



MONASH
University



BENCHMARKING FOR HEALTHY STORES

PROJECT NEWSLETTER 5 – MARCH 2024



HELLO AGAIN!

Welcome to the 5th edition of the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores Project Newsletter, and our first update for 2024. The year already seems to be flying by - you can find out more about what we've been up to below!

PROJECT PROGRESS

SUB-STUDY ON FACTORS INFLUENCING FOOD PRICE IN REMOTE STORES

Work has commenced on a sub-study to investigate factors influencing food price in remote stores through utilising data collected in 29 remote stores from the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores project:

- Food price data from the Healthy Diets ASAP tool
- Environmental determinant data from a purpose-designed Environment Scan survey
- Remote store locations and demographics from the Remote Community Store Directory

These data will be used to examine the relationship between environmental determinants and food price. Though there is much anecdotal evidence on food pricing determinants for remote community stores, there is currently limited empirical evidence to support this. This sub-study will contribute a deeper knowledge of the determinants of higher food prices in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to inform policy action. Thanks to the project partners who have given their time to support this sub-study through an advisory group.

COALITION FOR HEALTHY REMOTE STORES



The Coalition for Healthy Remote Stores formed in 2023 in response to a policy window opening, with the transition of remote stores licensing from the National Indigenous Australians Agency to the Northern Territory Government as part of the NT Food Security Program. This Coalition includes representatives from 15 Aboriginal Community-Controlled and non-government retail, health and academic organisations who are calling for action to support storeowner and retailer efforts to improve the healthiness of food retail stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. The

Coalition's [Joint Policy Statement](#) can be accessed online. Excitingly, by the end of 2023, the Coalition's 4 Key Asks were endorsed as standards and guidelines in an amended Food Act that enables the NT government to regulate remote community stores to "promote and enhance security of access to food, drink and grocery items for residents of remote Aboriginal communities". The Coalition continues to meet regularly and advocate for policy change to reduce health inequity and improve health outcomes to support the strong future of communities. For more information, please see the key contacts listed on the Policy Statement.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Please join us in offering a huge congratulations to our project lead, Julie Brimblecombe, who has recently been promoted to Professor! This is a very well-deserved recognition of Julie’s longstanding passion and hard work, as well as an acknowledgement of her outstanding contributions to the field public health nutrition, particularly around food systems and food retail in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

FOOD GOVERNANCE CONFERENCE

The Benchmarking team as well as several project investigators and partners enjoyed taking part in an incredible program at the Food Governance conference held on Gadigal Country at the University of Sydney in February.

Abstracts related to Benchmarking for Healthy Stores and the Coalition for Healthy Remote Stores were presented, including:

- **Emma van Burgel (Monash University)** – A little-known setting in the national food retail landscape: an open-access database of remote retail stores
- **Amanda Hill (Monash University)** – Affordability of healthy diets in Northern Territory remote communities and regional centres
- **Megan Ferguson (University of Queensland) and Nicole Turner (IAHA)** (Benchmarking Chief Investigators) – Influencing government policy for stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- **Laura Baddeley and Sarah Funston (ALPA)** (Benchmarking partners) – Aboriginal store owners push for stronger regulation to create healthier stores in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory



Emma presenting at the Food Governance Conference

It was great to share so much of the exciting work that is happening in remote stores, and of course to catch up with so many collaborators and network with local and international researchers, practitioners and activists.



Amanda, Megan, Nicole, Sarah and Laura presenting at the Food Governance Conference

ENVIRONMENT SCAN PUBLICATION

Our manuscript “*Development of a survey tool to assess the environmental determinants of health-enabling food retail practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of remote Australia*” was recently published in BMC Public Health, co-led by Emma van Burgel, Molly Fairweather and Julie Brimblecombe. [This paper](#) describes the development of the Environment Scan survey tool being used for the Benchmarking study, which could also be used more widely to describe the barriers and enablers of healthy remote store operations. We would like to acknowledge the team of co-authors: Amanda Hill, Meaghan Christian, Megan Ferguson, Amanda Lee, Sarah Funston, Bronwyn Fredericks, Emma McMahon, and Christina Pollard.

PARLIMENTARY INQUIRY INTO DIABETES

With permission from project partners and participants, new evidence from our Benchmarking study, including sales data, food price and environment scan survey data, was tabled by Professor Julie Brimblecombe at the public hearing in Darwin for the Parliament of Australia’s Inquiry into Diabetes. This evidence summary can be accessed from the [Inquiry’s website](#) filed as **Document 37** under ‘Additional Documents’.

REMOTE COMMUNITY STORE DIRECTORY



The [Remote Community Store Directory](#) is a recently published open-access database of remote food retail stores in Australia, developed in collaboration with Monash Business School and the Centre of Research Excellence in Food Retail Environments for Health (RE-FRESH). It provides a series of interactive maps to showcase the sector's diversity. With over one-third of stores owned by registered Indigenous Corporations, the Directory can be used as a vehicle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote communities and their allies to describe the remote retail context.

Remote food stores require unique logistics for supplying food and are crucial for food security in remote communities, yet there is a lack of data-driven information on the remote food supply in national statistics. We hope this directory can assist in ensuring the design of targeted, effective, and sustainable policy and strategy to enhance health and food equity for remote residents.

COMING UP...

PREVENTIVE HEALTH CONFERENCE

At the end of April, the Monash Benchmarking Team look forward to attending the [Preventive Health Conference](#) on Larrakia country in Darwin where we will be presenting some more Benchmarking for Healthy Stores work, as well as co-facilitating a workshop on engaging with remote food retailers to support improved health with many of our project partners. Julie Brimblecombe will also be co-presenting a keynote address with Joan Djamalaka Dhamarrandji in the plenary session 'From Policy and Practice: Mobilising Communities to promote Nutrition and Physical Activity'. We hope to see many of you there!

UPCOMING PROJECT DATES - 2024

Activity	Date	Location
Benchmarking Action Plan / Implementation period (S)	January – June 2024	Remote NT
Economic Analysis Usual Practice (C) & Implementation (S) Resource Surveys	March, May, July 2024	e-survey
Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting	April 11, 2024	Zoom
Benchmarking Co-Design Committee Meeting	June 6, 2024	Zoom
2024 Data Collection Training for Nutritionists	June 14, 2024	Zoom
Stakeholder Interviews (S)	July-August 2024	Remote NT/Zoom

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to our: Monash Research Team- 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- 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... Some more key players in the Benchmarking for Healthy Stores research collaborative!

ECONOMIC EVALUATION LEAD– ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JAITHRI ANANTHAPAVAN

Jaithri leads the Economics of Obesity team within Deakin Health Economics (DHE) and the Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition (GLOBE) at Deakin University and is leading the economic evaluation for the Benchmarking study. She is a health economist with over 15 years of experience in both consulting and academia. Jaithri's research interest is the economic evaluation of preventive health interventions and policies, economic modelling, priority setting and methods to better assist decision-makers use economic evidence in resource allocation decisions.

What's your hidden talent? Baking- my specialty is Sri Lankan cheese cake

What's your career highlight? The ACE-Obesity Policy study, where we evaluated the cost-effectiveness of 16 different obesity prevention interventions. This project was an incredible journey, working alongside an interdisciplinary team of researchers and students. What's truly gratifying is seeing the impact our work has had on national and international policies.

What's your most memorable meal? My most memorable meals are the ones shared with my extended family. Every year, my aunts, uncles, and cousins come together to prepare Sri Lankan Kool, a spicy seafood soup. These events are filled with family, fun, laughter and lots of delicious food!



Jaithri at Tokyo Tower with her family on a recent trip to Japan

POLICY LEAD – CHIEF INVESTIGATOR DR MEGAN FERGUSON



Megan near the top of Baldwin St in Dunedin, New Zealand – the steepest street in the world!

Megan is a Senior Lecturer in Public Health Nutrition at the School of Public Health, The University of Queensland. The research she partners on is focused on approaches to support local decision-makers to design effective policy interventions to improve nutrition and food security outcomes, through incorporating evidence and an understanding of the policy context. Megan's research in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community retail settings follows a public health and nutrition career working in policy and service provision in government, remote retail, and the international development sectors.

What's your hidden talent? Apparently, coordination, recently acquiring the position of under 10 girls' netball team manager.

What's your career highlight? There are so many I could share from the work we all do together in remote communities. One that always stays with me though, is with an incredible team of mostly local staff and community, laying the ground-work for the closure of feeding centres that were treating malnourished children in an internally displaced persons camp in South Darfur. Another amazing example of what local engagement and public health nutrition can achieve!

What's your most memorable meal? I love food, but when I think of memorable meals, it's the moments rather than the food... around a camp fire after collecting traditional food with people I have worked with in NT communities, around a very large shared platter with staff in South Darfur breaking the fast during Ramadan, or with family and friends on many treasured occasions at home.

ASSOCIATE INVESTIGATOR – KHIA DE SILVA

Khia is the Health and Nutrition Manager at The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA), following many years of experience as a public health nutritionist in the NT. ALPA is one of the largest Aboriginal Corporations in Australia, operating non-for-profit grocery stores in remote Australian communities for over 50 years. For over 5 years, Khia has led the ALPA Nutrition team in implementing the [ALPA Health and Nutrition Strategy](#) across 25 stores, as well as leading collaborations with research teams to explore new ways to create healthy retailing environments, and advocating to government and food businesses on solutions to improve food security for people living in remote Australia. [Healthy Stores 2020](#) was a notable study co-designed by ALPA, Monash University and other research institutions. Khia is currently taking 12 months parental leave with her 4-month-old, Raffy.

What's your hidden talent? In a previous life, I travelled around Australia playing tennis! Best way to spend my teen years. I don't move around on the court like I used to.

What's your career highlight? It was pretty special (and daunting) being asked to share the ALPA nutrition story at the International Congress on Obesity. I loved being able to show people from all over the world what the ALPA Board have achieved in the healthy retailing space.

What's your most memorable meal? This is really hard! It's hard not to mention the epic food tour I did in Istanbul. My friend Ellie and I ate our body weight in delicious Turkish food. We still rave on about those dishes.



Khia chasing waterfalls at Behana Gorge in far north Queensland