



# BENCHMARKING FOR HEALTHY STORES

PROJECT NEWSLETTER 8 –  
MAY 2025



**HI THERE!**

Presenting our 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores Project Newsletter - we've had a great collaborative final workshop on Larrakia Country in Darwin. Find out what else has happened below!

## PROJECT PROGRESS

### FINAL BENCHMARKING WORKSHOP



Our final Benchmarking for Healthy Stores workshop was held on Larrakia Country in Darwin on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. 47 delegates attended the workshop, including food retail industry, community leaders, health professionals, government policy makers and academics. It was a great day, with everyone coming together to discuss how to keep Benchmarking for Healthy Stores going, and making sure Benchmarking has Indigenous governance at the forefront into the future. We also had presentations from remote retail representatives: Anna Murison (Outback Stores), Laura Baddeley (ALPA), Craig Spicer (Yirrkala Community Store), and government representatives: Vicki Schultz (NT Government), Tom Dyer (NIAA). Keep an eye out for our Workshop report, we will be sending it out soon.

## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK POSTERS

Community Feedback posters have been sent out to all strategy stores at the beginning of the year. The set of six posters (sugar sales, healthy and unhealthy sales, fruit and vegetable sales, and pricing) were developed as a way for stores to share their Benchmarking results with the community. The information included in the posters was codesigned with our Benchmarking partners, to make sure stores have easily accessible information to feed back to community.

**If stores would like printed versions of these posters to display, please get in touch with the Benchmarking Project team.**

Here is a snapshot of some of the Community Feedback posters:



## RESEARCH DISSEMINATION & TRANSLATION

NIAA is developing a National Code of Practice for Remote Store Operations. This is to support remote stores that service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The purpose of the Code is to establish minimum standards to improve health outcomes and protect food security of communities and for the government to be responsive to, and meet the needs of, community. The Code is linked with the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Since late 2023, we have engaged with NIAA through numerous invited presentations, meetings, discussions and have provided them with written information, to inform them of the benchmarking study and our codesigned and evidence-informed policy actions for health-enabling stores and tools and processes for assessment and feedback of information to store directors and owners.

At the end of 2024, Julie Brimblecombe was invited to be on a NIAA-led sub working group for the development of the Code with other representatives including ALPA, AMSANT, Outback Stores, Mai Wiru and NACCHO. This provided direct opportunity for the evidence from the Benchmarking study and related studies (e.g., Healthy Stores 2020) to directly inform the Code health standards.

In April, recognising the value of the benchmarking evidence, tools and processes for supporting remote stores with best practice for health, NIAA invited Monash on behalf of the Benchmarking collaboration to prepare a funding proposal that would provide remote stores the opportunity to be a part of benchmarking to help with implementation of the Code. This is an exciting and important translational opportunity for the Benchmarking study to continue to support stores and remote communities in building health-enabling environments. We look forward to providing more information on this once funding agreements are in place.

## COMING UP...

### BENCHMARKING OUTCOMES ANALYSIS

The Benchmarking for Healthy Stores project outcomes analysis is underway. Dr Emma McMahon (Chief Investigator) is leading the outcomes analysis to see whether there is a difference between stores that received the Benchmarking model and those that didn't (control stores). The outcomes analysis will look at a change in the amount of sugar in food and drink purchased, healthy and unhealthy purchases and how much sodium (salt) is in the food and drinks purchased. Interviews with the Benchmarking partners are underway to understand when they would expect to see an effect from Benchmarking in their stores.

### PATHWAY TO POLICY

A/Prof Megan Ferguson and Dr Emma Tonkin are underway with the Pathway to Policy for Benchmarking work. This will help to understand how Benchmarking can be delivered with current resourcing in stores, and what is needed to support its uptake by stores in the NT, Qld, SA and WA. The team will be conducting interviews with policymakers and remote health service delivery representatives in the coming months.

### UPCOMING PROJECT DATES

Activity	Date	Location
<b>Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting</b>	June 26, 2025	Zoom
<b>Project feedback to participating stores and nutritionists</b>	Mid-year TBC	Email/Zoom
<b>Findings fed back to partners and stakeholders</b>		

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Thanks to our: Monash Project Team-** Prof Julie Brimblecombe (Project Lead), Ms Amanda Hill (Project Co-ordinator), Dr Meaghan Christian, Ms Emma van Burgel (Acting Project Co-ordinator) 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-** Prof Julie Brimblecombe (Monash University), Dr Emma McMahon (Menzies School of Health Research), Dr Leisa McCarthy (Menzies School of Health Research), A/Prof 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), Mr. Eddie Miles (Menzies School of Health Research), Prof Ross Bailie (University of Sydney), Prof Anna Peeters (Deakin University), Assoc Prof Gary Sacks (Deakin University).

## INTRODUCING...

### EMMA AINSWORTH – PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITIONIST, NT HEALTH



**Emma and her husband Justin canoeing in Nitmuluk Gorge in Katherine**

Emma has been working as a Public Health Nutritionist/ Dietitian in the Allied Health Service Big Rivers Region for the past 2 years. Emma is based in Katherine and along with working in the urban setting she travels out to NT Health communities within the region. The role is varied with dietary support provided to individuals as part, however, majority of the role is collaborating with stakeholders and community organisations to facilitate public health nutrition interventions, group nutrition education, staff upskilling, and providing support to different settings that provide food e.g. schools, early childhood education and care (ECEC), community groups, and remote stores. Prior to this Emma worked in Newcastle for NSW Health in a health promotion role and has worked in various community and private practice-based dietitian roles. Emma is passionate about population and public health nutrition having completed a postgraduate MPH with a focus on Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

**What's your hidden talent?** I don't know if I have any. In 2016 I completed my yoga teaching training in India so that is always a fun fact – not that I teach anymore.

**What's your career highlight?** Either publishing my first research paper as first author during my MPH or my first charter plane trip out to a remote community. It was surreal and not something I ever thought would be a part of my job! It is a privilege to travel out to and work with remote communities.

**What's your most memorable meal?** This is tricky, I am a big foodie. My partner took me on a surprise weekend to Mudgee a few years ago. We ate at this farm to table restaurant and winery, The Zin House, we had the degustation and there were so many veggies used in unexpected ways, chocolate to finish, and they sent us home with fresh tea from the garden. I also recently went to South Africa and visited a place called Babylonstoren which I had seen on 'Somebody Feed Phil', that was another exceptional farm to table experience - the bread, cheese, fresh and pickled veggies were all divine.

### STUART MILLS – DATA SCIENTIST, MONASH UNIVERSITY



Starting with a Bachelor's in Astrophysics from Monash, Stuart followed up with a Master of Data Science while looking for a career path. Stuart returned to Monash a few years later as a research fellow at the Monash Data Futures Institute, where they took great pride in finding ways to use "AI and data science for good". These experiences prepared Stuart for their current role as a Data Scientist with the Benchmarking project. When they are not working with a computer, Stuart will be traveling, playing golf, cricket, or soccer, or solving puzzles and playing board games, all offering different kinds of challenges from their usual day-to-day. Stuart is also especially passionate about cricket coaching, which has become a significant part of their life outside work.

**What's your hidden talent?** I spend a lot of time at the golf driving range, so I've picked up a knack for some trick shots and just generally having a bit more fun than just hitting the balls as far as I can!

**What's your career highlight?** While my day job has given me lots of highs, my proudest achievement actually comes from outside the office. For years, I've coached junior cricket, working with the same group of kids as they've grown up. There's something incredibly rewarding about watching them develop not just as athletes but as people, seeing them succeed on the field, make it through VCE, and head off to university. The relationships built and the impact on their lives beyond cricket is what makes all those practice sessions and early mornings worthwhile.

**What's your most memorable meal?** A meal I had in Papua New Guinea after walking the Kokoda Track and on a homestay was amazing. Having dinner within a community, eating food grown right there, all those different potatoes, bananas, rice, vegetables, and plenty of peanuts. It was incredibly satisfying after completing such a challenging walk, and being welcomed wholeheartedly into the cultural experience made it even more special.