



Indigenous Allied Health Australia



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Health groups: Closing the gap needs urgent action to overcome food insecurity

The health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is set to widen unless urgent action is taken to address availability and affordability of nutritious food among Indigenous communities, leading health organisations have warned.

A coalition of organisations will release their blueprint for improving food security at Parliament House in Canberra today.

The coalition is comprised of Australian Red Cross, Dietitians Association of Australia, Indigenous Allied Health Australia, National Heart Foundation of Australia, Public Health Association of Australia and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

These organisations have been working on the issue of food security over the years through workforce training and development, remote food supply, research, delivering food and nutrition programs across Australia, and advocating for change.

But they're calling for further collaboration to bring greater national attention to the issue and want a coordinated response to enable effective action.

Their blueprint calls for sustained action and leadership from all levels of government and non-government organisations towards food and nutrition security, based on approaches that work and have been developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Latest figures show around one in four (23%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in a household that, over a 12-month period, had run out of food and could not afford to buy more – a figure six times higher than non-Indigenous Australians<sup>1</sup>.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households have, on average, a weekly gross income which is \$250 less than that of non-Indigenous households<sup>2</sup>, with as much as 80 per cent of the family income used up in buying the foods needed for a healthy diet<sup>3,4</sup>.

The organisations want food and nutrition security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be front and centre in the country's National Nutrition Policy, and in rolling out the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan.

In addition, the policy statement calls for:

- Australia to sign up to the policy recommendations outlined in the World Health Organisation's Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008) to address the underlying barriers to food security in Australia, such as housing and income.
- Training and job opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work with their local communities on improving food security and closing Australia's food and nutrition gap.
- Ongoing monitoring of the availability, affordability, accessibility and acceptability of healthy food, with this tracked and evaluated against food security policy actions.

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food security is shaped by complex and interrelated factors. There is no quick fix here, a strong plan addressing the underlying complexity is one important step,' said Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia.

Australian Red Cross CEO Judy Slatyer said: 'There should not be a single Australian who is unable to access or buy adequate food, but the reality is that there is great inequality in who can access healthy food and who can't. There are many reasons - poverty, low income, and poor housing, including a lack of the basics needed to store and prepare food. Addressing these issues would certainly make having a healthy diet more accessible.'

'Solutions that address social and cultural factors that are made and rolled out together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are crucial to improving food security and achieving health equality,' said Donna Murray, CEO of Indigenous Allied Health Australia.

'Improving availability and affordability of healthy food for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families could counter the current situation where 41 per cent of daily energy (kilojoule) intake comes from 'discretionary' foods, such as take-away and convenience foods, which are seen as more affordable and filling,' said Claire Hewat, CEO of the Dietitians Association of Australia.

Daniel James from the National Heart Foundation of Australia said improving food security would have far-reaching and long-lasting effects in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing outcomes.

'Reducing hunger and malnutrition within some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by improving food security, will help stop crippling rates of preventable diseases like heart disease, kidney disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes,' said Mr James.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people live an average of ten years less than other Australians, despite improvements in some areas of Indigenous health.

The coalition of organisations stress that improved food security among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is critical to Australia 'closing the gap' in chronic diseases and life expectancy with non-Indigenous Australians.

**ENDS**

**Policy launch:**

The policy will be launched at Parliament House (Senate Alcove) in Canberra on Tuesday 29 November, 12-1pm. More information on the launch from Danielle Dalla, [ddalla@phaa.net.au](mailto:ddalla@phaa.net.au)

**Media interviews:**

Australian Red Cross: Spokesperson – Judy Slatyer. Media contact – Alice Crowley on 0400 942 861.

Dietitians Association of Australia: Spokesperson - Claire Hewat. Media contact – Felicity Curtain on 0409 661 920.

Indigenous Allied Health Australia: Spokesperson – Donna Murray on (02) 6285 1010.

National Heart Foundation of Australia: Spokesperson – Daniel James. Media contact – Sofia Dedes on 0478 483 777.

Public Health Association of Australia: Spokesperson – Michael Moore on 0417 249 731.

## Background

[Joint Policy Statement: Food Security for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples](#)

[Background paper: Supporting document for the Joint Policy Statement on Food Security for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples](#)

The following statement was developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait People from a series of workshops held within remote communities in 2010, drawing on insights and using the definition of food security:

‘The land and the sea is our food security. It is our right. Food security for us has two parts: Food security is when the food from our ancestors is protected and always there for us and our children. It is also when we can easily access and afford the right non-traditional food for a collective healthy 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.’

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: Nutrition Results - Food and Nutrients, 2012-13; 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 2015. Canberra: AIHW; 2015. Report No.: Cat. no.: IHW 147.

<sup>3</sup> Northern Territory Department of Health. Northern Territory Market Basket Survey 2014. Casuarina: Department of Health; 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Lee A, Rainow S, Tregenza J, Tregenza L, Balmer L, Bryce S, et al. Nutrition in remote Aboriginal communities: lessons from Mai Wiru and the Anangy Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2015;40(S1):7.