food pricing data collection and analysis for benchmarking.

What's your hidden talent? I enjoy sewing, but I'm not sure I'm particularly talented!

What's your career highlight? Completing my PhD, "Dietary intake, cost, and affordability of diets in low socioeconomic groups in Australia" in November 2022. It aims to provide better data on habitual diet intakes, and the affordability and costs of habitual and recommended diets for low socio-economic groups in Australia, to better inform policy and practice. Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS) used this work to inform the food budgets for households within the 2022 & 2023 'Living Affordability' advocacy reports, showing just how important and valuable this research can be.

What's your most memorable meal? In terms of the one that I think of most is my Mum's Sunday dinners, where she'd make a lamb roast and lemon meringue pie. The smell of rosemary takes me back there in an instant!

FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS LEAD – DR ASNAKE IRENZO

Asnake is a Research Fellow at Monash University, who has been working on the feasibility study for Benchmarking Healthy Stores since June 2023. Asnake has a background in Public Health, starting his career as a health officer in a rural health centre and then pursued research at Haramaya University, Ethiopia. He completed his PhD at Deakin University in June 2023, focused on studying how social networks within households and communities affect complementary feeding practices in Ethiopia

Career highlight: I used to work in a region prone to extreme droughts in Ethiopia, including El Niño. It allowed me to research the connection between climatic crisis and food scarcity, maternal and child nutrition, and social protection programs. This experience is relatable to the persistent problem of food insecurity in remote areas of Australia.

Hidden talent? While I might not have hidden talents, I'm really into visiting new places and celebrating diversity! 😊

Most memorable Meal? In 2017 I attended the 2nd Annual ANH Academy Week in Kathmandu, Nepal, to present my study "Household Coping Strategies and Childhood Wasting among PSNP Beneficiaries and Non-beneficiaries in Eastern Ethiopia". While there, a Nepalese friend invited us to try Bhutuwa, a Nepali dish made of goat brain! It was served with rice and had a rich flavour.



Asnake during 'Irreechaa', a thanksgiving ceremony of the Oromo people in Ethiopia. Fresh grass and flowers are soaked in lake water and splashed to express gratitude to 'Waaqa' (God) for blessings of fertility, health & prosperity