

Stocking healthier choices in remote Indigenous stores and takeaways as part of the RIST Project

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The poor health and nutritional status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including extreme rates of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and renal disease have been widely documented.¹ The links between poverty, food security and obesity are also clear. Given this and the fact that almost half of Indigenous Australians live in remote Australia, the Heart Foundation has conducted an investigation into this area of the food supply.

This project investigated the food supply chain to remote Indigenous stores and takeaways. The aim was to identify and evaluate strategies to support the stocking of healthier choices. Remote stores provide a vital service supplying more than 95% of the food eaten in the community. However they face unique challenges due to isolation and economies of scale that influence the foods they stock.

The food supply chain was mapped in the jurisdictions of the Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) Project (WA, SA, NSW, QLD and NT) from store to distributor to the manufacturer. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at each stage along the supply chain. The source of food distribution was identified and the purchasing practices of the distributors were explored. The relationship between food distributors and food manufacturers was also determined.

A key component of the project was the development of the Heart Foundation's *Buyer's Guide for Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways*. This buyer's guide offers a listing of recommended branded products supporting the RIST *Food Variety Guidelines*.

Broader sustainable strategies to support the stocking of healthier choices in remote stores and takeaways were also identified considering the influence of other key stakeholders in the supply chain and supporting environments. Examples of such strategies included engaging distributors in promotional work and further collaboration with food manufacturers to modify products.

¹ Webb KL & Leeder SR (2007) New Year's resolution: let's get rid of excessive food prices in remote Australia. *MJA*.186:1;7-8.