Catchment Area Assessment of the Food Environment for Developing a Coordinated and Targeted Food Access Strategy

People who have physical access to nutritious foods are more likely to consume a healthy diet and less likely to be obese. The availability and cost of nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables are widely accepted as factors which influence eating habits. One of the fundamental principles of public health is the importance of partnerships and their role in creating environments that allow for healthy communities. Influencing a local food environment requires a multifaceted, multi-sectorial approach, approached with a systemic lens. Local governments are being increasingly recognised for their role in effecting change to a local food system, whilst working in partnership with the traditional health sector.

Victorian Healthy Food Basket Survey

Independent supermarkets (n = 62) using the Victorian Healthy Food Basket (VHFB) tool.

- Wide variation of food price across the catchment.
- Some disadvantaged areas within the catchment had the highest price for a standard food basket.
- Independent supermarkets were less likely to stock all the necessary items compared to the major chains.
- For families relying on government assistance to support living costs, a significant proportion of income was required to purchase a VHFB.
- Approximately 30% of income was required for all family types to purchase a VHFB, with the exception of elderly pensioners who would only need to expend between 12% and 16% of their income.
- The data indicates that most family types are likely to be placed under financial stress in order to purchase a nutritious diet.

GIS mapping

GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping can be used to gain a better understanding of the distribution of different type of food outlets.

GIS maps demonstrated the High proportion of discretionary food outlets compared to fresh food outlets and the spaces across the catchment with black holes—or no access to any food outlets. When visualising the food outlets in one of the local government areas, categorised as either fresh or discretionary, it is striking to note the disproportionately high availability of discretionary food (see figure below).

While the classification of restaurants and cafés as discretionary may not accurately reflect the availability of fresh healthy menu items in some businesses, it indicates a greater availability of unhealthy items.

Food Supply and Demand Project

Undertaken to identify evidence-based, inter-sectorial and multi-strategy intervention options to address the barriers to food security in the EMR.

Future local research to identify the impacts of the current food system on food security within the EMR

Food access initiatives :
- Moving away from emergency food relief to long term, systemic change approaches
- Various ways for local councils to improve on current strengths and address key challenges, such as:
  - Increased commitment by councils
  - Strengthened regional leadership

Access to Healthy Food Survey

Survey conducted to understand the types of services and organisations that promote food access.

A range of charitable, faith and community organisations responded to the surveys, who largely receive financial and food donations to support people in the community that need meals.

Many organisations outlined that they would benefit form being involved in food access directory to support people to access their services.

Organisations outlined that:
"they support disadvantaged and marginalised people to support themselves" And the main reason people need support is reason is because they "lack of adequate income to make ends meet and cope with the growing cost of living".

Food Purchasing Study

Research project conducted Dr Lukar Thornton (Deakin University) assessing food purchasing behaviour across the catchment.

Develop a stronger sense of what factors are important to food choice amongst the local communities.

Develop a stronger sense of the environmental facilitators and barriers to healthy eating in the local community— don't just assume this is a straight forward as having a food store nearby.

Environmental interventions should be tailored to community needs — not a one size fits all approach.

Study Findings and recommendations are currently been outlined in a report that will be used to develop a coordinated food access strategy with specific interventions targeting vulnerable communities/settings.

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Discretionary food map (%)

1. Restaurant/cafe
2. Take away
3. Bakery
4. Convenience store
5. Supermarket
6. Retail butcher shop
7. Delicatessen
8. Greengrocer
9. Other

1. Boroondara
2. Manningham
3. Whitehorse
4. Monash

References: Larson NI, Story MT, Nelson MC. Neighborhood environments: disparities in access to healthy food in the US. American journal of preventive medicine. 2009;36(1):74-81. e10. Palemo C. The cost of nutritious food: a determinant of health. Nutrition & Dietetics. 2011;68(4):246-7. Palermo C, Wilson A. Development of a healthy food basket for Victoria. Australian and New Zealand journal of public health. 2007;31(4):360-3. Convenience stores Graham SR, Carlton C, Gaede D, Jamison B. The benefits of using geographic information systems as a community assessment tool. Public Health Reports. 2011;126(2):298.