Australian Government

**National Indigenous
Australians Agency**

National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

2025 – 2035

Making Tracks for Health

This artwork by Jordan Lovegrove, Ngarrindjeri, of Dreamtime Creative, represents the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.

The central meeting place is the coming together of the Australian Government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health peak organisations, and state and territory governments working together to manage food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The surrounding meeting places represent the seven pillars of food security, which reflect advice from, and experience of, remote community members. These are: Country and Culture; Health and Nutrition; Housing Infrastructure and Environmental Health; Families and Community; Supply Chain; Remote Retail; and Healthy Economies. (See page 24 for pillar descriptions.)

The background of the artwork depicts the Country and landscapes, both land and water. The smaller meeting places are the community stores and the tracks show the journey to get food to communities.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to their lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and Elders past and present.

We would like to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who contributed to the development of this Strategy and recognise the continued leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in seeking equity in health and wellbeing for their people.

All Australian governments are committed to the implementation of Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (the Strategy) is the result of Commonwealth, state and territory governments working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Sector, through shared decision-making, to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap outcomes.

While this Strategy is focused on addressing food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we recognise that food insecurity is experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across urban, regional and remote areas of Australia at disproportionately higher rates than non-Indigenous Australians.

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Minister's Foreword

Australia is one of the most food secure nations in the world, yet families like mine who live in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience food insecurity at alarming rates.

Food insecurity is a deeply concerning issue, which contributes to poorer health outcomes for First Nations people in remote communities. People who face food insecurity are often more reliant on cheaper convenience foods, which can be nutrient poor and calorie dense. This is because there is limited storage and cooking facilities, as well as less income to support long term meal planning and purchases. Too much of these foods contributes to increased risk of obesity and malnutrition, low birth weight, ill health in infancy and childhood, chronic disease and poor mental health.

The National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (the Strategy) has been developed in close partnership between the Commonwealth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations, and state and territory governments.
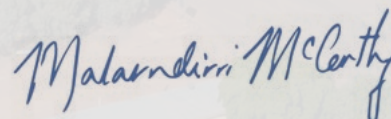
The Strategy identifies seven pillars of food security, which dismantle barriers to food security and provide a road map to strong and healthy life outcomes for First Nations people in remote communities, now and into the future.

The Strategy reflects what First Nations people in remote communities said is needed to improve food security. I appreciate the time and efforts of community members who participated in these discussions. I also acknowledge the contribution from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations, academics, state and territory government agencies, and the public.

Improving food security for First Nations people in remote communities will improve health outcomes and contribute to the first target of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives.

Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy

Minister for Indigenous Australians'

NACCHO Foreword

Along with secure and appropriate housing, food security is a key determinant of health. For many people in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the ability to buy, store and cook healthy, nutritious food is limited, sometimes impossible. Over recent years, and despite various efforts, we have seen food insecurity become an ever more critical concern, with severe health implications.

The development of the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities reflects the need for more sustained and coordinated effort and has been shaped by the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Consultations with remote communities revealed a pressing need for sustainable, community-led solutions to food insecurity, and emphasised the importance of local knowledge and cultural practices in addressing this critical issue. We are grateful to all community members who participated in this vital process – your contributions are the foundation upon which this strategy is built.
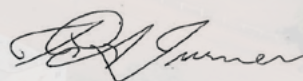
We know that when our people have agency and control to lead their own responses, we get better outcomes. This Strategy highlights the need for tailored solutions that reflect the specific needs and strengths of each community, and which build on existing systems and infrastructure. However, this will not be enough on its own to ensure meaningful and sustainable change to food security for remote communities. Governments and industry must also work in partnership with the community controlled sector, and with communities themselves, to deliver that change.

Only through collaborative effort on issues such as this can we hope to achieve the targets outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

We are pleased that the Strategy reflects a collective commitment to fostering resilience, improving health outcomes, and ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can thrive through enhanced food security. Together, we must work towards a future where food security is not just a goal, but a reality for all remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Patricia Turner, CEO

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Executive Summary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have sustained vast and varied food systems that maintained collective health and wellbeing for tens of thousands of years. The disruption of traditional ways of gathering and preparing food has had a significant impact on food security and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many remote communities now experience food insecurity at a much higher rate than Australians as a whole.

Food insecurity has significant impacts on rates of chronic disease and other measures of health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities. Food insecurity also has flow-on effects for workforce and educational participation, economic opportunities and mental health.

The National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (the Strategy) is a result of a partnership between the Commonwealth Government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health peak organisations, and state and territory governments.

A governing body will be established to oversee implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy. This body will comprise Commonwealth and jurisdictional government representatives, as well as representatives from relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). The first task of the governing body will be to develop an action plan to support the seven pillars of the Strategy.

Throughout 2024, input was sought from remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through:

21

face-to-face community consultations in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia, with **378 participants**

10

face-to-face regional forums, with **128 participants**

44

online submissions

3

online public consultations, with **27 participants**

The Strategy identifies seven pillars of food security which reflect advice from, and experience of, these remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Country and Culture
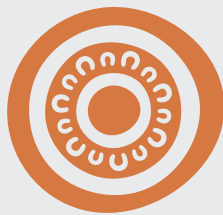
Increase on-Country activities and knowledge sharing

- Land and water management activities improve access to traditional foods.

- Knowledge-sharing for on-Country food practices is recognised and supported.

- Access knowledge and resources for traditional and culturally significant foods.

Health and Nutrition

Equitable access to nutrition services and knowledge to improve health and wellbeing

- Nutrition related health workforce that includes local community members.

- Dietary health care supports people with or at risk of nutrition-related conditions.

- Preventative approaches develop the knowledge and skills for food security.

- Health services have resources to engage with community services.

Housing, Infrastructure, and Environmental Health

Remote housing and infrastructure are adequate and culturally appropriate

- Remote housing is in line with food security and health needs.

- Environmental health workforce, that prioritises local community members.

- Remote housing includes equipment and furnishings for food security.

- Access to affordable, continuous electricity for food security.

- Affordable, reliable access to potable and palatable water.

Families and Communities	**Remote Retail**	**Supply Chains**	**Healthy Economies**
Services and facilities provide culturally appropriate nutritious food	Remote stores and other food outlets are responsive to, and meet the needs of community	Supply chains are efficient and resilient and minimise the impact of remoteness	Remote communities purchasing power, job and economic opportunities are the same as non-remote
• Support to access and grow food locally and access suitable cooking facilities.	• The reliable provision of quality, affordable, nutritious food and other essentials.	• Not disadvantaged by long, complex transport routes and higher freight costs.	• Strong local economies support equitable food security.
• Service providers knowledge and skills meet nutrition, medical and cultural needs.	• Food outlets encourage healthy and discourage unhealthy purchases.	• Supply chains provide year-round, uninterrupted access to food and essentials.	• People in remote communities have the income to support their food security.
• Support implementation of locally designed transport solutions for food security.	• Genuine decision-making authority of their remote food outlets.	• Actively involved in decisions related to the supply of food and essentials in their community.	• Employment and ownership opportunities prioritised in remote food sector.
• Food relief is community-led, appropriate and easily accessible when needed.	• Strong local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment.		• People build and develop local food enterprises that contribute to food security.
	• Residents without a permanent store have access to alternative food retail services.		
	• Support to achieve high quality, best practice through continuous improvement.		

Introduction

For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sustained vast and varied food systems, from tropical coastal fishing to large grasslands management and hunting. These food systems, underpinned by a deep understanding of land, waterways, seasons and food sources remain central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Through their connection to Country, traditional food practices and knowledge supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain collective health and wellbeing.

Across Australia, 4% of households experience food insecurity. This rate is higher in remote areas of Australia, with 7% of people regularly experiencing food insecurity. However, 51% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in remote areas of Australia experience food insecurity.[1]

Aboriginal people in remote communities have defined food security as:

"...when the food of our ancestors is protected and always there for us and our children. It is when we can easily access and afford the right non-traditional food for collective health and active life. When we are food secure, we can provide, share and fulfil our responsibilities, we can choose good food knowing how to make choices and how to prepare and use it."[2]

The ongoing disruption of traditional food systems is a root cause of food insecurity for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In remote and very remote areas of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to experience a loss of access to land and waterways, and limited access to appropriate housing, power and potable water. This is compounded by poor quality infrastructure, such as roads and barge landings that can disrupt supply chains, further limiting access to grocery stores, fresh food markets and traditional foods.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities described the level of food insecurity as a "life and death situation". In remote areas, employment opportunities are often limited and food is more expensive, requiring a high proportion of household income. This means families – even those in paid employment – may find themselves in 'survival mode' when unexpected expenses disrupt already tight budgets.[3]

The 2018–19 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) found that 31% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in remote areas had, at some point in the year, run out of food and could not afford to buy more. This figure increased to 43% for very remote areas. Additionally, 52% of very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households had run out of money for basic living necessities at some point during the year.[4]

In recent decades, the ACCO sector has developed and implemented a range of initiatives to address food insecurity experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These include the establishment of store management companies to improve access to and availability of healthy foods; public health nutrition programs to build skills and knowledge; and supports for communities to grow and sustain traditional food practices. ACCO store management companies have since become one of the largest employers of Aboriginal people in remote communities.

This has provided important opportunities for families and households to achieve greater financial agency and capacity to make healthy choices.[5] Through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) sector, the Aboriginal health workforce has been critical in delivering programs including child and family health programs.[6] These programs have been important in supporting traditional breastfeeding practices and the introduction of solid foods, to reduce the risk of nutrition-related child health conditions. However, too often the efforts of the ACCO sector have been under-resourced due to inconsistent funding.

In 2020, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs (HORSCIA) established the Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities. A key recommendation from the Inquiry was that 'the Australian Government, in partnership with the States and Territories and First Nations people, develop a strategy for food security and nutrition for remote First Nations communities'.

As a result, the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities (the Strategy) has been developed. The goal of the Strategy is to achieve equitable food security for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with a focus on addressing social determinants of health.

Through coordinated action across jurisdictions and levels of government, the Strategy will work to overcome systemic barriers to food security and ensure ongoing equitable access to food and other essential items for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities.

The Strategy has been developed in partnership with the ACCHO sector and states and territory governments and incorporates feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas experiencing food insecurity.

What is food security?

Food security is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as, 'when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'.[7]

For food security to be realised, six dimensions must be fulfilled:[8]

- Agency
- Physical availability of food
- Economic and physical access to food
- Food utilisation
- Stability
- Sustainability.

Why is food security so important?

Food security is essential to a person's health and wellbeing. Experiencing food insecurity can contribute to the development of various health conditions, including malnutrition and diabetes. Food insecurity can also have other flow-on impacts for educational attainment, work participation, economic opportunities and mental health.

Food insecurity is driven by a range of factors, such as limited income to support meal planning and food purchases; poor access to safe storage and cooking facilities; and limited transport options to access stores. Consequently, people who face food insecurity are often more reliant on cheaper convenience foods, which are often nutrient-poor and higher in calories. Over-reliance on these foods can contribute to increased risk of low birth weight, ill-health in infancy and childhood, obesity and malnutrition, higher rates of nutrition-related chronic diseases, poor mental health and increased mortality. These nutrition-related conditions are more prevalent in remote and very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities than in the general Australian population.[9]

Figure 1: Food insecurity impacts a variety of health outcomes and is a key contributor to the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people.[10,]

23.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in remote areas have diabetes/high sugar levels.

Prevalence of Youth type 2 diabetes in Northern Australia 6.7 per 1000.

26.3% of children under 14 in remote areas reported teeth or gum problems.

Life expectancy in remote and very remote areas is 12.4 years less than for non-Indigenous Australians.

Rates of kidney failure are up to 20 times higher than for non-Indigenous people.

13% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies in remote areas born with low birthweight.

14% of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory reported as stunted.

Food Security Enablers and Barriers

More than 30% of people living in remote and very remote areas of Australia identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.[11] Remoteness brings particular challenges for food security, such as distance, the quality of transport infrastructure, accessibility of stores and food markets, timeliness of food supply systems and responsiveness of support services. Improvements across the supply chain, coupled with community-led initiatives, such as environmental health programs, on-Country learning programs and community-owned infrastructure, are key enablers to improving food security.

Figure 2: Examples of enablers and barriers of remote food security

Traditional foods	Housing and storage	Price and affordability	Supply systems
ENABLERS			
Strong culture and knowledge continues to support traditional food practices.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental health programs have been shown to increase access to housing maintenance services and education leading to improved housing quality and health outcomes.	The establishment of community-led store groups has shown to lower food prices, improve food quality and increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Community-led transport solutions have been established to provide a more direct link to suppliers improving access to quality food and increasing food shelf life.
BARRIERS			
Restricted access to land and water ways, invasion of feral animals and barriers to resources needed to engage in hunting and gathering practices have reduced the ability of communities to improve food security through traditional food practices.	Poorly designed, built and maintained housing and storage facilities for both stores and households means the ability to keep vermin out and prevent food spoilage is difficult.	Low household income and lack of employment opportunities place considerable stress on households to have enough income to afford healthy foods and maintain power and water supply.	Long fragile supply chains, poor quality transport infrastructure and utilities repair and maintenance, drive up the cost of food supply and impact on the quality and shelf life of food.

Kowanyama cut off for six months

The 2023–24 wet season saw Kowanyama cut off from essential deliveries by road for 25 weeks. This is just one example of remote communities regularly experiencing severe and extended seasonal disruptions to their food supply that are not experienced in urban or regional parts of Australia.

Source: Community Enterprise Queensland, CEQ ensures wet season food supply to remote Cape York communities, CEQ News June 26 2024.

Closing the Gap

In 2020, all governments in Australia committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) which seeks, "...to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians."[12]

The National Agreement includes four priority reforms that detail the structural changes needed to achieve meaningful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the long term.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap – The Four Priority Reforms

Priority Reform One Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.
Priority Reform Two Building the Community-Controlled Sector	Building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors. There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.
Priority Reform Three Transforming Government Organisations	Improve mainstream institutions: Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.
Priority Reform Four Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.

This Strategy's principles are aligned with the Four Priority Reforms and aim to contribute to four of the National Agreement's socio-economic outcomes. Food security is critical to the achievement of these four outcomes, and contributes indirectly toward several others, including education, employment and justice outcomes. Progress toward other outcomes listed below, such as housing and connection to culture, are essential to the realisation of food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Figure 3: The Strategy will contribute to four National socio-economic targets

Outcome Area 1

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives

Outcome Area 2

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong

Outcome Area 4

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years

Outcome Area 9

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and needs

Outcome Area 14

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing

Outcome Area 15

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters

Strategy Context

Previous strategies and reviews

Food security in remote communities has been of concern to all levels of government (Commonwealth, state and territory and local), as well as the community-controlled sector for many years. There have been a range of government-led strategies and programs designed to improve food security outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (refer Figure 4).

Over this time, ACCOs have also been working to address food security through their advocacy, research and primary health care services, as well as the ownership and management of remote stores. Despite these efforts of governments and the ACCO sector, progress has been slow and in some areas worsened, and food security remains a serious issue.
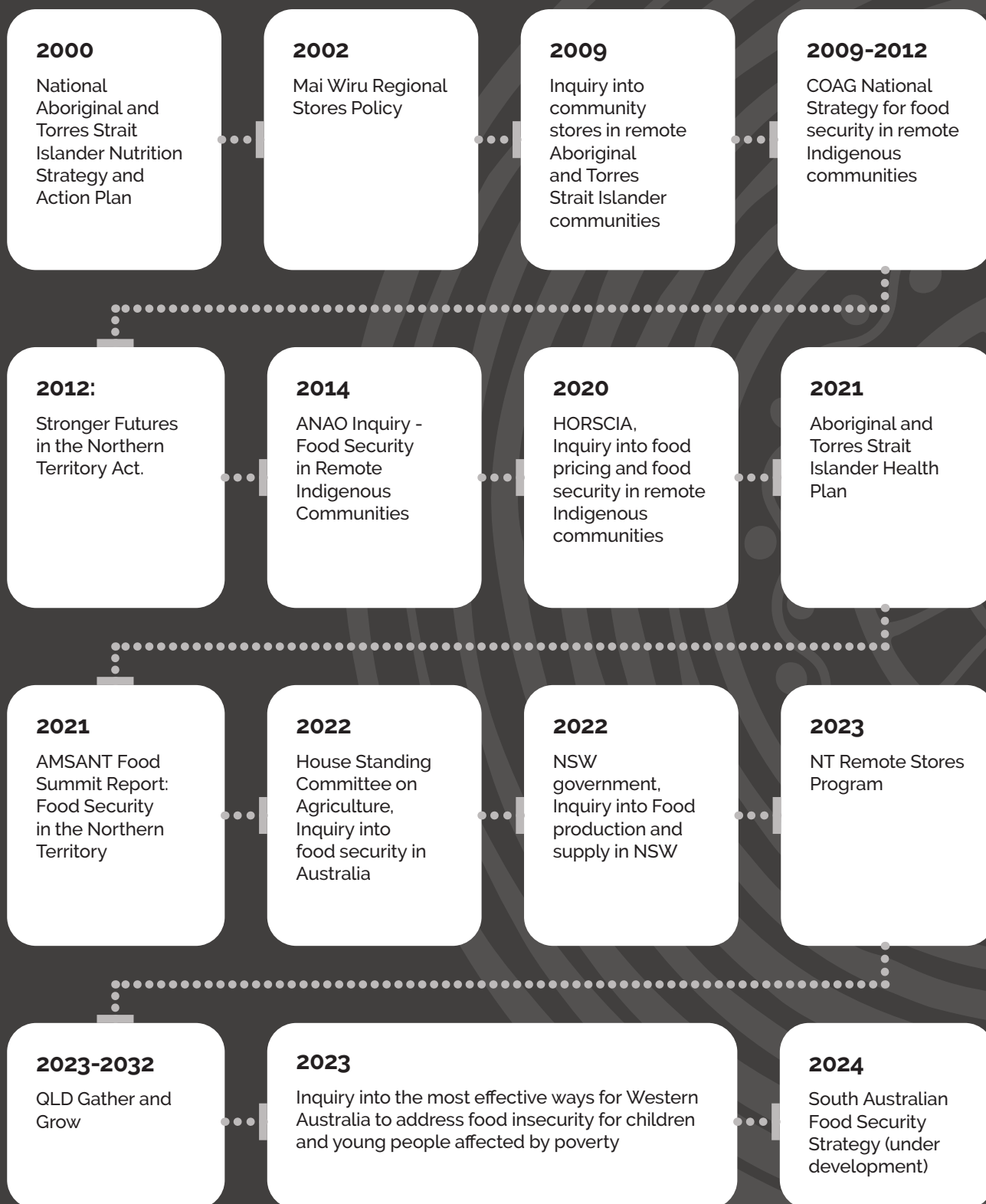
The 2020 HORSCIA inquiry noted that three federal reviews on remote food security had been conducted over the last 20 years. While there have been some successes during this time, such as the Northern Territory store licensing scheme, repeated recommendations from Australian Government inquiries and reviews have identified the need for: [13]

• Stronger national leadership

• Effective cross-government cooperation

• Increased involvement from communities, and

• Increased involvement from the ACCO sector.

The Strategy looks to address the theme of those recommendations through a strong partnership between all levels of government, the community-controlled sector, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It further identifies the need for secure funding, a sustained focus on food security governance and strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.

Closing the Gap continued

*Figure 4: Outline of relevant strategies and reviews over the past 24 years**

2000

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan

2002

Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy

2009

Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

2009-2012

COAG National Strategy for food security in remote Indigenous communities

2012:

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act.

2014

ANAO Inquiry - Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities

2020

HORSCIA, Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities

2021

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan

2021

AMSANT Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory

2022

House Standing Committee on Agriculture, Inquiry into food security in Australia

2022

NSW government, Inquiry into Food production and supply in NSW

2023

NT Remote Stores Program

2023-2032

QLD Gather and Grow

2023

Inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty

2024

South Australian Food Security Strategy (under development)

ALPA remote store management group have an ongoing Health and Nutrition policy. This policy was developed in the 1980s to support the availability and promotion of healthy foods with ALPA remote stores. More information available in Appendix A.

Strategy Development

Governance and oversight

The Strategy was developed using a partnership approach with the Commonwealth Government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health peak organisations, and state and territory governments. The Project Reference Group included representatives from the Commonwealth Government, ACCHO peak bodies and state governments across New South Wales (NSW), Queensland (Qld), Western Australia (WA), Northern Territory (NT) and South Australia (SA), as well as community representatives from NT, SA and Qld. The group met regularly to provide oversight and direction for the development of the Strategy.

Project Reference Group and Drafting Group Members at Strategy Partners Workshop in Adelaide, September 2024

Discussion Paper

In the early stages of the Strategy, a literature review was conducted by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) to ensure previous consultations, research and inquiries were taken into account. *A Discussion Paper* was then developed from the literature review and made available online for public feedback.

Consultation Overview

In July 2024, Yamagigu Consulting (yamagigu) was engaged to conduct national consultations to inform the Strategy. A qualitative research methodology utilising an open or 'exploratory' approach was taken, with consultation materials being developed using the Discussion Paper. Consultation activities included:

- Face-to-face community consultations in 21 remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia, with 378 participants,

- Face-to-face regional forums held in 10 locations around Australia, with 128 participants,

- Written submissions, with 44 received, and

- Online public consultations, with 27 participants.

The consultation findings were presented to the Strategy Partners and formed the *Consultation Report, National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Communities.*[14] All data, including notes from in-person and virtual consultations, and online submissions, were analysed using thematic analysis, and themes for each jurisdiction were summarised. This analysis revealed both similarities and some important differences in the experiences of food security across locations and jurisdictions.

The consultation report highlighted very high levels of food insecurity and communities' wishes for agency and control over addressing this pressing issue. Topics highlighted in the Discussion Paper aligned with the seven pillars of the Strategy (Country and Culture; Health and Nutrition; Housing, Infrastructure and Environmental Health; Families and Communities; Remote Retail; Supply Chains; Healthy Economies). Other recommendations included water management and palatability, education as an integral focus and a need for flexible funding. The report made recommendations relating to priority actions set out in the Discussion Paper; added actions identified through gap analysis; and proposed funding options and duration of the Strategy.

What Community said

Key themes across the consultation included:

Severity of food insecurity

Food insecurity was highlighted in all jurisdictions:

- Representatives in the Northern Territory described the current situation as "starvation" in some cases.

- Participants in South Australia talked about a "life and death situation".

- Across communities, low incomes and the high cost of food were the major drivers of food insecurity.

Lack of action and involvement of communities

Community members expressed frustration at over-consultation, limited feedback on the resulting actions from those consultations and lack of tangible improvements on the ground despite multiple government reviews.

Self-determination and shared decision-making

Communities repeatedly expressed that imposed solutions would not work – Communities already have the knowledge to direct what needs to happen. Participants highlighted the importance of leveraging community strengths to develop solutions, as they already take responsibility to look after each other despite limited resources.

Solutions raised in consultations included:

- A strong governance mechanism that aligns with the Four Priority Reforms of the National Agreement and is inclusive of community-controlled organisations and community voices.

- Long-term funding – it was suggested that the commitment needs to be extended beyond 10 years.

- Flexible funding – there was clear support for flexible funding so communities could direct their own solutions.

- An action plan with clearly delineated responsibilities, timeframes and milestones.

- A robust monitoring and evaluation framework that includes Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles, and provides feedback to communities that could be used to further develop and improve community-led action.

- Improved government coordination, transparency and accountability.

Strategy Finalisation

The Strategy was developed through synthesis of the consultation report, the Discussion Paper and the literature review. The development process included a series of workshops with the governance group to ensure the Strategy represented the collective views of Commonwealth, state and territory governments, ACCHO peaks and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives.

Strategy Framework

Vision

It is the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Country and in remote communities to be healthy and food secure.

Food Security Domains

Agency

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities participate on their own terms and make meaningful decisions about food systems.

Availability

Sufficient quantities and varieties of food and essentials appropriate for cultural and nutritional needs are available in remote communities.

Access

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities have the means to acquire quality food and essentials appropriate for cultural and nutritional needs.

Underpinning Principles

Equity

Working towards achieving equal food security for all, while recognising community needs and aspirations vary, consistent with Priority Reform Three.

Self-determination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their organisations are active decision-makers and governance participants, including through formal partnerships, consistent with Priority Reform One and Two.

Prioritise Health

Improvements to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities is the primary objective of all Strategy actions.

Systems Based

Enables long-term, holistic and equitable structural reform to address remote food security, consistent with Priority Reform Three.

National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

Goal

Achieve equitable food security for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a focus on addressing social determinants of health.

Stability

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities always have access to quality nutrition, without interruption.

Utilisation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities can safely store, prepare and consume foods that support long, healthy lives.

Sustainability

Food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is long-term, measurable, and sustained by robust and adaptable systems.

Partnership

Success requires strong partnerships and shared effort between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their organisations, governments, and other stakeholders, consistent with Priority Reform One.

Measurable

Monitoring and evaluation data supports continuous improvement and self-determination, consistent with Priority Reform Four.

Adaptive

Embedded ability to adapt to the needs of local communities and be responsive over the life of the Strategy.

Pillars of the Strategy

Implementation of the Strategy will occur across seven pillars. The implementation approach will be informed by the Strategy framework. Together, these pillars provide a holistic approach to addressing food insecurity at a systems level by addressing social determinants of health. Successful implementation of the Strategy will contribute to progress against the Four Priority Reforms of the National Agreement and its socio-economic targets by taking a partnership approach; growing and supporting the ACCO sector; and building a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.

Country and Culture

Goal	1.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are supported to increase participation in on-Country activities and knowledge sharing related to food security.
Intended outcomes	1.1	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and water management activities improve community access to traditional foods and reduce threats due to climate change.
	1.2	The value of intergenerational knowledge-sharing to increase and maintain on-Country food practices is recognised and supported.
	1.3	Remote residents have access to the knowledge and resources needed to access traditional and culturally significant foods.

Health and Nutrition

Goal	2.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities have equitable access to nutrition services and the knowledge needed to support improved health and wellbeing.
Intended outcomes	2.1	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities are supported by a culturally responsive nutrition, dietetic and food security health workforce, which includes local community members.
	2.2	Dietary health care in remote communities supports people with established, and at risk of, nutrition related conditions.
	2.3	Preventative approaches are designed by, and with, remote communities to develop the knowledge and skills required to access, prepare, and consume nutritious, culturally appropriate foods.
	2.4	Remote health services have the resources to engage with community services, such as stores and schools, to improve nutrition outcomes.

Housing, Infrastructure, and Environmental Health

Goal	3. Remote housing and infrastructure are adequate and culturally appropriate to meet the food security needs of community residents in remote areas.

Intended outcomes	
3.1	Remote housing is appropriately designed, built, renovated and repaired in line with remote community food security and health needs.
3.2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities are supported by a culturally responsive environmental health workforce that prioritises local community members.
3.3	Remote housing includes fit-for-purpose equipment and furnishings to safely store, prepare and consume nutritious food.
3.4	Remote households have access to affordable, continuous electricity to prepare food and store perishables without risk of spoilage.
3.5	Remote households have affordable, reliable access to potable and palatable water for hygienic food preparation and consumption.

Families and Communities

Goal	4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are supported by services and facilities that provide access to culturally appropriate and nutritious food.

Intended outcomes	
4.1	Remote families and communities are supported to access and grow food locally and have access to suitable cooking facilities.
4.2	Service providers have the knowledge and skills required to meet the nutrition, medical and cultural needs of individuals and families.
4.3	Remote communities and homelands are supported to implement locally designed transport solutions that improve food security.
4.4	Food relief is community-led, appropriate and easily accessible to remote community residents when needed.

Pillars of the Strategy continued

Remote Retail

| Goal | 5. **Remote stores and other food outlets are responsive to, and meet the needs of, community.** |

Intended outcomes

5.1 The needs of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are met through the reliable provision of quality, affordable, nutritious food and other essentials.

5.2 Remote store and other food outlet environments encourage healthy purchases and discourage unhealthy purchases.

5.3 Remote communities have genuine decision-making authority to determine ownership, governance and management practices of their remote food outlets.

5.4 Remote food providers have strong local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment across the remote store environment.

5.5 Remote residents in locations without a permanent store have access to alternative food retail services.

5.6 Remote stores and other food outlets are supported to achieve high quality, best practice operations and governance through continuous improvement.

Supply Chains

| Goal | 6. **Remote supply chains are efficient and resilient, and minimise the impact of remoteness on the availability, cost and quality of products in remote stores.** |

Intended outcomes

6.1 The food security needs of remote community residents are not disadvantaged by long, complex transport routes and higher freight costs.

6.2 Remote supply chains are effective, efficient, flexible and provide communities with year-round, uninterrupted access to food and essentials.

6.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are actively involved in decisions related to the supply of food and essentials in their community.

Healthy Economies

Goal	7.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities have the same purchasing power, job and economic opportunities for food security as non-remote communities.

Intended outcomes	7.1	Strong local economies support equitable access to nutritious food and essential groceries in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
	7.2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities have the income to support their food security.
	7.3	Employment and ownership opportunities for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are prioritised across the remote food sector.
	7.4	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities can build and develop sustainable local food enterprises that contribute to the food security needs of their community.

Country and Culture

Goal

1 **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are supported to increase participation in on-Country activities and knowledge sharing related to food security.**

Intended outcomes

1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and water management activities improve community access to traditional food and reduce threats due to climate change.

1.2 The value of intergenerational knowledge-sharing to increase and maintain on-Country food practices is recognised and supported.

1.3 Remote residents have access to the knowledge and resources needed to access traditional and culturally significant foods.

Context

Across all jurisdictions, Country and culture is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's physical health and the social, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of the whole community and the environment.[15]

Australia's unique and diverse landscape is home to over 6,500 traditional food varieties. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems have helped guide communities on what to harvest, hunt, and conserve for generations. Caring for Country plays a vital role in food security by supporting healthy, diverse environments, rehabilitation and protection of food sources against the impacts of invasive species and climate change, and improve health through access to culturally appropriate, nutritious food.

Traditional foods have long been identified as critical food sources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and have been shown to be protective against, and improve, chronic disease health and wellbeing outcomes.[16] However, over decades, the proportion of traditional foods in people's diets has significantly reduced.[17]

Restricted access to traditional foods and limited varieties of healthy food in remote stores have negatively impacted the dietary habits and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities.[18] While access to land is supported under the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)* and other government policies, this is not always the experience of people in remote communities. As of 2024, the Indigenous estate covered 536 million hectares (70% of Australia).[19] Targets in the National Agreement aim to increase this by 2030, which will help support the goal of this pillar.[20]

There is growing recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental leadership benefits all Australians.[21] By integrating traditional knowledge and western science, "Both Ways" leadership enhances the care of land, sea, freshwater, and culture, as well as strengthening biodiversity, climate resilience, and carbon neutral industries.
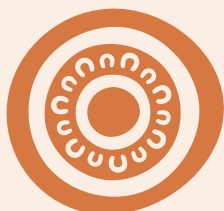
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ranger programs can play a major role in food security through revegetating, cultivating, and protecting native plant and animal species; collecting, and distributing bush food to Elders and other community members; and passing traditional knowledge onto future generations.[22] In 2024, there were 127 Indigenous Land and Sea Management Programs (Ranger Groups) across Australia including Commonwealth, state and territory programs.

There is significant overlap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned, managed or co-managed land, and land subject to other special rights. The use of, and access to, these lands could be an important vehicle to improve access to traditional food and develop employment opportunities. These approaches have been used in some communities as a means of building greater food security through increased access to high quality protein sources and employment opportunities for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[23]

The traditional foods sector offers an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve their health and create viable financial opportunities and support on-Country activities that promote social, cultural, and economic sustainability. Such opportunities could expand beyond food security to include education, employment and business opportunities. On-Country food activities, and businesses, are most successful when locally-led and developed in partnership with communities.[24] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research and policy development can also inform on-Country food production and harvesting enterprises.

What Community said

Through the consultations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members indicated that traditional food practices are important to ensure culture stays strong for the health and wellbeing of the whole community, including young people.

•• •

"Cultural way. Crabbing with kids while teaching language. Don't have fridge so have to cook food at the river. This feeds the community."

•• •

It was evident that on-Country food activities also make a direct contribution to food security, and in some cases, are essential for survival. Consultation participants emphasised the importance of integrating cultural practices, such as traditional harvesting of bush foods, medicine, and hunting into the food system.

Community members made it clear that traditional bush foods, hunting practices and cultural knowledge need to be recognised and maintained. Programs supporting these practices can foster self-reliance and preserve cultural heritage. Through the transfer of traditional knowledge from Elders to younger generations, such programs can help strengthen identity, culture, wellbeing and empower communities. For these to work, consultation participants highlighted the importance of government support for access to land and water.

Community-led development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems can enhance financial independence by creating jobs, supporting skill development, and boosting local economies. Investments in land and water resources, training, and technical assistance are needed to support on-Country food projects. Initiatives like school bush classes and teaching traditional food gathering and preparation, were highlighted as successful examples of engaging young people and addressing food scarcity.

"Hunting is important for both Elders and kids."

Communities noted that they increasingly depend on traditional hunting to survive, due to the high levels of poverty and food insecurity they are experiencing. However, barriers such as hunting restrictions, licensing issues, high fuel costs, seasonal factors, lack of storage facilities, and interference by feral animals significantly impact this as a food source.

"You've taken away our culture... how are you going to fix it?"

The consultation participants suggested options to overcome hunting restrictions, and seasonal and environmental factors. They emphasised that overcoming these restrictions should not come at the expense of protecting intellectual property of traditional knowledge. This was seen as critical to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people benefit from their heritage and gain from their relationship with land, sea and water ways, and to prevent others from exploiting it.

The successes of previous community projects were noted throughout the consultations, with suggestions including:

- The development of a hunting strategy and guidance around rights and access to traditional resources.

- The financial recognition of traditional knowledge-sharing practices.

- Ongoing government funding for traditional food collection and community-led industries.

- Development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce that integrates traditional food knowledge into health education. (see Health Pillar)

Case Study – Caring for Country supports food security outcomes

The Indigenous Rangers Program, funded by the Commonwealth Government, assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to manage Country and delivers a range of environmental, cultural, social, and economic development outcomes.

The program supports genuine partnerships to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to manage Country in accordance with Traditional Owners' objectives, using traditional knowledge and cultural practices, combined with western science. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are empowered to incorporate traditional knowledge of food systems, and connection to Country and culture when engaging with food security planning.

Cultural and environmental activities such as burning, weed management, feral animal control and traditional knowledge transfer are vital to maintaining and accessing bush foods. Initiatives with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are approached in a localised, and strengths-based manner.

The scope of the program enables participants to carry out activities related to food security if they align with Traditional Owners' objectives and funding outcomes. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Contributing to the maintenance and improvement of environmental and cultural heritage, and
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage in activities that strengthen connection to Country.

Importantly, projects are community-led and thus, Rangers can respond to emerging community priorities. For example, in April 2020 during COVID-19 restrictions, a time of food insecurity for the community, particularly for Elders, Gamay Rangers led the Community Mullet Run, an annual cultural fishing activity at Yarra Bay. Following the event, the Rangers cleaned, packaged and delivered fish to Elders and vulnerable members of the community to support them in being food secure during this uncertain time (2022 Stories from Country).

In the Torres Strait, Mura Buway Rangers regularly undertake work with My Pathway (job seeker) participants to plant, harvest and perform general maintenance on the Saibai Mekem Garden. The long tradition of subsistence gardening in the Saibai community has become less common with the establishment of the local store. The creation of the Saibai Mekem Garden has been an opportunity for the community to revive and promote traditional gardening methods and share harvest amongst the community.[25]

Indigenous Rangers Program funding can be used to meet the needs of the community through caring for Country, including successfully supporting traditional food practices.

Health and Nutrition

Goal

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities have equitable access to nutrition services and the knowledge needed to support improved health and wellbeing.

Intended outcomes

2.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities are supported by a culturally responsive nutrition, dietetic, and food security health workforce, which includes local community members.

2.2 Dietary health care in remote communities supports people with established, and at risk of, nutrition related conditions.

2.3 Preventative approaches are designed by, and with, remote communities to develop the knowledge and skills required to access, prepare, and consume nutritious, culturally appropriate foods.

2.4 Remote health services have the resources to engage with community services, such as stores and schools, to improve nutrition outcomes.

Context

The life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people in Australia is widest for people living in remote and very remote regions, at 12.4 years.[26] Chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, chronic kidney disease and some cancers, have previously been estimated to account for 75% of the mortality gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.[27] Given the much higher rates of food insecurity in very remote areas, and the rapid increase in chronic disease, this is likely to be an underestimate for remote areas.[28] In the NT, analysis of health and economic data found that socio-economic disadvantage, along with obesity, caused just over half of the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people with food insecurity and obesity both strongly associated with poverty.[29]

The relationship between food insecurity and poor diet is complex and driven by issues including insecure access to safe food storage and cooking facilities, insufficient transport options and limited income to support long-term meal planning and purchases. Furthermore, convenience foods are more readily available than healthy foods and perceived more affordable. There are significant health impacts as a result of the consumption of large quantities of energy-dense, nutrient-poor convenience foods (e.g. high sugar and fat snacks, sweets and desserts) over low fat and sugar, nutrient-dense foods (e.g. lean meats, wholegrains, fruits and vegetables).[30] For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities, the unacceptable high rates of nutrition-related diseases across the life course — from gestation to old age — stretch an already overburdened health system.[31]

Figure 5. Food insecurity impacts on the health and wellbeing of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Diet is the 5th leading risk factor contributing to total disease burden for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[32]

The life expectancy gap between remote and very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians is close to 12 years.[33]

51% of remote and very remote pregnant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are either overweight (23%) or obese (28%) in 2020.[34]

Aboriginal people in the Central Australia region have among the highest rates of diabetes in the world.[35]

In 2018, the Northern Territory reported a 14% rate of chronic malnutrition affecting growth (stunting) in Aboriginal children under five.[36]

Anaemia has been reported in 30% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged six months to five years living in remote areas.[37]

Food insecurity is closely linked to psychological distress, including higher rates of anxiety and depression.[38]

The role of the ACCHO sector in addressing food security

The ACCHO sector plays a central role in the provision of culturally safe, trauma-informed primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Alongside government health services, ACCHOs are a pivotal element of the primary health care architecture in Australia and have a national footprint across urban, regional, rural and remote settings. ACCHOs are highly visible in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with research showing they are best placed to respond to the social and cultural determinants of health.[39]

Underpinning this is their well-established comprehensive model of primary health care that is anchored in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing, and encompasses a holistic understanding of health and wellbeing. Culture is central to this understanding and shapes relationships across self, Country, kin, community and spirituality. Central to the ACCHO Model of Care[40] is the critical and trusted role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner in supporting preventative care and improving community health literacy.

Figure 6: ACCHO Model of Care by Kamilaroi artist, Ethan French
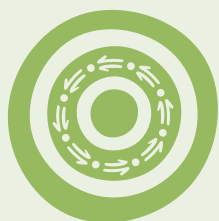
The diagram is a visual representation of the Core Services and Outcomes Framework foundations for community-controlled primary health care. At the centre of the diagram is a meeting place which represents members of the community being the heart of this document. Each ring and section of the diagram represents each component of the Core Services and Outcomes Framework, with culture surrounding the whole diagram and foundations, which is a representation showing that culture is involved in all aspects of the Core Services and Outcomes Framework.

ACCHOs have long been working towards addressing food security through several measures. These include:

- Individual/family-based intervention with people impacted by or at risk of nutrition-related conditions such as diabetes and/or illness where diet is an important component of managing the condition/risk factors.

- Targeted programs for groups with particular needs such as pregnant women, families with young children or Elders.

- Whole of community/population approaches.

- Advocacy for national policies to improve access and price of healthy foods.

To support this work, additional preventative approaches are essential to improving food security over the long term. This requires:

- A workforce focused on nutrition promotion, food security and health education.

- Coordinated, well planned, community-led, and evidence-based nutrition programs.

- Actions that address the social and commercial determinants of food insecurity.

Key elements of successful, community-based nutrition and food security programs include approaches that address environmental and structural barriers such as action to improve food supply rather than relying on health education alone. Programs and strategies require a strong community engagement process with a preference for community-controlled programs that are developed in partnership with communities.[41] This is in line with long established principles for effective health promotion (Ottowa Charter), which emphasise community empowerment and intersectoral action alongside health education.

Given the importance of the early years on long term health outcomes, a public health approach to food security should prioritise working with children and families. This can include providing support to early childhood programs and schools, including the development of appropriate education around nutrition and food preparation for children and families.

A well-resourced nutrition and food security program can also provide education on practical skills such as budgeting, shopping and cooking in schools and for families. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this requires a cross-cultural approach and should cater to varying levels of English literacy. Nutrition support to stores is also critical, particularly for independent stores that do not have in-house nutritionist roles. Public health nutritionists and dietetic staff can provide input into a stores nutrition policy and provide advice on how to best promote healthy food choices within stores.

Clinical dietetic services are a critical element of comprehensive primary health care, noting the extraordinarily high rate of chronic conditions that require dietetic management. Other high priority conditions requiring dietetic input include failure to thrive/malnutrition and iron deficiency in children.

Workforce

The current nutrition workforce in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities largely consists of public health nutritionists and dietitians. Public health nutritionists usually focus on a preventative approach and work with communities and small groups, while dietitians work with individuals who have nutrition-related diseases. Due to the limited resources on the ground, dietetic-trained staff often cover both roles, limiting their ability to provide comprehensive service delivery.

However, what is often lacking is a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce that understands local cultures, can communicate in language and provide nutrition knowledge in a culturally responsive manner. Small but successful models have been trialled in some communities, with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce working side-by-side with public health nutritionists and dietitians, noting there are currently few registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dietitians in the workforce.[42] While health services and communities are keen to expand the number of roles, there is a lack of training opportunities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities to develop skills in nutrition and an understanding of food security issues and underlying contributors.

Nutrition training was previously available up to a Certificate III or Certificate IV level, but this has not been consistently made available.[43] The AMSANT Food Summit recommended that a local nutrition workforce be established with roles ranging from supporting individuals and families (often in partnership with a dietitian or public health nutritionists), to working on community-wide nutrition programs including educational activities and supporting access to traditional foods.[44] It was proposed these workers would also have a key role in developing partnerships with other critical organisations such as stores, schools and Ranger groups to support intersectoral action in community nutrition programs.[45]

What Community said

Communities recognised that high levels of food insecurity were directly related to poor health outcomes, including high rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes, kidney and cardiovascular disease, and growth issues in children. They reported that health services faced challenges in meeting the needs of people with nutrition-related conditions. People with such conditions also struggled to manage them because of the high cost of healthy foods. Food insecurity was recognised as a "life and death issue". The social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) impacts of protracted and severe food insecurity were also noted by participants, with impacts on mental health and quality of life.

Participants emphasised that there is currently an ad hoc and limited approach to community-based nutrition education, which mainly occurs in a limited way in schools. The lack of a systematic approach results in low levels of knowledge about key nutrition issues. Ideas were raised including a national approach to funding health promotion education that was community-directed, well-structured and provided to all communities, instead of the current piecemeal approach.

Culturally appropriate education on all aspects of nutrition was discussed including safe food handling and storage, food related hygiene, budgeting, meal preparation and health literacy related to nutrition.

The need for education resources in language was also emphasised. Low levels of adult English literacy and numeracy were recognised as a barrier to health education.

"Food is the first step, being hungry and not knowing if you'll have dinner tonight takes all your attention."

There was recognition of the need for a nutrition and food security workforce within health services that takes a "Both Ways" (western and traditional) approach. This should include a nutrition workforce that is culturally appropriate, with local community leaders, and supporting the development of community-directed nutrition projects. In the NT, health coaching roles for local people were identified as a way to support people with, or at high risk of, nutrition-related conditions. The need for effective strategies to support recruitment, retention and professional development of the workforce (particularly the local workforce) was highlighted. A food security and nutrition workforce in health could provide nutrition support to community services, stores, schools and other relevant agencies.

Submissions also emphasised the importance of a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food security and nutrition workforce. The need for the health system to provide clinical dietetic support to those with existing nutrition-related conditions, as well as provide a health promotion/public health approach, was recognised. The need for well-developed referral pathways and other links between local health services and other agencies in communities was highlighted.

High priority groups were recognised, including pregnant women, children and young people. The need for culturally appropriate nutrition education to be incorporated across the education curriculum from pre-school to high school was also raised.

Consultations also highlighted community support for a national sugar sweetened beverages levy with revenue helping to fund healthy food initiatives and support community-level food security. International examples suggest a tiered tax on sugar content of drinks may help reduce the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages and encourage manufacturers to reformulate products and reduce the sugar content of beverages to reduce taxation, while raising revenue to subsidise public health initiatives.

Case Study: Miwatj Health shaping a community food security strategy

Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation (Miwatj) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service providing primary and public health care services across six remote communities and the township of Nhulunbuy in East Arnhem Land. In 2019, Miwatj received funding to hire their first Public Health Nutritionist. This position led the development of Miwatj's first Food Security and Nutrition Strategy 2020–2024 through staff and community consultation. Using this strategy, Miwatj was able to secure a two-year food security grant to develop a Nutrition Team and implement key projects in partnership with the Miwatj Yolŋu Public Health workforce. This included establishing an in-house clinical dietetic and public health nutrition service to drive place-based, co-designed nutrition resources and education activities, nutrition training resources and sessions for Yolŋu community-based staff, further community consultation, and food systems projects including working with remote stores, schools, and youth programs.

Prior to Miwatj establishing a nutrition team, some communities in East Arnhem received clinical dietitian services for one day, every six months. This was contracted to an external service. The visiting dietitian changed regularly and often did not have a sufficient understanding of Yolŋu culture or strong relationships with community members. Culturally appropriate resources were limited and not specific to East Arnhem. Since the establishment of the nutrition team, each community receives multiple dietitian days every one to three months depending on the size of the community. Dietitians visit the same communities, have strong relationships with Yolŋu staff and community members, and have developed resources in collaboration with communities in Yolŋu Matha (language).
All dietitians complete cultural induction delivered by Miwatj and prioritise continued learning of Yolŋu ways of being and doing, adapting their messaging and service delivery to better suit this, including working alongside Yolŋu staff members where possible.

Ongoing implementation

Several community members have expressed a desire to work with the nutrition team in a nutrition-specific role. The nutrition team currently partners with Yolŋu staff in other programs who provide excellent support; however, are limited in the time they can dedicate to nutrition. A Yolŋu nutrition workforce is an imperative next step to increase Yolŋu community-control and ownership over the program as well as improved outcomes in food security and nutrition. While this is a priority, sourcing appropriate funding is a significant challenge and adequate, long-term funding is required to continue this work and ensure the sustainability of a successful and impactful program.

Housing, Infrastructure, and Environmental Health

Goal

3. Remote housing and infrastructure are adequate and culturally appropriate to meet the food security needs of community residents in remote areas.

(Addresses National Agreement Socio-economic Outcome and Targets 9a and 9b.)

Intended outcomes

3.1 Remote housing is appropriately designed, built, renovated and repaired in line with remote community food security and health needs.

3.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities are supported by a culturally responsive environmental health workforce that prioritises local community members.

3.3 Remote housing includes fit-for-purpose equipment and furnishings to safely store, prepare and consume nutritious food.

3.4 Remote households have access to affordable, continuous electricity to prepare food and store perishables without risk of spoilage.

3.5 Remote households have affordable, reliable access to potable and palatable water for hygienic food preparation and consumption.

Context

The condition of housing has a strong correlation with health and people's ability to be food secure. To support positive health outcomes, it has been shown that housing must be affordable, culturally and physically appropriate, safe and secure.[46] Reducing overcrowding and increasing the proportion of houses that are well-maintained, and can meet standards such as the nine healthy living practices developed with the ACCHO sector, have been shown to lead to improvements in a population's health status and reduce the risk of disease.[47] Well-maintained, culturally appropriate housing that is not overcrowded supports families and communities to keep children safe and secure, reduce household conflicts, maintain hygiene and other healthy living practices such as household cleanliness, all of which support food security through a family's capacity to store, prepare and cook healthy food at home.[48]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas experience higher rates of household overcrowding than those in non-remote areas. In 2021, just 45% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in very remote areas were living in appropriately sized housing.[49]

The availability, condition and setup of accessible remote housing is fundamentally linked to food security outcomes. Along with overcrowding, the lack of appropriately designed, constructed and maintained houses that provide for the safe storage, preparation and consumption of food is a key barrier to food security. Major structural problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households, affecting food storage, preparation and cooking, and are common in remote (41%) and very remote (50%) areas. Programs aimed at addressing these issues are often slow to respond, and lacking in cultural awareness and community involvement.[50]

There is also a critical need for proper housing infrastructure to support food storage (particularly for fresh produce), food preparation and cooking. Lack of access to basic storage solutions, such as fridges and freezers, prevents or hinders families from bulk buying (which would reduce costs) and safely storing fresh foods. Without a place to safely and reliably store, prepare and consume nutritious meals, people are often reliant on ready-made or convenience foods, which are likely to be nutritionally poor.[51] In addition, the lack of quality infrastructure often forces families to make frequent, often daily, purchases to prevent spoilage and reduce food waste. This can make community members feel as though they are 'living out of the shops'.

Remote communities often experience intermittent electricity supply, and many have been found to not have access to reliable and safe water and wastewater services.[52] Poor reliability and quality of drinking water has flow-on effects for economic and health outcomes for communities in remote areas of Australia.[53] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote areas have repeatedly been found to have drinking water with levels of arsenic, fluoride, nitrate, sodium and uranium that are above the safe levels outlined in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.[54] This can have a direct impact on the taste, consumption and hydration of community members, as well as practical impacts on health hardware such as showers and toilets.

The impact of climate change further exacerbates the barriers to food security caused by poor infrastructure, crowding, and limited access to electricity and water. Homes that lack structural integrity and appropriate design and insulation are more expensive to keep warm or cool and to operate essential appliances, such as refrigerators.[55] As parts of rural and remote Australia experience warmer temperatures and more extreme heat due to climate change, it becomes even more crucial to address the intersections between housing and food security.

What Community said

Participants advised that the overall scarcity, design and quality of housing options increased homelessness and overcrowding, and hampered food security and health needs. Submissions highlighted overcrowding as a key issue affecting food security. More people sharing limited resources reduces access to food, as well as the capacity to store food. Overcrowding also results in significant 'wear and tear' on homes, driving up home maintenance costs.

"Clients call into the Health Council saying gas (for stove) isn't working so they couldn't cook."

Poor housing conditions may be the result of poor design and inadequate maintenance of homes. The design of community housing in remote communities often fails to meet the needs of families, affecting their ability to store, prepare, and access food. Submissions emphasised the importance of consulting with communities prior to building new homes to determine the types of housing they prefer, including aspects of the living environment, such as outside cooking areas for food preparation. It is important to ensure that houses are climate resilient and adequately protected from all weather conditions – including extreme heat – to support food preparation in the home. It was reported that many houses lack ventilation or adequate insulation and are ill-designed for the local climate, leading to higher living costs and affecting food storage.

Participants highlighted significant issues with inadequate infrastructure for storing and maintaining safe, healthy foods, both in residential and commercial settings. Many residents face challenges due to the lack of proper refrigeration and food storage facilities in their homes. This leads to rapid spoilage of perishable items, forcing families to either frequently purchase smaller quantities of food or endure a higher rate of waste. Additionally, without reliable and affordable power, appliances such as fridges and freezers are often damaged, leaving households to struggle with keeping food fresh, which often results in opting for less nutritious, but non-perishable alternatives.

Kitchen functionality was said to play a vital role in food security. Submissions highlighted that kitchens should offer adequate bench space and storage, as well as functioning plumbing and appliances. Participants suggested promoting healthier eating habits by investing in cooking equipment and appliances in houses. Beyond the kitchen, other elements contributing to healthy and safe food storage and preparation include reliable water and electricity supply, smoke detectors, and accessible bins.

Poor housing conditions from inadequate maintenance or failure to repair houses also undermine the community's efforts to achieve food security. Participants identified a clear need to prioritise maintenance and house repairs to achieve a 'liveable' standard. This includes improvements to 'health hardware', such as working showers and kitchens, running water, food storage and preparation spaces, reliable refrigeration, cooking appliances and power supply.

Proposed solutions also include support for ongoing repairs and maintenance programs linked to health priorities, more frequent visits from public health and environmental health officers and training local people to repair houses. To achieve this, the submissions underscored the importance of supporting the establishment of a locally based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing maintenance workforce.

Consultations highlighted that communities who are required to prepay for power experience fluctuations in power supply when credit runs out or cannot be topped up. As well as increasing the risk of food spoiling, these fluctuations also put strain on appliances, leading them to reach the end of their life more quickly. It is noted that while tariffs are typically uniform, extreme climates (hot and cold), and housing design that lacks energy efficiency, are typically the causes of high consumption.

Community members referred to the principle of energy sovereignty, whereby communities should have the right and ability to control their own energy resources, production and consumption, which would reduce dependency on external energy entities. Further considerations should be made around housing infrastructure to facilitate energy requirements in remote areas (e.g. solar panels on houses or solar banks within community).

The intersection of water and food security is a pressing issue in many of the remote communities visited during consultation, as water availability and quality directly affect the ability to prepare and consume nutritious food.

Water infrastructure and the quality of local water sources is a critical concern, with participants highlighting the need for reliable water provision and improved water quality. In some communities, bore water is considered unsuitable for consumption, as boiling and filtering the water does not remove all contaminants. Concerns around contaminated water sources leading to foodborne illnesses and other health issues extended to concerns about eating traditional foods due to pollution, such as fish from rivers. Where water is high in some minerals, it was mentioned that it may exacerbate or increase the risk of population health issues, including poor palatability, which discourages water consumption. As expressed by participants, water quality in some communities also directly contributes to health problems such as kidney disease. These risks highlight how water security is inextricably linked with food security.

"...sometimes water is more expensive than soft drinks..."

Poor water management was also a significant concern, directly impacting food production and health, with emphasis placed on ensuring transparency and community involvement in water management. Poor water management in the broader region can lead to unreliable water supply in some communities.

Moreover, the cost and logistical difficulties of accessing clean water often divert resources away from other critical needs. Participants advised that there must be transparency and trust in the testing of water for both potability and palatability.

Participants also identified the need to protect water sources and support locally relevant water infrastructure projects.

"If we don't have drinking water, we don't have the basics."

Case Study — *Uwankara Palyanku Kanyintjaku*

Healthabitat was established in response to the need identified by Nganampa Health Council (Yami Lester) and key community researchers (Punch Thomson and Nura Ward) to improve living environments and health outcomes for Aboriginal people living on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands.

The project's mission of 'stop people getting sick', or in the local language 'Uwankara Palyanku Kanyintjaku' (UPK), was underpinned by nine Healthy Living Practices and a local Aboriginal workforce to support communities to achieve these practices for all households.

Between 1987 and 1990, UPK was regarded nationally as a yardstick for environmental intervention in Indigenous communities. The reasons for UPK's success include:

- The initiative and motivation were provided by local Indigenous people.

- Immediate action – there was 'no survey without service' – the Dr Fred Hollows principle that insisted on fixing Health Hardware immediately, not after the work.

- A strong health priority, known as the Nine Healthy Living Practices, using data collected on house function to focus limited resources on important health targets.

- Strong liaison, using a predominately local Anangu team, ensuring all community members were aware of the project.

Involving local Indigenous teams has been critical to the model of practice, improving the living environment of communities, improving health and informing national Housing for Health programs. The model has since been used in over 10,000 houses around Australia over the past 40 years.

Families and Communities

Goal

4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are supported by services and facilities that provide access to culturally appropriate and nutritious food.

Intended outcomes

4.1 Remote families and communities are supported to access and grow food locally and have access to suitable cooking facilities.

4.2 Service providers have the knowledge and skills to meet the nutrition, medical and cultural needs of individuals and families.

4.3 Remote communities and homelands are supported to implement locally designed transport solutions that improve food security.

4.4 Food relief is community-led, appropriate and easily accessible to remote community residents when needed.

Context

There are multiple food systems in remote communities that operate outside the home and remote stores. These include:

- food provided in schools; aged care, disability, and other care services;
- community event spaces where food is
- often prepared, cooked, eaten and stored;
- local food production sources like community gardens, farms and agriculture; and
- emergency food relief during crisis and disasters.

When operating successfully, these services are community-led and operate with locally-based solutions to local food service and community needs.

Apart from a small number of local food production sources, food provided through services in remote communities rely heavily on food purchased outside the community. This food travels long distances, with multiple contact points and high handling costs, and involves systems that are often slow to adapt and respond to changing needs. All of these factors contribute to high costs and reduced quality of fresh food (Supply Chains Pillar).

In education services, the provision of school breakfast and lunch programs can be a key source of food and nutrition for childcare or school-aged children in a remote community. For people accessing meals through aged care or community care services, often with special dietary needs, these meals are not only an important source of nutrition, they also provide opportunities for social interaction and welfare checks.

These services support healthy food choices and access to nutritionally diverse and culturally appropriate foods and require significant resources to meet quality standards and community demand. These resources include access to commercial kitchens and walk in freezers, and qualified staff to prepare meals, both of which are difficult to access in remote areas. Services that cannot source sufficient staff with relevant qualifications (including chefs/qualified cooks) from within a community are required to provide housing and other benefits for external staff. These additional expenses significantly increase the cost of providing meals, directing funding away from other critical services.

Transport to access sufficient and affordable healthy food is an issue across multiple Pillars. Some community-controlled services have trialled alternative transport options to support community members to access healthy food and other essential household items. The model of these services varies, but aims to increase access by lowering the cost of transportation and providing opportunities to buy affordable healthy food at a regional centre. Models include subsidising buses, food order and delivery services, and support for small community stores to transport food from supermarkets in larger regional centres. The services rely on community ingenuity and flexible funding, which is often short-term and is not always available across all areas of remote Australia.

Community gardens are commonly proposed as a strategy to increase local access to healthy foods.[56] They can provide a variety of benefits, including learning opportunities through integration of nutrition and food-related activities into school curricula. Community gardens are more successful when they are community-led or initiated, with an ongoing funding source and adequate handover to community built on community engagement with the garden. These successful community-controlled gardens underscore the need for sustainable, community-controlled food systems with ongoing funding.[57]

For community food systems that are vulnerable to seasonal weather events and disasters, emergency food relief is an important element. While emergency food relief may be accessed on a regular basis, outside of such events, it is not a long-term solution for fragile food systems and food insecurity. It is understood that remoteness makes community food systems particularly vulnerable to emergency and crisis situations. Food security immediately becomes an acute and serious risk for people escaping domestic and family violence; communities affected by severe weather events like cyclones and associated floods, or events involving community lockdown or household quarantine, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of climate change are expected to make such emergencies more severe and unpredictable.[58] A community-led approach must be central to emergency food relief organisations operating in remote communities. This ensures organisations deliver effective responses that meet the needs of vulnerable community members and the community as a whole. Responses should aim to build community capacity and resilience against emergencies, while not stigmatising or being culturally unsafe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is also important that emergency food provision does not create dependence and have the unintended impact of undermining traditional food systems and making community-controlled food services and shops unviable[59]

What Community said

Community-led local food production was strongly supported throughout the consultations. This included local gardens, agriculture and aquaculture, as well as sourcing food through activities such as traditional hunting and fishing practices. Communities emphasised that strengthening local food production would also strengthen connections to culture and Country (Pillar: Country and Culture), and provide people with important skills, education and employment.

"We need to look at changing the way we think instead of just bringing (in and paying) for food in all the time."

Participants stressed that solutions need to be community-specific. The consultation revealed a diverse range of barriers and potential solutions to local food production, including the need to build on existing food systems and infrastructure (including transport to access food), as well as account for local factors like geography and water security. Participants also raised concerns about unreliable water and land access.

"People having their own initiatives means people can be proud of their community."

Participants emphasised that communities wanted to ensure high-needs groups, such as those with chronic illness or receiving aged care support, have access to food that is appropriate for their needs. There was strong support for additional funding of school food programs to provide healthy breakfasts and lunches, and for this to be accessible to all children. It was noted in one jurisdiction that children lost weight in school holidays, highlighting the extent to which some children rely on these programs.

Participants raised the urgency of food insecurity and noted it had been linked to crime – particularly increased engagement of youth with the justice system – as a result of hunger.

There is a high demand for emergency food relief in communities. Participants expressed a desire for these food relief systems to be community-led. Participants stated that relief should be designed to be flexible to accommodate the increasing unpredictability of climate change impacts on food security. There were concerns raised about external agencies making decisions about emergency relief in weather-related events with no consultation with community.

Case Study – Community-led enterprises creating community 'supply chains' to provide access to fresh, affordable food

With access to fresh, high quality, affordable food becoming increasingly difficult, some remote communities have taken it into their own hands to create their own food 'supply chains'. For example, the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation's Bawinanga's Tucker Run provides a mobile shopping service for people who are living on the homelands surrounding Maningrida.

This supply of food and essentials is, for some people, the only way they can regularly buy groceries.

During the dry season, the Tucker Run travels weekly across two days to 11 homeland outstations. In the wet season, the Tucker Run charters a plane to deliver essential supplies to homeland residents who are cut off from other suppliers by rivers or floodwaters.

The Bawinanga Tucker Run is a significant alternative that provides options to remote communities without a local store. This community-led enterprise provides 'supply chain' supports to many people who would otherwise struggle to access fresh, quality, affordable food, particularly during the wet season. Further information on Bawinanga's Tucker Run is available on their website *https://www.bawinanga.com/what-we-do/retail/tucker-run*.

Remote Retail

Goal

5. **Remote stores and other food outlets are responsive to, and meet the needs of, community.**

Intended outcomes

5.1 The needs of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are met through the reliable provision of quality, affordable, nutritious food and other essentials.

5.2 Remote store and other food outlet environments encourage healthy purchases and discourage unhealthy purchases.

5.3 Remote communities have genuine decision-making authority to determine ownership, governance and management practices of their remote food outlets.

5.5 Remote food providers have strong local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment across the remote store environment.

5.6 Remote residents in locations without a permanent store have access to alternative food retail services.

5.7 Remote stores and other food outlets are supported to achieve high quality, best practice operations and governance through continuous improvement.

Context

In 2024, there were more than 200 food and grocery stores servicing remote communities across Australia. Most estimates suggest 90-95% of food eaten in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is purchased in these stores, with traditional foods contributing a small, but critical supplement to people's dietary intake.[60] Overall, the remote store landscape supports an estimated 150,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living across more than 1,200 remote and very remote communities. Residents in communities with no store will often travel hundreds of kilometres on unsealed, damaged and/or seasonally inaccessible roads to the nearest retail provider in major towns or cities.

NT $2 Waters

The majority of remote stores in the NT sell water for $2 – cheaper than high sugar drinks – by cross subsidising the cost using increased prices on unhealthy drinks like soft drinks.

A range of factors compounding the disadvantage faced by remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities when seeking access to healthy food include: small populations; limited purchasing power; distance from food production and market hubs; store storage capacity; and poor store and transport infrastructure such as fridges, freezers, roads and ports.

All these issues mean the viability of many remote stores is an ongoing concern, leaving communities at continual risk of food insecurity.

Healthy food in remote communities is often over 50% more expensive,[61] inconsistently available and of lower quality compared to urban or regional centres.[62] The challenges of operating in remote Australia are a major contributing factor to the differences in price, availability and quality of food. High prices also result in many people relying on takeaways for their daily meals, contributing to poor health outcomes.[63] (Pillar: Health and Nutrition)
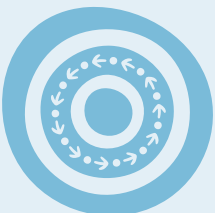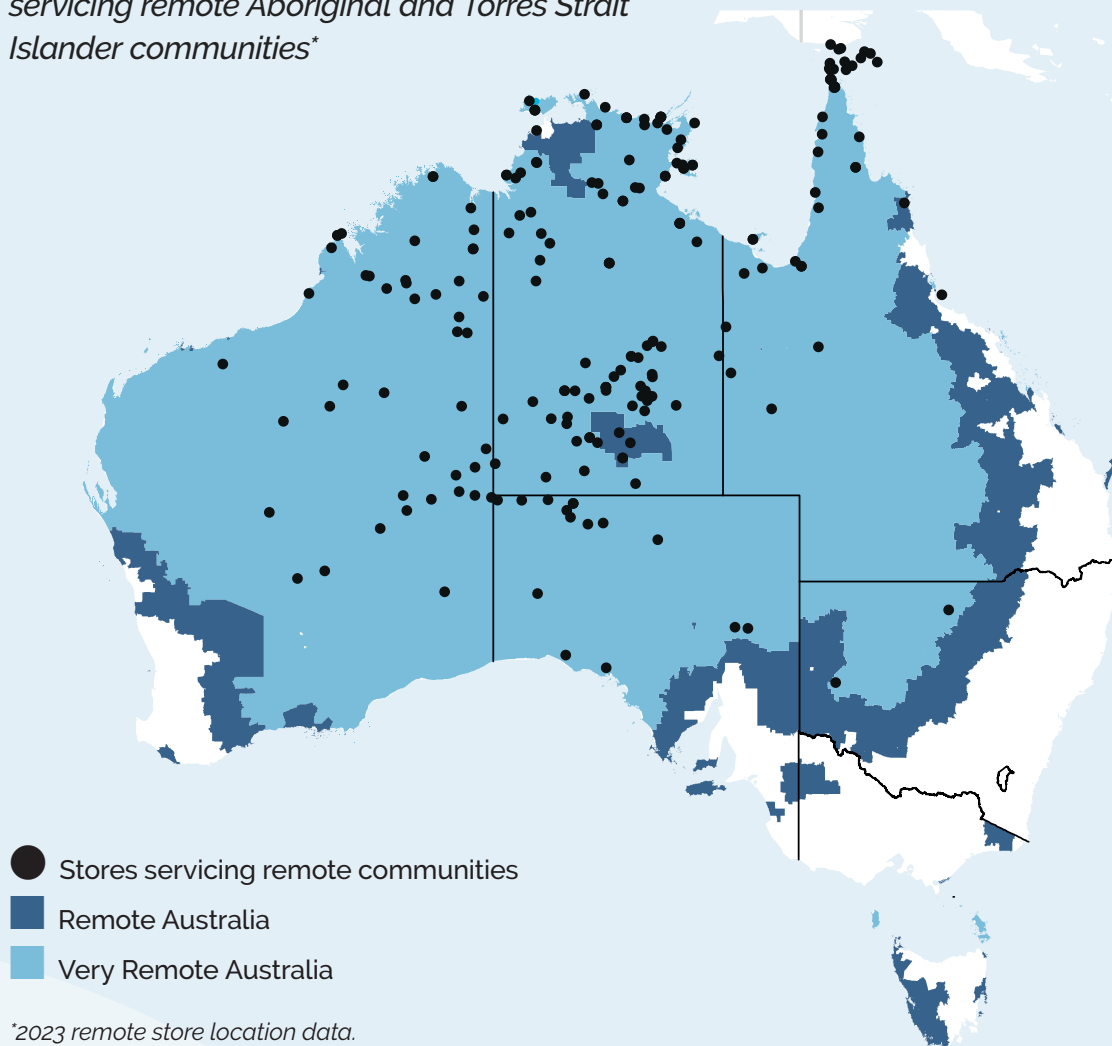
*Figure 7. Map of food and grocery stores servicing remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**

- ● Stores servicing remote communities
- ■ Remote Australia
- ■ Very Remote Australia

*2023 remote store location data.

During wet weather events, many remote communities can be cut off for months due to flooding or road damage. Extended periods of isolation increase the demand on store infrastructure and storage capacity, with both governments and communities expecting stores to play a central role in support and recovery operations in emergency management events.

Similar to commercial businesses nationwide, remote stores operate under a range of ownership and operating models.[64] This includes community-owned and independently run; community-owned and managed under a management group; and fully private models. Through these models, the range of products made available varies across full grocery stores, convenience stores and takeaway services. The ownership, management and community involvement behind remote stores models also influences the quality and cost of products available in store.

Significant variability in pricing has been found across remote store operating models with analysis of the 2019 Northern Territory Market Basket Survey showing that community-owned stores were 9% cheaper than private stores and stores operated by stores management companies were 13% cheaper than private stores.[65]

Around half of all remote stores, and three quarters of community-owned stores, are managed by store management companies, such as Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA), Community Enterprise Queensland (CEQ), Island and Cape Retail Enterprises, Mai Wiru, and Outback Stores Pty Ltd. Store management companies have greater organisational capacity; can support the implementation of store policies; employ and deliver training to managers and local staff; provide financial management, retail expertise and nutrition specialists; and facilitate engagement with community store board members. These companies often also have greater buying power, which can provide lower prices to customers.

While there are many examples of successes from this structure, not all communities have benefited from operating under a management company and there are lessons to be learned from this approach to store operations. To establish stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-control in the food retail sector, greater support and resources must be provided for existing governance structures. This will ensure the ongoing knowledge, skills and capability of store boards and communities store services so they can better support each community's food security needs and grow successful businesses.

The relationship between a remote community store and the community it serves differs from retailers in regional and urban settings. Not only do remote stores provide food and essential goods, they also support community events, provide employment opportunities, and fulfil other needs such as banking, fuel supply, community noticeboards and delivery of community programs. Due to these important functions, and stores being the only place where residents can buy essential goods, it is important that they continue to operate and provide access for people to meet their basic needs for day-to-day living.

Through multiple community-led forums related to building food security, communities have made clear their expectations about the important role that remote stores play in improving food security, and the need for greater community-control and self-determination on topics related to the ownership, management and governance of stores in their community. These expectations are not new and align with the principles in the National Agreement.

Community-controlled approaches have demonstrated success in food security initiatives, including the establishment of community-controlled stores groups and the implementation of policies such as product cross-subsidisation. This is achieved by increasing the price of unhealthy discretionary products such as full-sugar soft drinks and confectionary, to reduce prices on healthy products, such as fresh fruit and vegetables. These initiatives have been successful in making some staple healthy foods more affordable and thereby encouraging better nutrition.

Lessons can also be learned from Aboriginal communities in the NT, where the Commonwealth Government established the Community Store Licensing Scheme to improve the quality, availability, and accessibility of healthy food in remote store environments. The Scheme ran for ten years under the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012 (Cth) (SFNT Act).* Following the sunset of the SFNT Act in July 2022, the NT Government assumed responsibility for remote stores licensing. There are opportunities to build on the successes of the licensing scheme to ensure ongoing improvement in both the quality of food supplied and communities' involvement in the governance of stores nationally.

Community stores are a critical local employer and can be a conduit for other local economic opportunities. These employment opportunities can lead to significant economic improvements for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households, families and wider communities. However, for some stores, lack of support and understanding of these benefits mean these opportunities are not always realised, leading to an over-reliance on an external workforce. This employment model is inherently accompanied by significant costs due to the need to source housing and provide training. It also creates issues of staff retention as external workers invariably move, due to their limited or non-existent ties to the community they service.

For communities without a retail store, access to alternative food retail services is essential. Communities have come up with a range of models to overcome the lack of an easily accessible store in community. (Pillar: Families and Communities)

What Community said

Community members made it clear during consultations that community stores play a vital and pivotal role in ensuring access to essential goods and services and therefore food security.

Significant concerns were raised about a number of issues including: the high price of food, inadequate supply of affordable healthy food, out-of-date food, poor quality or spoiled food, rodent infestations, inadequate cool storage, unreliable electricity affecting the ability to buy fresh or frozen food, and freezer-burned items. Participants also consistently identified significant challenges related to limited opening hours reducing reliable access to stores and limiting food options.

Additionally, some communities only receive one weekly shipment of goods, requiring stores to order in advance and hope the quality of fresh produce holds until delivery. In some cases, shipments may arrive as infrequently as once a month, leaving community members without access to essential items. The limited frequency of deliveries can compromise the quality of foods, leading to issues such as mould on fruit and vegetables. Once in the store, popular items such as fresh foods frequently sell out within a few days, leaving the community with low-quality items for the remaining days until stock is replenished.

Significant concerns were also raised by participants about the high prices of food in remote stores. The high costs and poor quality of fresh produce often drive individuals to rely on frozen, ready-made, or takeout foods, rather than fresh grocery items, further impacting healthy eating habits.

"Sometimes it's cheaper for families to get takeout over grocery shopping."

Participants advised that some local stores struggle with inadequate infrastructure, including insufficient cool storage and unreliable electricity, which impacts their ability to safely store food. Existing infrastructure and resources are also often insufficient to meet the needs of the community during disasters. For example, local stores face difficulties in sourcing supplies, particularly during emergencies and disaster-declared weather events. To address these challenges, participants suggested improved infrastructure, including partnerships between organisations and surrounding towns, coordinated freight systems, distribution centres, and food banks.

The dual role of community stores in maintaining a balance between running a successful business and promoting healthy food options was acknowledged. Investing in community store capabilities was seen as vital for improving food security. Participants noted that in some locations, community stores often prioritise profits over providing access to affordable and healthy food options, which can negatively impact the wellbeing of communities. Some participants were also concerned about the perceived monopoly ownership of community stores leading to high prices, limited choices, and a lack of transparency in food pricing.

Participants emphasised the need to review the operational models of these stores to better support the communities in which they operate.

"Store for community, run by community."

Participants expressed the need for greater Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community member involvement in governance, management, and local staffing of remote community stores. Some participants identified a lack of transparency in the operations of their local remote store, including how funds were being used. In the long-term, participants expressed a desire for stores to transfer to community ownership and management to support local food security outcomes, create more employment opportunities and ensure profits are reinvested into community programs and infrastructure upgrades.

Where the stores are under community-control, there is a desire for decisions and strategies that impact food security to be shared with the broader community. Positive local changes made by some community stores include prominently displaying fresh and healthy foods; providing adequate shelf space to promote healthier choices; providing more nutritional and affordable food (as often sweet and sugary foods were a cheaper option); and making water more affordable.

"Giving back the power to community means giving the agency to make their own decisions."

Many participants were of the view that regulation of community stores to ensure compliance with national standards would guarantee food quality (including nutritious foods), affordability, and accessibility.

Case Study — ALPA helping the community through community-controlled governance

The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) was formed in 1972 as a collective of community-controlled stores in East Arnhem Land. Since then, ALPA has been financially independent, owned by Yolŋu members and governed by a Yolŋu Board of Directors. The modest surplus funds generated from store operations benefit the community, providing financial assistance for cultural ceremonies, nutrition programs, education support, medical escorts, and community events.

In 2002, ALPA expanded outside its member stores to operate client stores on behalf of, and in partnership with, other Indigenous community organisations. The model gives these communities access to ALPA's systems, processes, financial management, training, nutrition program and group purchasing. This partnership approach allows these communities to maintain ownership and control of their retail business, but with the expertise and support of an experienced Indigenous business partner.

ALPA currently operates in 24 remote communities across a 1.2 million km² footprint. In their retail operations, ALPA have over 1200 employees, more than 80% of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In the 1970s, the ALPA board recognised the importance of accredited training and development for it's team, and with support from the Queensland Retail Training Institute, began a program of in-house training. The training school at Galiwin'ku was built to support this. ALPA became a Registered Training Organisation in 1992 and remains committed to team training. Over 1500 of ALPA remote Indigenous team members have completed apprenticeships or qualifications through ALPA.

ALPA was founded to ensure reliable access to food and essential goods as a basic human right. ALPA has done this for more than 50 years with little or no government funding. They are acutely aware of the significant role they play to support food security in the communities they service. Under the leadership of the ALPA Board of Directors, they strive to improve access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods. Improving affordability, while maintaining financial viability, continues to be a key focus for ALPA.

The ALPA Board of Directors understand the link between diet and disease and prioritise health in their Health and Nutrition Strategy and Policy. They strive to provide affordable healthy options to customers and self-fund a freight subsidy in the member stores on a range of healthy fresh, frozen, chiller and grocery items. ALPA has implemented a freight subsidy on fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, chicken and most dairy products to support consumption and healthy choices. In 2023–24, ALPA member stores freight subsidy equated to $750,000. Within ALPA member stores, healthy food subsidies have been in place since the 1980s. The freight subsidy is completely independent of government funding.

Supply Chains

Goal

6. Remote supply chains are efficient and resilient, and minimise the impact of remoteness on the availability, cost and quality of products in remote stores.

Intended outcomes

6.1 The food security needs of remote community residents are not disadvantaged by long, complex transport routes and higher freight costs.

6.2 Remote supply chains are effective, efficient, flexible and provide communities with year-round, uninterrupted access to food and essentials.

6.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are actively involved in decisions related to the supply of food and essentials in their community.

Context

For remote communities, a resilient supply chain relies on numerous options, robust infrastructure – including roads, rail and ports – and simple coordinated logistic points that are able to withstand a disruption such as bushfires, flooding, cyclones and extreme heat.[66]

Freighting goods to remote communities is a long, challenging and high-cost process, often reliant on weather and the condition of a single road, rail, air or barge access point. Geographical remoteness means there are long distances between the point of harvest or production and goods arriving at the community store. Remote supply chains often rely on only a small number of service providers and require multiple transfer points. Each stop along the supply chain increases the cost and time it takes for the product to reach the consumer and increases the risk of degradation and damage of goods.
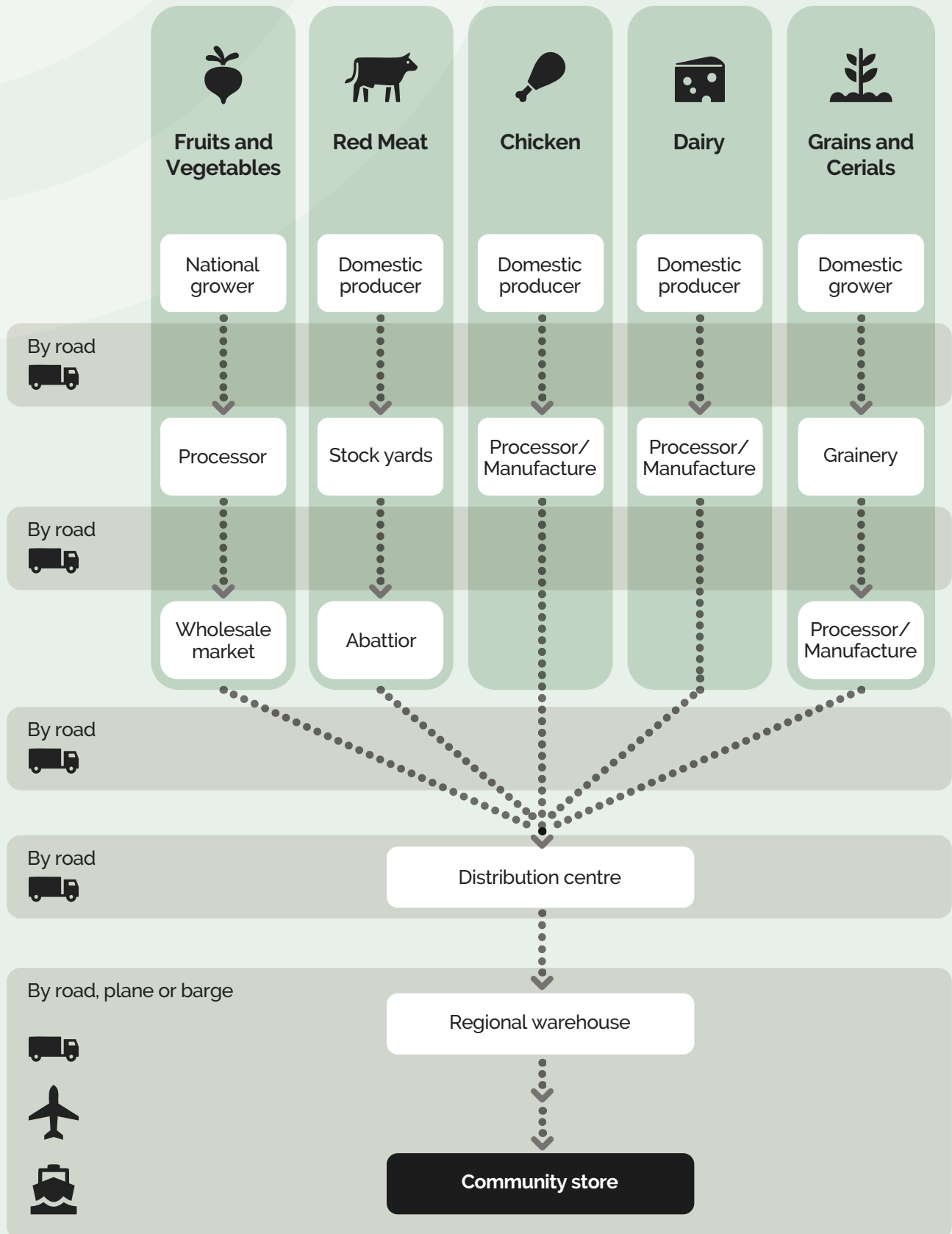
Disruption to the supply chain is more likely to occur in remote and very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is due to pressure points caused by a number of variables, including:

- vast distances
- complex connection points and transport routes
- geographical and seasonal isolation
- inadequate storage infrastructure
- poorly maintained freight infrastructure, and
- higher operating, repair, and maintenance costs.

Figure 8: The long supply chain to remote communities has multiple touch points and covers large distances, increasing the cost of food and reducing quality.

Average travel distance: 3500km | Average touch points: 8 | Days: up to 7 days

Fruits and Vegetables	Red Meat	Chicken	Dairy	Grains and Cerials
National grower	Domestic producer	Domestic producer	Domestic producer	Domestic grower

By road

Processor	Stock yards	Processor/Manufacture	Processor/Manufacture	Grainery

By road

Wholesale market	Abattior			Processor/Manufacture

By road

By road

Distribution centre

By road, plane or barge

Regional warehouse

Community store

Ugar Island, Queensland. Picture courtesy of Sea Swift Pty Ltd

Seasonal and severe weather events, such as tropical monsoons, floods, and bushfires, can often disrupt supply chains and limit the food supply in remote communities for prolonged periods. The already high-cost freighting process can become even more costly during these weather events. For example, during the 2023–24 wet season, NT communities cut off by flooded roads paid $10 per kilo for air freight, adding $20 to the cost of delivering 2 litres of milk.[67] These weather events, combined with poorly maintained or inadequate freight infrastructure (such as barge landings and airstrips), severely impact the amount of goods able to be transported to community and the timing in which the supply is received. Even once the goods arrive in community, inadequate local storage capacity limits remote community access to stock reserves that protect against supply shocks. (Pillar: Families and Communities)

In addition to long distances and poor infrastructure, small consumer populations in remote communities, with their limited purchasing power, often means bulk pricing for products is unviable. Opportunities to improve supply chain collaboration and coordination among communities, services and others to ensure stable, efficient and cost-effective supply for remote communities is one way to overcome these limitations. This could be achieved through service agreements across sectors (e.g. health services and remote community stores) as well as building on the success of ACCO store management groups that increase purchasing power and coordination of supply across communities.

Complexities associated with remote supply chains can result in deliveries that are infrequent, unreliable and insufficient. Shorter supply chains are one way to improve resilience. A focus on local and regional food systems, improving access to local or regional food supplies and increasing local food production to ensure sustainability and reduce reliance on long-distance freight has the potential to lower costs and boost resilience.

What Community said

Throughout the consultations, it was apparent that there are concerns with freight costs, infrastructure inadequacies, and delayed and unreliable transport.

Participants raised concerns over expensive freight costs being passed on to communities. High freight charges associated with geographical isolation of these communities are passed on to consumers, making food significantly more expensive than in urban areas.[68] Participants suggested using partnerships between organisations and surrounding towns, and coordinating freight systems to reduce costs. They noted structural issues related to logistical infrastructure and high freight costs have remained unaddressed for many years, and that improving the resilience and cost-efficiency of supply chains is key to improving food security outcomes.

> *"Most of the food comes from Brisbane. Why is it coming from Brisbane when you could get it locally and it's more beneficial to have it locally."*

Participants reported infrastructure inadequacies, such as poor road conditions and lack of or inadequate airstrips as factors that significantly impact food prices and availability in remote communities. Road quality, conditions and access are severely affected by seasonal weather events – particularly in northern Australia – further complicate food logistics. Poor road conditions in some communities were said to contribute to significant 'wear and tear' on vehicles, which not only increases maintenance costs, but also impacts on the timely delivery of goods.

Additionally, larger amounts of food cannot be delivered by air due to the size limitations of airstrips within communities. Participants also highlighted that during the high-risk weather season and periods of flooding, transporting food via trucks and planes becomes particularly challenging, leading to delays and limiting the availability of fresh food.

● ●

"We have rivers and creeks north and south of us, so we literally turn into an island in wet season. Roads get cut off. We live by wet and dry season....so between April and December the trucks can get in. We get one truck a week."

● ●

Participants noted infrequent, insufficient, and unreliable deliveries of fresh food led to rapid spoilage and a lack of variety in available food items. For instance, some communities reported receiving fresh produce only on a fortnightly basis, with much of it becoming unfit for consumption shortly after arrival due to the lengthy transportation and storage periods.

Often deliveries do not meet the demand from the community and there is a constant struggle to ensure that all residents have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The scarcity of fresh food not only affects dietary diversity, but also contributes to higher prices for the limited available items, making them less accessible to families with tight budgets. The unreliability of these deliveries means that communities cannot plan their meals or grocery shop effectively, leading to further entrenchment of food insecurity.

● ●

"Families risk their cars to get into town to shop"

● ●

To address these challenges, participants suggested:

- establishing improved infrastructure
- better coordinated freight systems and distribution centres
- improving road and transportation infrastructure
- introducing freight food subsidies
- income subsidies aligned with income levels
- regulating providers in the remote food and logistics and supply sector
- aligning delivery frequency with pay weeks to ensure timely food purchases
- increasing access to bulk pricing and cooperative purchasing among remote stores, and
- improving access to local producers to reduce prices and improve the quality and range of food as well as protect against supply interruption.

Case Study — Government and industry working together to create better outcomes for community

In response to COVID-19 and related supply chain issues in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the NIAA established a Remote Food Security Working Group (FSWG) in April 2020. The FSWG brings together Commonwealth, state and territory governments, remote store management companies, wholesalers, and freight and distribution companies to identify and address barriers in the remote supply chain.

The FSWG was a primary mechanism to respond to supply chain and retail challenges experienced in remote communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, 'panic buying' in major cities and town centres led to lower or zero stock of certain items in remote communities. Through the FSWG and support from food and grocery wholesalers, manufacturers and suppliers prioritised the allocation of stock for remote communities. This meant remote communities were able to receive their regular supply of certain goods without stock shortages due to panic buying experienced in some regional or urban locations.

Additionally, the FSWG worked with state and territory governments to support the transport of stock to remote stores through biosecurity boundaries and to provide solutions to other local supply issues. In a time where much of the country was 'shutdown', this was a significant outcome for the FSWG to ensure remote communities continued to have access to food and essentials.

The FSWG has since expanded its scope to include remote food security risks as a consequence of events including, but not limited to, other pandemics, natural disasters and seasonal changes. The group continues to meet regularly to share information and identify actions to improve the supply of food and essential items to remote communities.

Healthy Economies

Goal

7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities have the same purchasing power, job and economic opportunities for food security as non-remote communities.

(Addresses National Agreement Socio-economic Outcome and Target 8.)

Intended outcomes

7.1 Strong local economies support equitable access to nutritious food and essential groceries in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

7.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities have the income to support their food security.

7.3 Employment and ownership opportunities for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are prioritised across the remote food sector.

7.4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities can build and develop sustainable local food enterprises that contribute to the food security needs of their community.

Context

While the affordability of healthy food impacts many Australians, the underlying factors outlined throughout the Strategy are exacerbated for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and linked strongly to socio-economic disadvantage.[69] Factors such as household income, employment opportunities and hours worked disproportionally impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people, contributing 34% of the total health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians.[70]

Socio-economic disadvantage is more prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in remote areas.[71] In 2016, 53% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in very remote Australia lived below the poverty line, an increase of 8% from the previous Census in 2011.[72] The gross equivalised household income per week*, adjusted for household size, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people decreases from urban areas ($982) to remote and very remote areas ($612 and $459 respectively).[73] It is estimated that in some remote communities, 34 to 80% of household income is needed to purchase food for a healthy diet, compared to 14% for the average Australian family.[74]

Employment opportunities in remote and very remote areas are often limited and can be long distances away from people's homes and families. The employment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 64 which is just 32%, significantly lower than in major cities.[75] This is a particular concern for young people, with only 45% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 15 to 24 engaged in employment, training or education in remote areas. This rate drops to 30% in very remote areas compared to 80% of all young people across Australia.[76]

*Gross equivalised household income: Household incomes are adjusted to facilitate the comparison of income levels between households of different size and composition, reflecting the requirement of a larger household to need a higher level of income to achieve the same standard of living as a smaller household.

Limited opportunities for employment, training or education in remote areas puts young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at risk of poor long-term employment and income outcomes, which has lifelong health and wellbeing impacts. In remote communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tend to earn lower incomes than both non-Indigenous Australians and non-remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[77]

Access to an adequate income also plays a significant role in other key areas of food security, including people's ability to purchase, maintain and power food storage and preparation equipment on a daily basis. Compared to 2% in Australia's non-Indigenous population, 17% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 55 years of age were reported to go without food due to a lack of money.[78]

Given the growing rate of poverty in remote and very remote areas of Australia, a more coordinated, sustained and community-led response is needed to improve training and increase employment opportunities. This should include fair remuneration for people involved in employment programs to incentivise and support workforce engagement. To address economic access barriers, it is essential that action is undertaken to improve incomes in relation to the cost of living, which will support greater food security.

Additionally, business opportunities in remote communities are often deficient or absent. As highlighted earlier in the Strategy, support is needed to establish and foster sustainable business opportunities and to create more community-controlled food security related jobs. Noting the interrelationship with the Country and Culture and Health and Nutrition Pillars, the traditional food or health sectors could offer employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This might include:

- on-Country food activities
- sharing cultural knowledge about food
- food production businesses
- remote retail positions and community-led health
- nutrition, and environmental health related workforces

Other business opportunities including:

- development of new or expanded ACCO store management groups
- agricultural ventures, and
- the transfer of social services to community-control.

It is recognised that government income support payments may be the only available income for some households. The amount received and timing of these payments affects the ability of individuals and households to purchase nutritionally and culturally appropriate food, and may determine when, and how much food can be purchased.[79]

In addition to income support payments through Services Australia, the Remote Area Allowance is a regular, tax-free welfare payment for persons living in remote areas.[80] This allowance aims to meet the additional costs associated with living in remote areas. However, the allowance does not accurately reflect the higher cost of living in remote Australia and has only increased twice since 1984.[81] In 2024, the remote areas allowance was $18.20 a fortnight for a single person. Multiple assessments of the additional costs of living in remote and very remote communities indicate that the current rate is set too low to compensate for the additional costs of living in these communities. This further disadvantages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote and very remote areas who are reliant on income support payments.[82]

It is also important that people living in remote communities can access Services Australia services to receive support when needed, and in a timely manner, including support when there are issues with payments.

What Community said

It was clear from the consultation that food insecurity is at very high levels across all jurisdictions and the impact of high food prices actively contributes to health disparities and perpetuates cycles of poverty.

Participants stated that food security can be a 'life and death situation', and families may find themselves in 'survival mode' when unexpected expenses disrupt already tight budgets. This impact extended to those in paid employment who needed to help others. The lack of food security contributes to a cycle of poverty that limits career and training opportunities. The high cost of food impacts people's capacity to pay for other essential items such as rent, power and transport. The direct impact on health was also recognised with people having to opt for cheaper, lower-quality processed food out of necessity. Mental health was also impacted by chronic food insecurity.

"Most people don't have meaningful jobs, they don't have qualifications so with that most people are on JobSeeker...It's very basic money and then having to buy food, two bags of food would be $150. That's a lot so you can only get the basics."

The creation of economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to support food security, income, and overall health outcomes was a common theme. Participants emphasised that addressing this Pillar requires an approach that combines immediate relief measures with systemic changes to improve economic stability and access to essential services. It was recommended this could be achieved through culturally-relevant employment and training opportunities; supporting local in-community businesses; business enterprise development; and re-evaluating social security payments.

"People having their own initiatives means people can be proud of their community."

A community-led approach that creates local jobs and provides on-Country access to training and development, as well as employment opportunities, was highlighted by participants as reinforcing communities' strength and resilience and improving food security.

Participants encouraged strengthening local economies through remote employment programs, ensuring wage subsidies provide a 'genuine minimum wage', and promoting more opportunities for locals rather than outsourcing to workers from other regions. It was also noted that limited local employment forces reliance on welfare. Participants noted the current amount of welfare payments, including the Remote Area Allowance, is insufficient and should be re-evaluated to meet the cost of living in remote areas.

It was heard across the consultations that solutions to food insecurity need to be sustainable and community-led to ensure initiatives are tailored to meet local needs and leverage existing community strengths. Opportunities identified include local food production systems to create job opportunities, on-Country programs and community gardens featuring traditional foods. However, it was raised that government support would be necessary to secure resources to implement these initiatives, including land, water, infrastructure and training. The need for flexible and sustained government funding to support local food enterprises was also noted which highlighted that support had largely been ad hoc in the past.

Case Study — Community controlled economic development

The Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency was established in the NT to overcome previously failed approaches to economic development on Aboriginal land without Aboriginal communities leading these efforts.

The agency works with Traditional Owners and Land Councils under the Land Rights Act to develop economic opportunities – predominately agricultural projects at commercial scale – on Aboriginal land with community involvement and employment opportunities. A core component of this work is Centrefarm and their work with Aboriginal communities in Central Australia. These projects aim to build economic opportunities through commercial farming on Aboriginal land, while also developing training and employment opportunities for local communities.

Alekarenge Work Experience Pathway Project (WEPP) was established by Alekarenge Horticulture and Centrefarm in 2020 to provide employment and horticulture training opportunities. In 2023, the project planted a 1.5-acre garlic plot involving local employment. While a labour-intensive crop, the test crop in 2024 was a success and will be sold into local markets and supermarkets with the lessons to be used for a larger crop in coming years.

Next steps

At the time of the development of the Strategy, there was no policy or governing structure to address food security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas of Australia, at either Commonwealth, or state and territory levels.

The lack of coordinated decision-making across governments meant limited opportunities for community voices to influence policy approaches and service design. There remain significant data gaps – there is no reliable, relevant and consistent information about the rate and impact of food insecurity in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This hinders the ability to understand, monitor and effectively address the issue.

Recommendations from previous inquiries and reviews identified opportunities for increased cooperation and involvement from communities and ACCOs. Similarly, the Productivity Commission's 2024 Closing the Gap review indicates that most jurisdictional governments are adhering to business-as-usual policy and program approaches, rather than implementing the systemic changes required through the Four Priority Reforms of the National Agreement.[83]

The Strategy proposes an overarching governance body to ensure the approach of governments is transparent, effectively coordinated and includes the voices of those communities most impacted by issues of food security.

The proposed governance body is based on the model utilised for development of the Strategy itself. It will be comprised of Commonwealth and jurisdictional government representatives, as well as representation from the ACCO sector across NT, SA, Qld, WA and NSW, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health peaks.

Community consultations held during the development of the Strategy identified several elements to ensure legitimacy of this body for remote communities. These elements include:

- Principles of partnership
- Coordination
- Knowledge sharing
- Measurable actions
- Reporting
- Accountability, and
- Transparency.

The governance group will embed a mechanism to ensure the inclusion of community voices and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership at the core of decision-making, in line with Priority Reforms One and Priority Reform Three of the National Agreement.

The Strategy Governance Group will serve as a coordinating body for food security nationally and will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the development and implementation of rolling Action Plans to achieve the Strategy goals. Action plans will be refreshed every three years across the life of the Strategy; the first Action Plan running from 2025–2028.
- Development of guidelines and funding rules for the implementation of any flexible funding mechanism aligned with the Four Priority Reforms of the National Agreement. The Strategy principles of equity and self-determination (see below) will be central to the development and implementation of the funding mechanism.
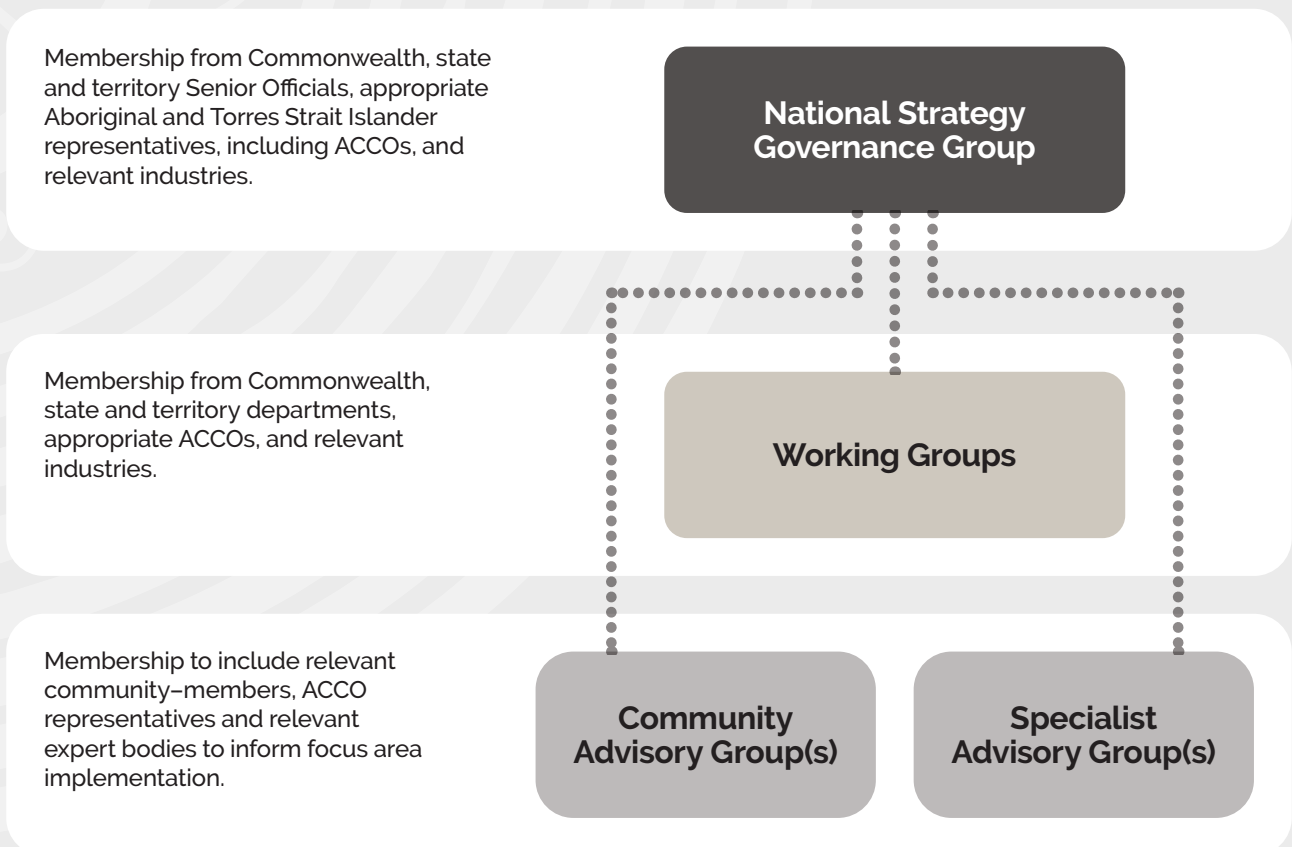
- Development and mplementation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Strategy. Evaluation is critical to ensure that the actions are achieving their stated goals and making a difference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families in remote communities.

- Ensuring the needs and solutions identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are prioritised in delivery of the Strategy in alignment with the principle of self-determination and Priority Reform One of the National Agreement.

- Coordination across governments and industry to ensure initiatives to address food security are effective and leverage work already being undertaken, and that there are improvements in policy alignment and implementation. To ensure this, the body will be supported by central agencies, including the NIAA.

The Working Group(s) will include officer-level representatives from governance group members and will be directed by the Governance Group.

The Community Advisory Group(s) will include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives with lived experience of food insecurity who have been nominated by their communities or an organisation. This group will provide important insights and approaches to ensure initiatives will have impact at the community level. Representatives may be part of existing regional or community bodies or organisations working to address food security concerns.

The Specialist Advisory Group(s) will include subject matter experts such as industry representatives, researchers and others who can provide technical and other relevant advice across the breadth of the Strategy. This group will not be static, but will change and grow as the need for technical advice is identified by the governance group.

Figure 9: Governance group structure and relationship with working and advisory groups

Membership from Commonwealth, state and territory Senior Officials, appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, including ACCOs, and relevant industries.

National Strategy Governance Group

Membership from Commonwealth, state and territory departments, appropriate ACCOs, and relevant industries.

Working Groups

Membership to include relevant community–members, ACCO representatives and relevant expert bodies to inform focus area implementation.

Community Advisory Group(s)

Specialist Advisory Group(s)

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Appendix A

List of previous Commonwealth, state government and community-controlled strategies and reviews

Title and date	Government/ACCO	Summary
Health and Nutrition Strategy	**ALPA**	This is a multifaceted strategy, developed by the ALPA Board of Directors and ALPA Nutritionists to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities. The strategy was first launched in the early 1980s, initiating a 100% freight subsidy on selected fresh fruit and vegetables – a policy that remains in place today. The objectives of the strategy are to: • Increase the availability of nutritious food and drinks • Increase the affordability of nutritious food and drinks • Support customers to make healthy food and drink choices • Increase awareness and understanding of health and nutrition.
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2000–2010	**Commonwealth Government**	Outlines seven action areas (with 'first phase activities' in each area): • Food supply in remote and rural communities • Food security and socio-economic status • Family focused nutrition promotion, resourcing programs, disseminating and communicating 'good practice' • Nutrition issues in urban areas • The environment and household infrastructure • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce • National food and nutrition information systems.

Title and date	Government/ACCO	Summary
Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy (2002)	**Mai Wiru**	The project aims to improve the health and wellbeing of Anangu tjuta (all Aboriginal people living on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands) by ensuring continuous access to safe, nutritious and affordable food as well as essential health items through community stores. Mai Wiru translates as 'good food' in Pitjantjatjara. As well as providing access to healthy, affordable food and adequate refrigeration, the Mai Wiru policy ensures stores support health promotion and nutrition programs and the employment and training of Anangu workers under appropriate wages.
Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (2009)	**Commonwealth Government**	Made several recommendations aimed at improving fresh and healthy food availability and achieving better nutrition policies in community stores. Also recommended the development of local food production through market gardens, improving the governance and licensing of community stores, and improving the infrastructure and supply chains for community stores.
National Strategy for food security in remote Indigenous communities 2009–2012	**Council of Australian Governments**	This strategy aimed to improve food security among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities through sustained, coordinated action around food supply and nutritious food consumption. The strategy had five key actions: • National standards for stores and takeaway shops • National quality improvement scheme to implement these standards • Stores' incorporation under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act • National healthy-eating action plan • National workforce action plan.
Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012	**Commonwealth Government**	Implemented a measure providing for a community store licensing scheme to operate for a 10-year period to provide food security for Aboriginal communities.

Title and date	Government/ACCO	Summary
Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities (2014)	**ANAO**	The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's implementation of food security initiatives for remote Indigenous communities. It made four recommendations: • Review National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities 2009–12 • Review licensing requirements • Improve performance measurement for the Community Stores Licensing Scheme • Consider grant assessment processes for food security grants.
Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities (2020)	**Commonwealth Government**	This inquiry investigated: • Licensing requirements and governance arrangements for remote community stores • Food prices in remote stores in comparison with those in other stores and centres • Access to affordable and healthy food by remote communities • The role of food and grocery manufacturers and suppliers in improving the supply of food to remote stores • The effectiveness of current Federal and State laws to provide oversight and combat price gouging. Key findings included that there was no evidence of systemic price-gouging, despite high overall prices. Prices appeared to be reflective of genuine operating costs. The committee made 16 recommendations, including the development of a strategy for food security and nutrition for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031	**Commonwealth Government**	Developed in full and genuine partnership, the Health Plan identifies food security as a human right and highlights improving food security as a key objective under Priority 7: Healthy environments, sustainability and preparedness.

Title and date	Government/ACCO	Summary
Food Summit Report: Food Security in the Northern Territory (2021)	**AMSANT**	AMSANT undertook a two-year project inclusive of a NT Remote food summit that sought to develop tangible solutions to high levels of food insecurity and nutrition-related conditions in very remote communities. Key recommendations of the Summit included: • Appointing a Board for all stores, as well as developing and providing governance training to all store Boards • Reviewing the Remote Area Allowance (RAA) to ensure people have the income needed to be able to afford food. • Improving maintenance and repair of houses (with an environmental health workforce), as well as adopting culturally appropriate housing designs to ensure people can store, prepare, and cook food. • Investing long-term in traditional and non-traditional local food production • Increasing store capacity, including expansion of the NT store licensing scheme, benchmarking and funding to upgrade stores, thereby ensuring increased availability and affordability of healthy food • Conducting a study to determine how to effectively provide a healthy food subsidy • Improving the efficiency and resilience of supply chains.
House Standing Committee on Agriculture Inquiry into food security in Australia (2022)	**Commonwealth Government**	This inquiry investigated: • National production, consumption and export of food • Access to key inputs such as fuel, fertiliser and labour, and their impact on production costs • The impact of supply chain distribution on the cost and availability of food • The potential opportunities and threats of climate change on food production in Australia. The committee made 35 recommendations, including the key recommendation for the formulation of a comprehensive National Food Plan.

Appendix A continued

Title and date	Government/ACCO	Summary
Legislative Assembly committee on Environment and Planning, <u>Food production and supply in NSW inquiry</u> (2022)	**New South Wales Government**	The inquiry is investigating: • Improving food security • Equitable access to food • Reducing food waste and destruction • Technologies to bring food production into cities • Ways to preserve productive land and water resources • How food production impacts the environment. The Committee will also consider Indigenous food and land management practices; workforce challenges and skills development; developing the food industry as an export; and implications for quality control and labelling of processed/manufactured food.

Title and date	Government/ACCO	Summary
NT Remote Stores Program (2023)	**Northern Territory Government**	The NT Remote Stores Program was implemented after the sunset of the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012 (Cth), which ceased on 17 July 2022. The NT's legislative outcomes are to promote and enhance the: • Security of access to food, drink and grocery items for residents of remote Aboriginal communities • The viable operation of food businesses carried out by stores servicing remote Aboriginal communities.
Gather + Grow 2023–2032	**Queensland Government**	Qld has developed an extensive strategy and action plan to address food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within its jurisdiction. The strategy covers four key areas: • Improve supply chain performance, resilience and logistics with an emphasis on data and evidence. • Improve access to healthy food through creating supportive settings for local food production, including the protection of Indigenous knowledge/intellectual property. • Empower communities to eat well by building awareness, capability and environments for good nutrition. • Supporting healthy homes that enable preparation and cooking of healthy food.
Inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty (2023)	**Western Australian Government**	A WA parliamentary review of food security in children and young people assessed high levels of food security in remote communities and recommended the establishment of food hubs in remote and rural areas as a way to improve access and distribution of foods. The inquiry also recommended the establishment of a school lunch program.
South Australian Food Security Strategy (under development)	**South Australian Government**	SA is developing a strategy to address food insecurity across the whole population, having undertaken an extensive literature review.

Definitions

Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities referred to in the Strategy align with the definition of a discrete community included in the National Agreement (Targets 9a and 9b). The National Agreement uses the ABS definition "a discrete community is a geographic location, bounded by physical or legal boundaries, which is inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (greater than 50 per cent of usual residents) by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people".[84]

Remote used throughout the Strategy is loosely defined as areas that are classified as remote or very remote areas in the Australian Statistical Geography Standard. However, flexibility in the remoteness definition is required to allow for local diversity and tailored implementation where actions make sense. A rigid, universal definition is not suited to the remote food security objectives of the Strategy.

Remote Community Store

The Strategy defines a business that sells food, drink and grocery items to be a remote community store if:

a) the store is in, or services, a remote or very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as defined by the Strategy; and

b) the store is a significant source of food, drink and/or grocery items for residents of one or more of these communities or areas.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation

The Strategy defines Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation in line with Clause 44 of the National Agreement.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations deliver services, including land and resource management, that builds the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people and is:

• Incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit

• Controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

• Connected to the community, or communities, in which they deliver the services

• Governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body.

Abbreviations

ACCO	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisation
ALPA	Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation
AMSANT	Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
CEQ	Community Enterprise Queensland
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
FSWG	Food Security Working Group
NATSIHS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
HORSCIA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
MIRATJ	Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
ORIC	Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
QLD	Queensland
RAA	Remote Area Allowance
SA	South Australia
SEWB	Social Emotional Wellbeing
SFNT	Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act
UPK	Uwankara Palyanku Kanyintjaku
WA	Western Australia
WEPP	Work Experience Pathway Project
YAMAGIGU	Yamagigu Consulting

Australian Government

National Indigenous
Australians Agency