

pakana kipli nayri—Aborigines eat well

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Over the past five or six years there have huge changes in how the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre has promoted healthy eating in the community. Most of the changes relate to the food we provide to community at functions, events and meetings. In 2001 when we provided Kentucky Fried Chicken as lunch at our AGM, no-one blinked an eye. After all this is what we did most years, it was easy to order, everyone liked it and it was reasonably cheap. And all we had to do was make a phone call and open the door when it arrived. If we ordered pizza, it was the same: tasty, reasonably priced and everyone ate it up with gusto.

Over the past 6 years though, there has been a complete change in our approach and over the past few years there has not been an unhealthy meal in sight at any event the TAC runs. And the community are still loving it. We will outline the processes we went through to change the unhealthy eating habits of many of our community and will highlight where we need to do more.

We have developed a nutrition policy that was approved by our governing committee to guide our work, we have developed a good relationship with the state Community Nutrition Unit who supports our nutrition work, one of our Aboriginal Health Workers has nutrition (as well as physical activity and quit smoking) as the primary focus of her work, and from our pregnancy support programs to our aged care programs we always provide healthy food and drinks. We involve the community in the whole process, from choosing the recipes, buying the food, preparing it and cleaning up. And more recently we have employed a nutritionist and are of course expanding the range of community nutrition programs we offer. We have developed a Nutrition Action Plan for the next 2–5 years after consulting with the community and other TAC staff.

We strongly promote the link between healthy eating, physical exercise and smoking cessation. Staff in all our programs from pregnancy support to aged care promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles. We show that not only do we support the community to live healthy lifestyles but, as staff of the Aboriginal Health Service, we love to do so ourselves. Our challenge is to get this cultural shift of focusing more on healthy lifestyles happening as strongly out of the Hobart area and into the north and north-western regions of the state. But we have ideas for that too and we will outline those.