



Diet cost and affordability in Queensland

A summary report of findings from 2023 and 2024



Introduction

Health and Wellbeing Queensland is Queensland’s prevention agency. We work closely with the Queensland Health system, government, communities, and other sectors to improve the environments where people live, learn, work, play, and age – helping to create a healthier Queensland.

Improving food security is a priority for Health and Wellbeing Queensland. Food security is when all people at all times have physical and economic access to the food that they need to live a healthy and active life. Access to affordable, quality and healthy food is key to preventing chronic disease (such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease) and addressing health inequity. In remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, factors such as geographical isolation, housing issues, limited economic opportunities, harsh climate, as well as long and complex supply chains make it harder to access healthy food, which impacts health and wellbeing. Health and Wellbeing Queensland is addressing this through Gather + Grow, a program focused on improving food security in Far North Queensland and the Lower Gulf.

During cross-sector consultation on food security in remote Queensland, stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, identified diet affordability as major concerns. In Queensland, these important factors have not been tracked recently, particularly in remote regions.

In response, Health and Wellbeing Queensland developed the Diet Affordability Monitoring project to investigate two related metrics:



Diet cost

\$ per fortnight of food/drinks



Diet affordability

Diet cost as a percentage of household income
e.g. X% of household income required to purchase the diet

The project provides insight into diet-related cost-of-living pressures across Queensland, highlights areas at greatest food security risk and can be used to guide solutions.

The aims of the project are to:

- > Collect and collate data and evidence about the economic accessibility of healthy and usual (proxy, less healthy) diets.
- > Share information with community and other stakeholders to facilitate health advocacy and decision making
- > Inform future strategies and actions to address inequity in diet affordability across Queensland.
- > Develop an on-going mechanism to measure diet affordability over time and monitor change.

This project and its findings are not a measure of remote stores or any food/drink outlet performance. The factors influencing food/drink prices are complex, varied and often outside of the control of food/drink outlets in remote communities. This data is for monitoring purposes and is intended to raise awareness of the broader challenges influencing food affordability.

The project is supported by a research study, on which, further information will be made available in due course. The purpose of this report is to share an early summary of the results for 2023 and 2024 with stakeholders and communities. Further results from the research study (including region-level data) will be published at a later date.

What we did

Diet cost was monitored over two years (2023 and 2024) in 35 communities across six Queensland regions:

Non-remote (Urban)	Non-remote (Regional)	Remote
Brisbane	Cairns	Cape York (CY) Lower Gulf (LG) Inner Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Areas (TSI/NPA) Outer Torres Strait Islands (OTSI)

Data were collected and analysed using an evidence-based tool - [the Healthy Diets Australian Standardised Affordability and Pricing \(Healthy Diets ASAP\) protocol](#). Data were collected between

September and December of 2023 and 2024. Data were collected by visiting community food/drink outlets in person, partnering with store groups and collecting data online.

Data were then analysed to calculate the fortnightly cost of two diets:

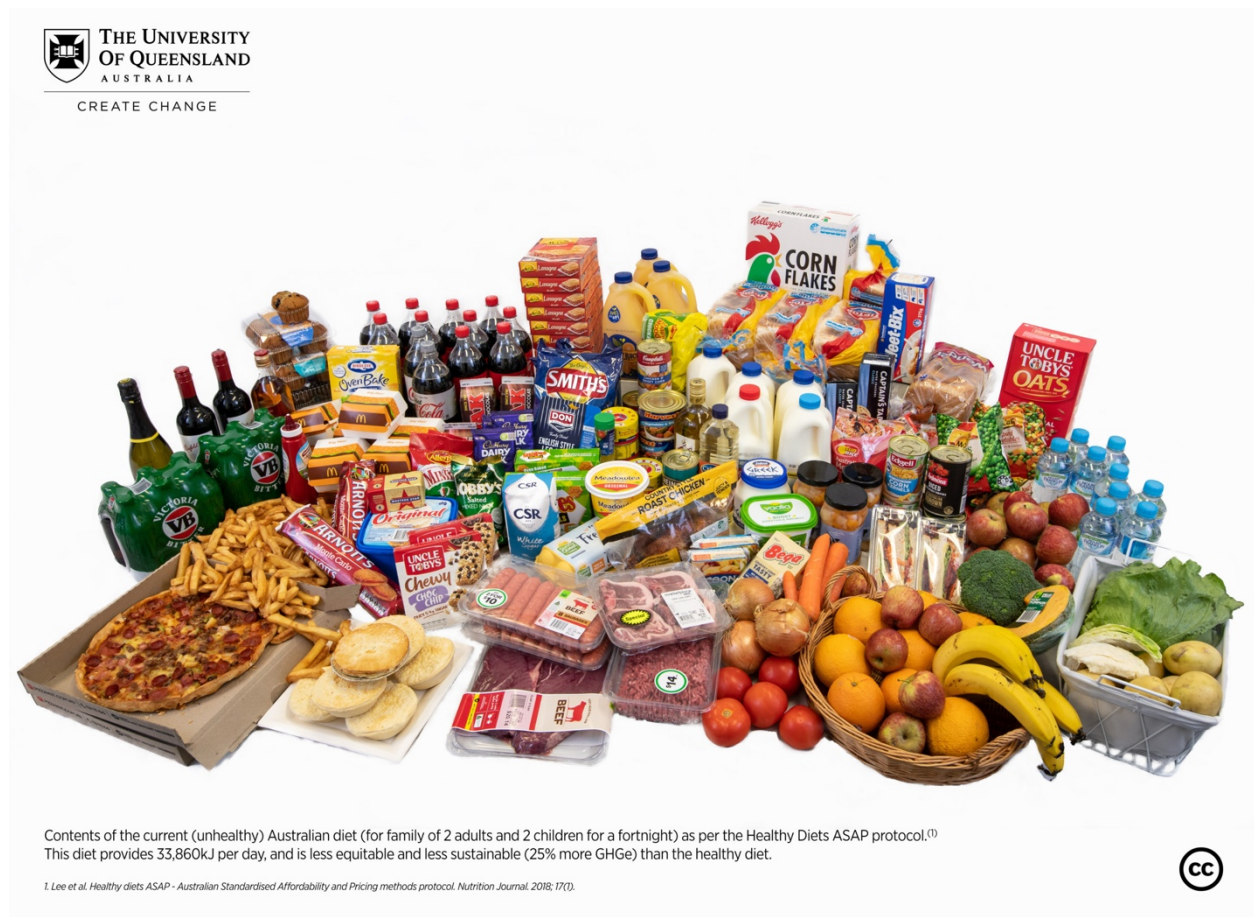
1. A healthy diet

Based on the Australian Dietary Guidelines



2. A usual (proxy) diet

Based on 'usual' dietary practices identified by the 2011-2013 National Health Survey. It reflects a less healthy diet as most Australians are not meeting the Australian Dietary Guidelines.



The diet cost and affordability were calculated relative to a six-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander multi-generation household (i.e. older people, adults and children). This household type was selected because large households are at increased risk of food security and this household structure was considered the most representative of the remote communities included in this study.

Diet affordability results were compared to two well-accepted benchmarks:

- **Food stress:** when the diet cost is >25% of household income, and,
- **Food is unaffordable:** when the diet cost is >30% of household income.

Further information on methodology is available upon request.

What we found

Diet cost was monitored over two years (2023 and 2024) in 35 communities across six Queensland regions:

Key messages

- > In 2023, diets cost more in remote Far North Queensland compared to non-remote areas.
- > In 2024, healthy diets became cheaper in remote Far North Queensland and cost similar between remote and non-remote Queensland regions.
- > Despite improvements in diet cost, across Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households are likely to be experiencing food stress.
- > Healthy diets cost less than the usual (proxy, less healthy) diet which includes alcohol and takeaway food.

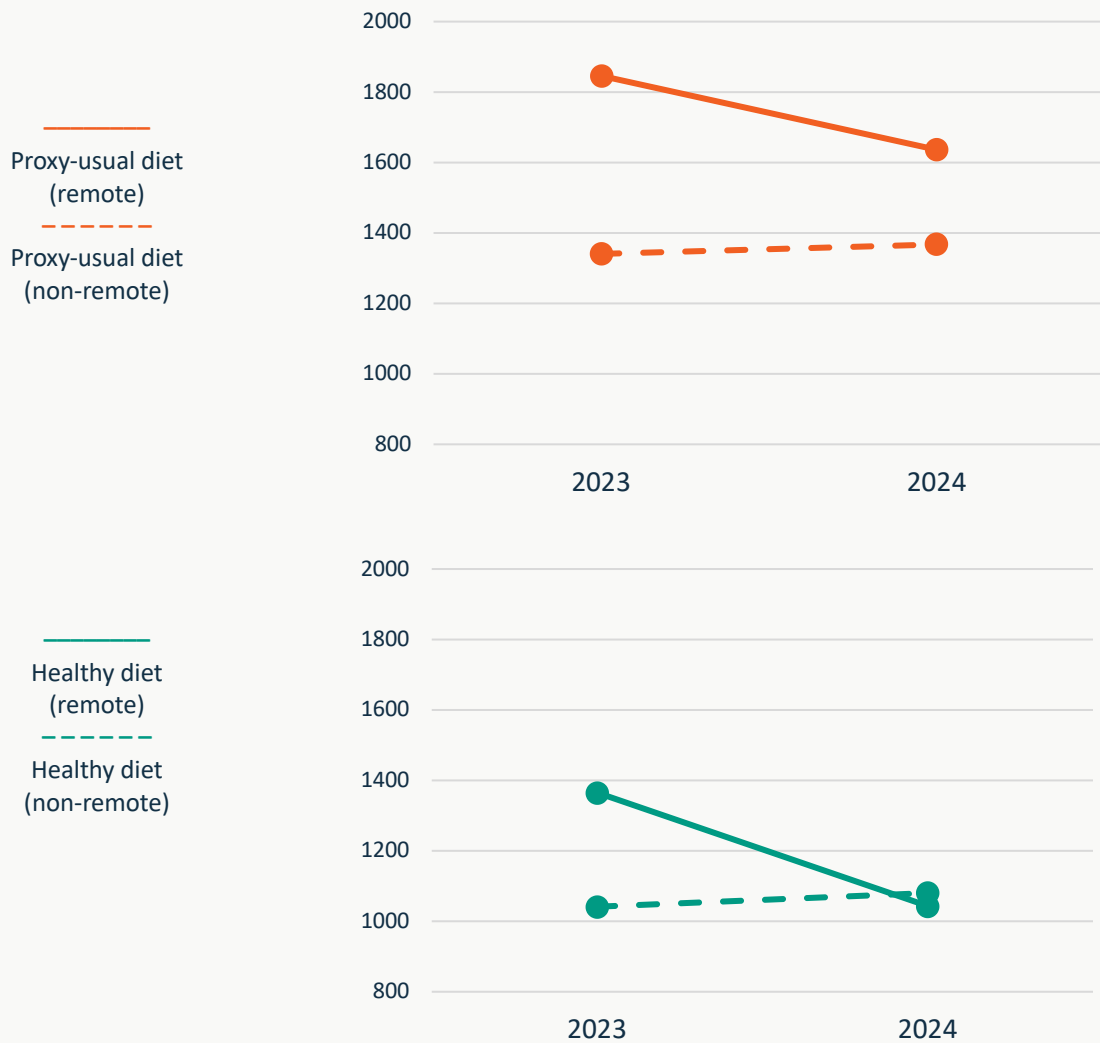
Across Queensland, a six-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household is likely to be experiencing food stress (no matter where in Queensland they live or what diet they consume).

These households could save over \$500 per fortnight by not purchasing unhealthy items like takeaway and alcohol. A healthy diet was, on average, 30% cheaper than the less healthy diet.

In the first year of data collection (2023), healthy diets were, on average, one third more expensive in remote Far North Queensland compared to non-remote regions. In 2024, healthy diets became significantly cheaper (24% cheaper) in remote regions. The same diet did not significantly change in cost in non-remote Queensland regions. As a result, healthy diets cost approximately the same in remote Far North and non-remote Queensland areas in 2024.

In 2024, the Queensland Government introduced the Remote Communities Freight Assistance Scheme (RCFAS). The RCFAS applied a 20% discount on essential goods (including groceries) in participating remote Far North Queensland stores. The discount was not applied in non-remote regions (i.e. Brisbane and Cairns) and was not applied in 2023.

Diet cost for a six-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household



Things to be aware of:

- > Findings are specific to a six-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reference household only.
- > The usual (proxy) diet is taken from data that is over 10 years old. However, this is expected to be updated in 2026 with recently released, updated data.
- > A healthy diet requires additional resources including (but not limited to):
 - functional hardware in the home (e.g. working cooktop, refrigeration and reliable, acceptable water supply), and,
 - knowledge and skills for meal planning, budgeting and cooking.These additional factors are not included in this report but are essential for families to consume a healthy diet.
- > The diets under investigation are hypothetical constructions suitable for comparison across regions and time. They may not reflect the actual purchasing behaviours of families.
- > The diets under investigation are comprised of standard branded food/drink items and do not include cheaper generic or home-brand products.

Why are these findings important?

- Findings are consistent with previous literature, confirming healthy diets are cheaper than the usual (proxy) diet in Queensland.
- Diet cost and affordability are significant factors of food security. However, there are many other influencing factors of food security that also need to be addressed. For example, food quality and availability.
- Disparities in diet cost between non-remote and remote locations are driven by a variety of complex factors (including inequities such as income, long and complex supply chains and geographic isolation). Addressing these challenges requires a strategic response involving multiple sectors (for example, government and non-government organisations working together). Gather + Grow is one mechanism to co-ordinate systemic action in Far North Queensland. Other policy opportunities include the National Remote First Nations Food Security Strategy.
- As a monitoring project, this project generates data and evidence that can be used to inform decision making and health advocacy.
- On-going annual monitoring is recommended. To build on the project, partnership with local organisations to support data collection is required.

What's next?

Data and evidence generated through this project is being shared with cross-sector and community stakeholders to inform policy and decision making.

- Health and Wellbeing Queensland will continue to annually monitor the cost and affordability of diets across Queensland.
- Results from the 2025 wave of this project will include the addition of:
 - More Queensland regions.
 - A lowest cost option that assesses the cost of the cheapest possible healthy and usual (proxy) diet. This protocol will include generic and home-branded items.
 - An audit of Healthy Homes products that are required to safely store and prepare a healthy diet. For example, pest prevention, fridges and cleaning products. This will provide information on the price and availability of healthy home products and help to inform future data collection.
- 2025 findings are anticipated to be shared mid to late 2026.

Get in touch

If you have questions about the project or would like to partner with us, please get in touch at hwqld_gathergrow@hw.qld.gov.au

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