

BENCHMARKING FOR HEALTHY STORES

Project Newsletter 1 – March 2022

WELCOME!

Welcome to the first Benchmarking for Healthy Stores Project Newsletter. Thank you for being a part of this collaborative project – we are very excited to be working with you all who bring such a wealth of expertise to this work.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Most of you have hopefully become more familiar with the project over recent months, but we have included a short summary here for anyone still getting their heads around the many moving parts!

In collaboration with our partner organisations, the remote retail sector and policy-makers, the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores project will co-design a benchmarking model to support continuous quality improvement and implementation of health promoting best-evidence into policy and practice in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stores.

We hope this research shows that the co-designed benchmarking model is feasible for remote stores and can improve the uptake of evidence-based store policy and practice to help increase customers' access to and purchase of healthy food and drinks. We also hope that it will result in policy commitment to a benchmarking program for healthy stores by the remote food retail sector, food retail organisations and government. Our aims are:

- 1) **CO-DESIGN:** To co-design the optimal benchmarking approach for continuous improvement of the healthiness of the food retail environment in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community stores.
- 2) **FEASIBILITY & EFFECTIVENESS:** To test the feasibility and effectiveness of the benchmarking model in increasing i) uptake of health-promoting evidence-based policy and practice, ii) customer healthy food purchases in remote community stores and iii) assess its value-for-money through an economic analysis.
- 3) **PATHWAY TO POLICY:** to determine the pathway to set the benchmarking program into policy, scale up into other states and territories and build an online benchmarking for healthy stores platform

The project is funded for 5 years from July 2021 until June 2026 through a grant from the Medical Research Futures Fund (MRFF) – please see below for our broad timeline:

Year 1 (Jul 2021-Jun 2022)	Year 2 (Jul 2022-Jun 2023)	Year 3 (Jul 2023-Jun 2024)	Year 4 (Jul 2024-Jun 2025)	Year 5 (Jul 2025-Jun 2026)
PHASE 1: Co-design of benchmarking model				
	PHASE 2: Partial Randomised Controlled Trial to test effectiveness of benchmarking model			
		PHASE 3: Assess feasibility, value-for-money and determine how to scale up benchmarking model		
				PHASE 4: Develop online benchmarking platform

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

We are delighted to be partnering with several key organisations involved in working with remote stores in the NT as part of this project. We would like to acknowledge:

- Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation
- Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation
- NT Health - Central Australia and Top End regions; and
- Outback Stores

This project can't happen without you and we thank you for your input.

PROJECT INVESTIGATORS

We also have an incredible diversity of knowledge and experience among the investigators on this project, and would like to acknowledge all for their contributions to date.

Chief Investigator	Primary Institution	Associate Investigator	Institution
Assoc Prof Julie Brimblecombe	Monash University	Ms. Khia De Silva	Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation
Dr Emma McMahon	Menzies School of Health Research	Ms. Simone Nalatu	Health and Wellbeing Queensland
Dr Leisa McCarthy	Menzies School of Health Research	Mr. Adam Barnes	Department of Health NT
Dr Megan Ferguson	The University of Queensland	Ms. Clare Brown	Apunipima Cape York Health Council
Prof Bronwyn Fredericks	The University of Queensland	Mr. Eddie Miles	Menzies School of Health Research
Ms. Nicole Turner	NSW Rural Doctors Network	Prof Ross Bailie	University of Sydney
Prof Amanda Lee	The University of Queensland	Prof Marjory Moodie	Deakin University
Prof Joanna Batstone	Monash University	Prof Anna Peeters	Deakin University
Assoc Prof Christina Pollard	Curtin University	Assoc Prof Gary Sacks	Deakin University
Prof Louise Maple-Brown	Menzies School of Health Research		

KEY DATES

2022 KEY PROJECT DATES

Activity	Date	Location
Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting	Thursday May 19 th , 2022	Zoom
Chief Investigators Meeting	Thursday May 26 th , 2022	Zoom
Benchmarking Co-Design Workshop 1	Tuesday June 14 th , 2022	Menzies School of Health Research, Charles Darwin University, Darwin
Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting	Thursday June 16 th , 2022	Zoom
Chief Investigators Meeting	Thursday June 30 th , 2022	Zoom
Partner Organisation / Associate Investigators Meeting	Thursday June 30 th , 2022	Zoom
Benchmarking Data Collection Training	Friday July 1 st , 2022	Zoom
Benchmarking Data Collection	July-August, 2022	Remote NT
Benchmarking Feedback / commence Action Planning	November-December, 2022	Remote NT

PROGRESS TO DATE

RECRUITMENT

For this study we are aiming to recruit 36-40 stores from across the NT, made up of 20 store-group managed stores and 16-20 independents. Inclusion and exclusion criteria have been defined as follows:

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store directors / store manager /area manager interested in nutrition initiatives • Food store servicing a predominantly Aboriginal community • Able to be approached during recruitment period • Store serviced by partner organisation Public Health Nutritionist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadhouse or club • Business reason precluding participation (eg. Community issues, financial difficulty)

Together with our partner organisations, we have identified 51 stores across the NT as eligible to participate in the project. Recruitment of stores is underway, and as at the end of March, we have 12 stores who have consented to participate in the project - this includes 10 from Top End and 2 from Central Australia. Partner organisations servicing stores in both regions are prioritising invitation of Central Australia stores where possible.

A big thank you to our partner organisations who have been very busy inviting stores to participate and helping get stores on board for the project.

BENCHMARKING TOOL DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICE

The Store Scout App will be used to assess health-promoting in-store practices against best practice. The app assesses Product (availability and range), Placement (visibility, accessibility, nearness to high-traffic areas, and location relative to other products), Price (discounts or deals), and Promotion (displays, advertising, or activity) on a wide range of healthy and unhealthy products to give an overall environment index score. Scores range from 0-100; with higher scores indicating more health-enabling practices.

Within the app, there are currently a greater number of measurement items related to healthy than unhealthy or less healthy products (156 versus 43, respectively), with practices discouraging purchases of unhealthy or less healthy products contributing only approximately 20% to the overall score. The Policy and Practice Task Group has been working hard to revise the scoring system for the Store Scout App so that each category and section score and overall Store Scout score provides a more valid assessment of a store's healthiness in consideration of both unhealthy and healthy practices, with the focus on the remote store environment. These changes will be implemented in the App prior to commencement of data collection for Benchmarking for Healthy Stores in July.

ENVIRONMENT SCAN

To assess environmental level factors outside of the control of store owners and managers which may impede or enable implementation of best-practice health-promoting policy and practice in remote stores, an Environmental Scan e-survey is being developed for store managers to complete.

The survey development is in early stages, with environmental factors being identified through document analysis currently. Our amazing research assistants, Emma van Burgel and Molly Fairweather, with valuable input from the Environment Scan Task Group have defined inclusion/exclusion criteria to apply to the Good Food Planning Tool (https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/resources/good_food_planning_tool/) to generate a codebook, which is now being applied to all submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Food Pricing and Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities and other relevant documents. All submissions have now been coded. Once this is complete, priority factors will be determined through the Task Group and the e-survey will then be drafted and tested.

INTRODUCING...

Each edition of this newsletter, we'd like you to get to know some people involved in the project. Many of you may have worked together previously, but there's many new collaborations. This time, we're introducing the project team!

PROJECT LEAD - JULIE BRIMBLECOMBE



Julie is an Associate Professor of Public Health Nutrition at Monash University. She is an internationally recognised expert in food systems research with Aboriginal communities in remote Australia, as well as conducting real-world population health interventions, population level dietary assessment and developing evidence-informed tools to appraise and modify food environments for improved health. She has worked for nearly 30 years in the South Pacific and remote Indigenous Australia, and her research aims to build the evidence base for policy to address social inequities in nutrition for remote Indigenous Australia.

What's your hidden talent? I don't know if it's a talent, but I'm learning the saxophone, and I'm a member of the Southern Area Wind Band. I took my 4th grade exam during lockdown and spent the whole weekend making a recording! (*worth it though because she got an A!*)

What's your career highlight? There are so many, but a memorable moment was driving out to Nyirripi for the first time and experiencing the beautiful expanse, landscapes and wildflowers of Central Australia. Another is working with stores to show how strategies promoting healthy foods and not promoting unhealthy foods can make a difference in remote stores, and having store directors wanting to put further strategies in place to support healthy diets in their communities.

What's your most memorable meal? I've had lots of them, I don't know, I just love food! All meals are an occasion, but one of the most memorable was having freshly caught mud crab, oysters and longbum cooked on the fire near a beach north of Galiwin'ku after hunting, and sleeping on the beach with the Yalu' women and a fire to keep the crocodiles away.

RESEARCH FELLOW - MEAGHAN CHRISTIAN

Meaghan is a Research Fellow who has been at Monash University for 2 years since moving back to Australia after spending over 10 years living and working in the UK. Her research has focused on addressing health inequities through improving the food environment. She has technical skills specific to evaluation of complex, novel public health nutrition interventions that have many components needing to be accounted for in evaluation of feasibility and effectiveness.

What's your career highlight? I was awarded Best Trial Paper for the International Journal of Nutrition Behaviour and Physical Activity in 2014, for the paper: *Evaluation of the impact of a school gardening intervention on children's fruit and vegetable intake: a randomised controlled trial.*

What's your hidden talent? Maybe not a talent, but I do enjoy gardening. I harvested over 60 cucumber from my veggie garden this summer, along with handfuls of strawberries and sweetcorn.

What's your most memorable meal? When I visited Kenya, I had the most amazing experience with beautiful food and stunning views of the Masai Mara wilderness.



RESEARCH FELLOW - AMANDA HILL



Amanda is a dietitian with over 12 years of experience in nutrition, including clinical practice, research, community health and public health nutrition. She has worked in Aboriginal health in the Northern Territory for over 6 years, as well as volunteering in community development in Tonga for a year. She has been working at Monash University as a Research Fellow since January, bringing strong cross-cultural experience, skills in community engagement and co-ordination of projects and teams.

What's your career highlight? Probably being a judge of the cooking entries at the Tongatapu Agricultural Show in 2016 which was a real treat! Also, being selected as a finalist in the Northern Territory Administrator's Medals for Excellence in Primary Health Care in 2021 - it felt really special to be acknowledged for the day-to-day efforts on the ground after working for several years in remote primary health care.

What's your hidden talent? Probably not-so-hidden from some who know me, but I am a keen trail runner. Currently on hiatus a bit post-baby, but I completed my first ultra-marathon, a 65km event on the Larapinta Trail near Alice Springs, in 2020, and would love to get back to running longer distances and exploring some new trails around Victoria.

What's your most memorable meal? This is a tough one! But I think the first time I visited México and tried fish tacos from a street stall in Ensenada in the Baja peninsula would be one. Having battered, fried fish and mayo in a tortilla was revolutionary, not to mention the amazing array of salsas! I took my partner back to that same street stall, which we both now love and we even went back to México for our honeymoon! Fish tacos are now a staple meal in our house.