Diet cost and affordability in Queensland

A summary report of findings from 2025

health + wellbeing Queensland

Queensland Government

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 key 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, and 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 consultations on food security in remote Queensland, stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, identified diet affordability as a major contributor to food insecurity. In Queensland, diet cost and affordability have not previously been monitored regularly, 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 proportion of household income e.g. x% of household income required to purchase the diet)

The project outputs provide insight into diet-related cost of living pressures across Queensland, highlights the regions at greatest risk of food insecurity, 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

The project and its findings are not intended to assess the performance of remote stores or other food and drink outlets. Food and drink prices in remote communities are influenced by a range of complex factors, many of which are outside the control of individual outlets. The data is intended for monitoring purposes only and to raise awareness of the broader challenges affecting food affordability.

This report provides a summary of the 2025 results for stakeholders and communities.

What we did

Diet cost has been monitored over 3 years (2023, 2024, 2025). In 2023 and 2024, data was collected from 30 and 34 communities respectively, across 6 Queensland regions. In 2025, data was collected from 43 communities across 8 Queensland regions.

Table 1: Regions where data was collected in 2025 separated by remoteness. Number of communities per region specified in brackets.

Non-remote (Urban)	Non-remote (Regional)	Remote
Brisbane (2)	Cairns (2) Mackay and Whitsundays (1)	Cape York (CY) (13) Lower Gulf (LG) (5) Inner Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Areas (TSI/NPA) (4) Outer Torres Strait Islander (OTSI) (14) Mt Isa and surrounds (2)

Data was collected and analysed between September and December 2025 using the evidence-based Healthy Diets Australian Standardised Affordability and Pricing (Healthy Diets ASAP) protocol. Data collection involved in-person visits to community food and drink outlets, partnerships with store groups to obtain centralised data, and online collection where available.

Data was analysed to calculate the fortnightly cost of 2 diets:

- A **healthy** diet, based on the Australian Dietary Guidelines
- A **usual** (proxy, less healthy) 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.

Diet cost and affordability were calculated for a 6-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander multi-generation household, comprising of older people, adults and children. This household type was selected because large households are at greater risk of food insecurity and were considered the most representative of the remote communities included in this study[1].

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics. Far North. Commonwealth of Australia. Available online: https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/31501

Diet affordability was calculated using:

- **Median income:** based on the median household income for each local government area where data was collected, then averaged at the regional level
- **Welfare-only income:** based solely on applicable welfare payments, assuming the adults in the household were unemployed and the older person received the Age Pension

Diet affordability results were compared against 2 widely accepted benchmarks:

- **Food stress**: where diet cost is more than 25% of household income
- **Unaffordable**: where diet cost is more than 30% of household income

Results are reported in the sections below with detailed data and figures in Appendices A and B.

Further information on methodology can be found online or made available upon request.

What we found

Key messages

> Similar to 2024, the cost of a healthy diet was comparable between remote and non-remote regions

> The healthy diet cost less and was more affordable than the usual diet across all regions and income types

> In remote regions, households could save more than $450 per fortnight by purchasing in line with the healthy diet, which cost 30% less on average than the usual diet

> Between 2024 and 2025, the average fortnightly cost of the healthy diet in remote regions increased by 8% ($84.60) in stores participating in the Queensland Government Remote Freight Subsidy Scheme (RFSS), compared with 22% ($267.60) in stores not participating

> Over the same period, the cost of the usual diet in remote regions decreased by 5% ($87.20) in stores participating in the RFSS, compared with a 12% increase ($208.20) in stores not participating

> Across Queensland, a 6-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household was likely to experience food stress regardless of income type, location or diet

> Across remote Queensland, a 6-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household was likely to face unaffordable food costs regardless of income type or diet

Things to be aware of:

> Findings relate only to a 6-person Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reference household used in this study

> The usual diet is based on 2011-2013 National Health Survey data, which is now more than 10 years old. This is expected to be updated in 2026 using recently released data and will inform future iterations of the project

> The usual diet includes some relatively expensive food and drink items, including takeaway foods and alcohol

> Following a healthy diet may require additional resources that are not captured in the data collection tools, including:
- Functional household infrastructure, such as a working cooktop, refrigeration, and a reliable and safe water supply
- Knowledge and skills for meal planning, budgeting and cooking

> The diets examined in this study are hypothetical constructs designed to support comparison across regions and over time. They may not reflect the actual purchasing behaviours of families

> The diets examined are based on standard branded items and do not include lower-cost generic or home-brand alternatives

> More communities and regions were sampled in 2025 than in previous years, which affects comparability between years. However, exploratory analysis suggests the maximum variation attributable to this was likely to be between $10 and $20 per fortnight

> Although the Low-cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme was implemented by the National Indigenous Australians Agency in 2025 during the data collection period, the discount was not applied in the analysis to ensure consistency across stores

Diet cost

In 2025, the average fortnightly cost of a healthy diet was similar in remote ($1,180.28) and non-remote ($1,118.60) regions across Queensland (Figure 1a). The average cost of a usual diet was higher in remote regions ($1,668.42) than in non-remote regions ($1,438.54).

Across both remote and non-remote regions, the healthy diet remained less expensive than the usual diet, with a larger price difference observed in remote regions (Figure 1b, and Appendix B, Figure 8). Across Queensland, the average cost of the healthy diet ranged from $1,085.34 in the Northern Peninsular Area and Inner Torres Strait Islands to $1,275.44 in the Lower Gulf region outside Mt Isa (Appendix B, Figure 8).

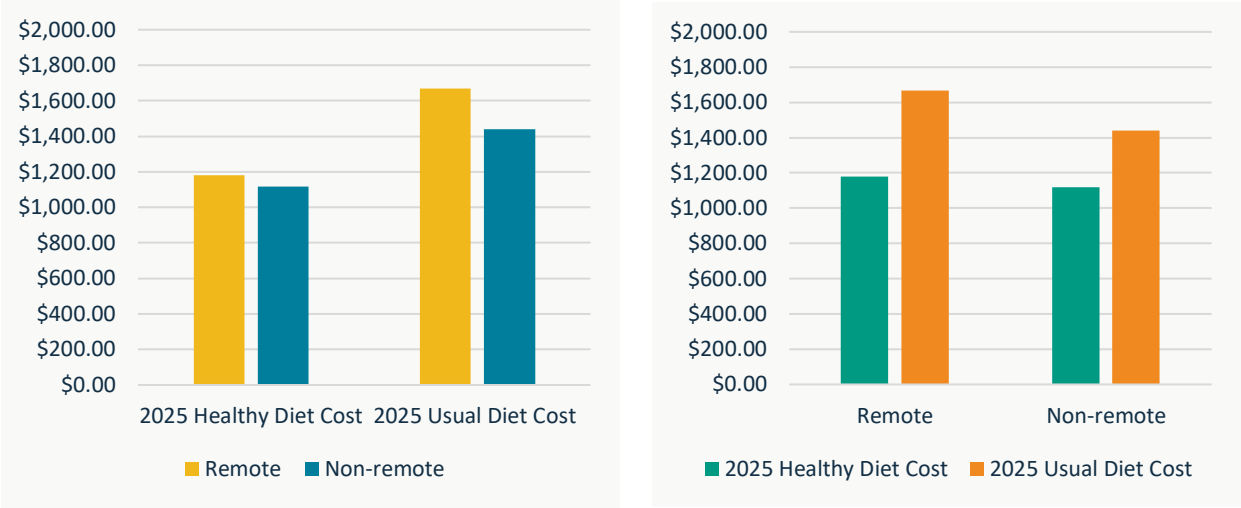


Figure 1a and 1b: Fortnightly diet cost (AUD$) of a healthy and usual diet in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland

In remote areas, the average cost of a healthy diet increased by 14.5% in 2025 compared with 2024, rising from $1,031.11 to $1,180.28. However, it remained lower than the 2023 average of $1,362.96 (Figure 2). In non-remote areas, the average cost of a healthy diet increased by 3.4%, from $1,081.58 in 2024 to $1,118.60 in 2025.

The average cost of the usual diet in remote areas was similar in 2025 and 2024 ($1,668.42 and $1,658.44, respectively). In non-remote areas, the average cost of the usual diet increased by 5.4%, from $1,364.78 in 2024 to $1,438.54 in 2025 (Figure 2).

The increase in healthy diet costs in remote regions in 2025 is likely to reflect the greater proportion of sampled stores that were not participating in the Queensland Remote Freight Subsidy in 2025 compared with 2024 (22% compared with 6%), particularly in the Cape York and Lower Gulf regions (Appendix B, Figure 9). See sub-analysis below.

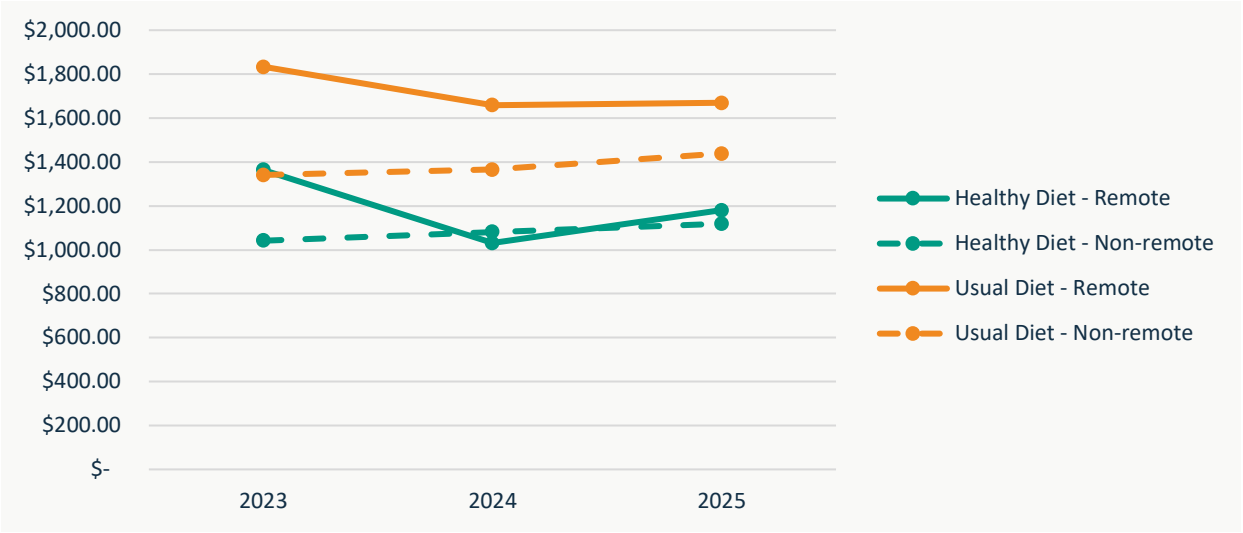


Figure 2: Fortnightly diet cost (AUD$) of a healthy and usual diet in remote (solid line) and non-remote (dashed line) regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Diet cost by Queensland Government Remote Freight Subsidy Scheme participation in remote stores

In 2024, 30 stores across 28 remote communities in Far North Queensland were participating in the Remote Freight Subsidy Scheme (RFSS), representing 94% of the remote store cohort included in this project. In 2025, 78% (36) of remote stores included in the data collection were participating in the RFSS.

From 2024 to 2025, the cost of the healthy diet in remote regions increased by 8% ($84.60) in stores participating in the RFSS, compared with 22% ($267.60) in stores not participating. Over the same period, the cost of the usual diet in remote regions decreased by 5% ($87.20) in stores participating in the RFSS, compared with a 12% increase ($208.20) in stores not participating (Figure 3).

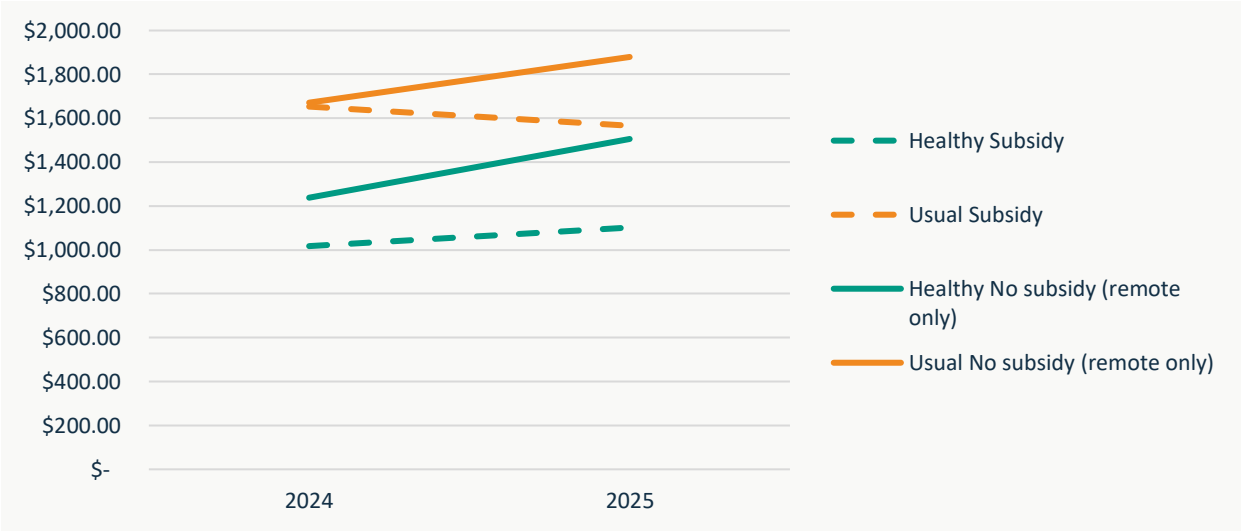


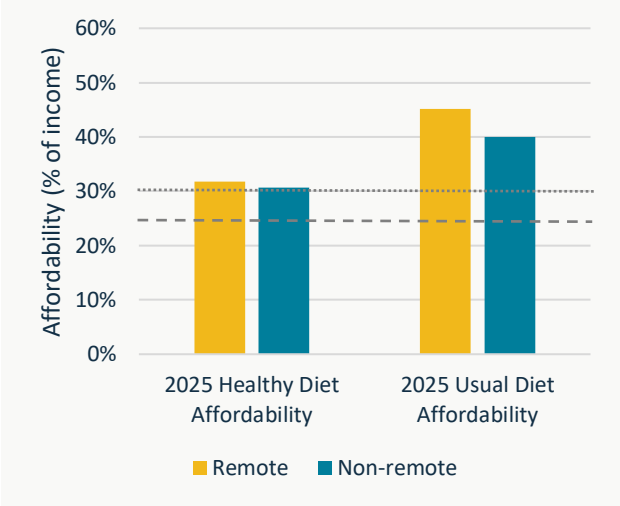
Figure 3: Fortnightly diet cost (AUD$) of a healthy and usual diet in remote stores signed up to the Queensland Government Remote Freight Subsidy Scheme (RFSS) (dashed line) compared to remote stores not signed up to the RFSS (solid line) across 2024 and 2025.

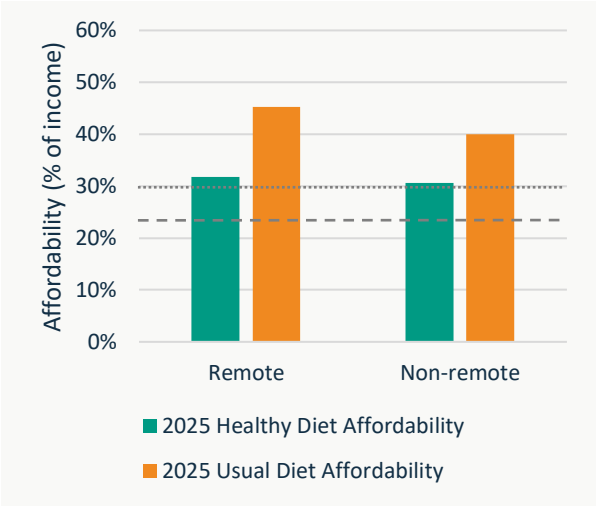
Diet affordability

Households reliant on welfare-only incomes

In 2025, the affordability of the healthy diet for households reliant on a welfare-only income was similar in remote (32%) and non-remote (31%) regions of Queensland (Figures 4a and 4b). The usual diet was less affordable in remote regions (45% of household income) than in non-remote regions (40%).

Across all regions, the healthy diet was more affordable than the usual diet (Figure 4b, Appendix B, Figure 10). In almost all cases, both diets were unaffordable for households reliant on a welfare-only income, with costs exceeding 30% of household income. The exception was the healthy diet in the Northern Peninsular Area and Inner Torres Strait Islands, where it accounted for 29% of household income. In this case, the diet met the threshold for food stress rather than unaffordability, as costs exceeded 25% but not 30% of household income.





Figures 4a and 4b: Affordability of a healthy and usual diet for households reliant on welfare-only income in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland. Dashed line represents food stress benchmark at 25% if exceeded. Dotted line represents food unaffordability benchmark at 30% if exceeded.

For households reliant on a welfare-only income, the affordability of the healthy diet in non-remote regions was unchanged between 2024 and 2025 (31% in both years). The affordability of the usual diet was also similar across years in both remote regions (45% in 2025 compared with 46% in 2024) and non-remote regions (40% in 2025 compared with 39% in 2024 (Figure 5).

Welfare payments are typically indexed to inflation through the Consumer Price Index[2]. These findings suggest that, in most cases, changes in diet prices were broadly in line with inflation, resulting in little change in affordability as welfare payments increased at a similar rate.

However, the healthy diet in remote regions became less affordable in 2025 compared with 2024, increasing from 29% to 32% of household income (Figure 5). This suggests that healthy diet prices in remote regions increased at a rate greater than inflation. This result is also likely to reflect the greater

[2] Social Security Act 1991, Australian Government, https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A04121/latest/text

proportion of sampled stores that were not participating in the Queensland Remote Freight Subsidy in 2025 compared with 2024 (23.4% compared with 6.3%).

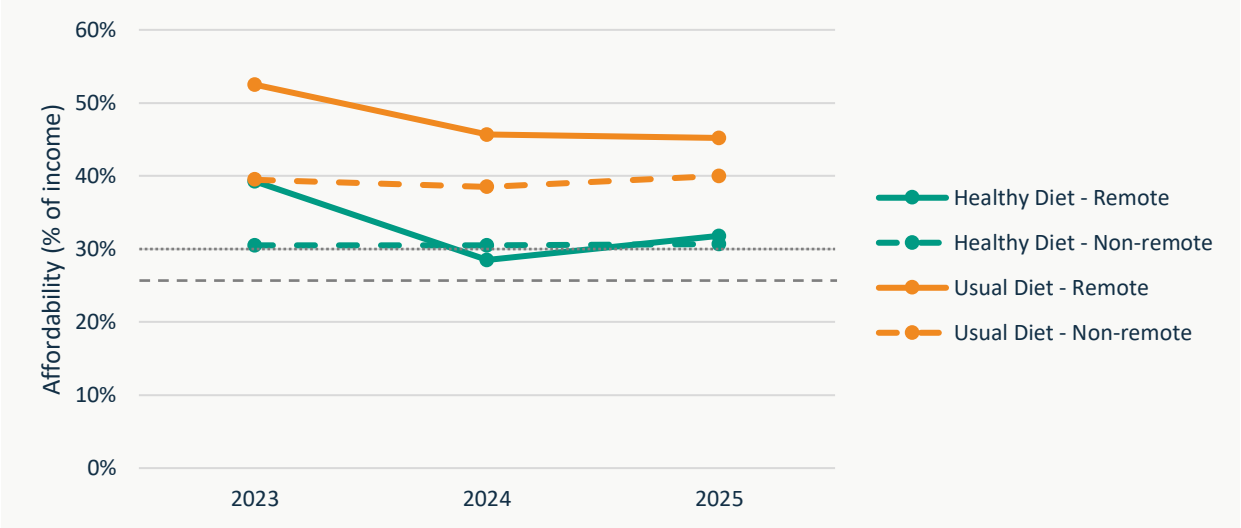


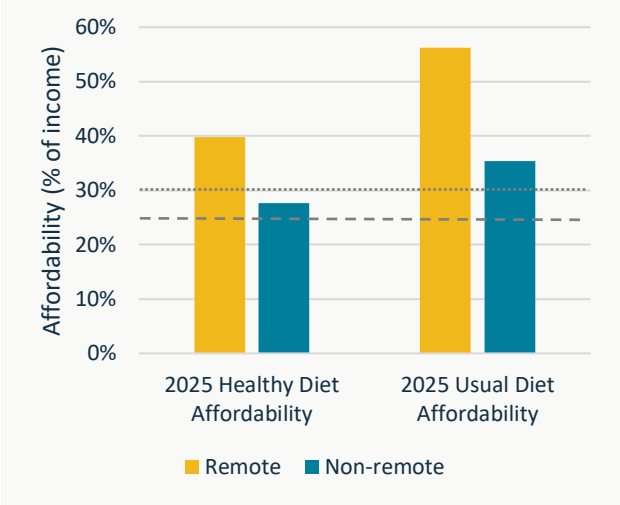
Figure 5: Affordability of healthy and usual diets for households reliant on welfare-only income in remote (solid line) and non-remote (dashed line) regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025. Dashed line represents food stress benchmark at 25% if exceeded. Dotted line represents food unaffordability benchmark at 30% if exceeded.

Median income households

In 2025, the healthy diet was 12% less affordable for median income households in remote regions than in non-remote regions. Similarly, the usual diet was 21% less affordable for median income households in remote regions than in non-remote regions (Figure 6a).

Across all regions in 2025, the healthy diet was more affordable than the usual diet for median income households, with an average affordability difference of 16% in remote regions and 7% in non-remote regions (Figure 6b). The affordability of the healthy diet ranged from 26% of household income in Brisbane and Mackay and Whitsundays to 49% in the Outer Torres Strait Islands. For the usual diet, affordability ranged from 32% in Mackay and Whitsundays to 73% in the Outer Torres Strait Islands (Appendix B, Figure 11).

Across all regions and diet types, median income households met the threshold for food stress, with diet costs exceeding 25% of household income. In all remote regions, both diet types exceeded 30% of household income, indicating food unaffordability for median income households. These findings suggest a high level of affordability pressure for median income households across Queensland, particularly in remote regions.



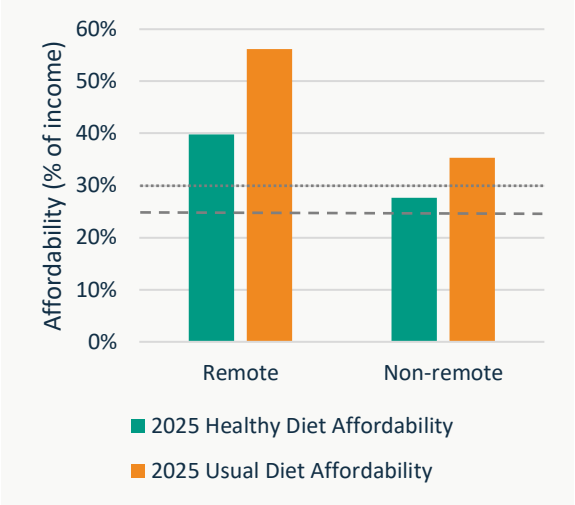


Figure 6a and 6b: Affordability of a healthy and usual diet for median income households in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland. Dashed line represents food stress benchmark at 25% if exceeded. Dotted line represents food unaffordability benchmark at 30% if exceeded.

For median income households, the affordability of the healthy diet in both remote and non-remote regions, and the usual diet in non-remote regions, was similar in 2025 to 2024 (Figure 7). In remote regions, the usual diet was more affordable in 2025 than in 2024, decreasing from 62% to 56% of household income (Figure 7). This suggests that median household incomes in both remote and non-remote regions may have broadly kept pace with inflationary changes in diet costs.

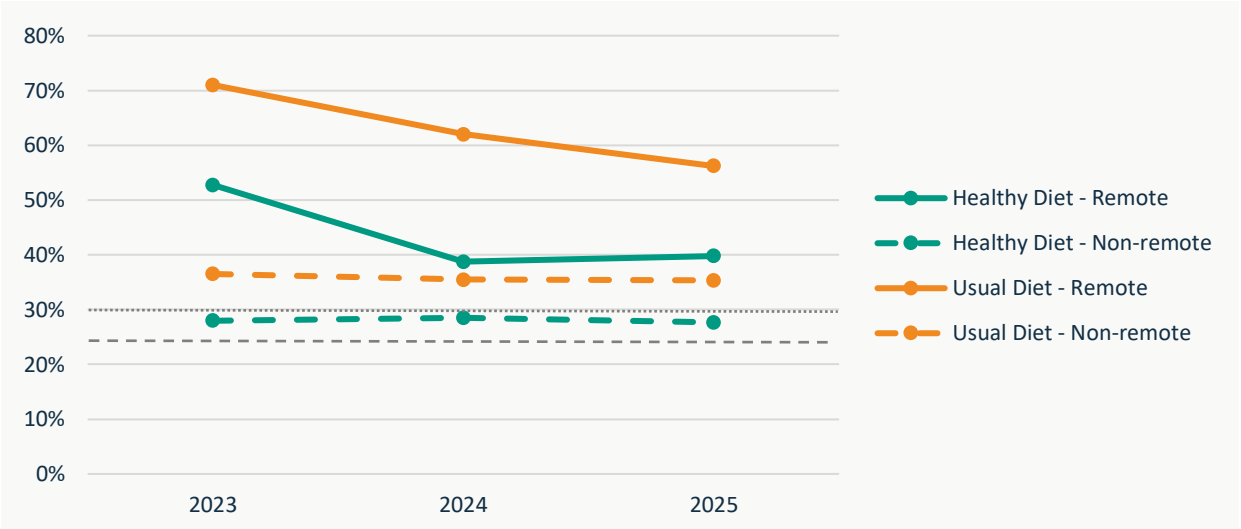


Figure 7: Affordability of a healthy and usual diet for median income households in remote (solid line) and non-remote (dashed line) regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025. Dashed grey line represents food stress benchmark at 25% if exceeded. Dotted grey line represents food unaffordability benchmark at 30% if exceeded.

Welfare-only versus Median incomes

In remote regions, both the healthy and usual diets were less affordable for median income households than for households reliant on a welfare-only income, with differences of 8% for the healthy diet and 11% for the usual diet. As diet prices are the same in both calculations, this indicates that the estimated median household income in remote regions was lower than the welfare-only income used in this analysis.

By comparison, in non-remote regions, both the healthy and usual diets were slightly more affordable for median income households than for households reliant on a welfare-only income, with differences of 3% for the healthy diet and 5% for the usual diet.

Why are these findings important?

- The findings are consistent with previous research, confirming that healthy diets are less expensive than usual diets in Queensland
- Diet cost and affordability are important determinants of food security. However, food security is influenced by a range of other factors that also need to be addressed, including food quality and availability
- Differences in diet cost between remote and non-remote locations are shaped by multiple, complex factors, including income inequity, long and complex supply chains, and geographic isolation. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, cross-sector response involving government and non-government organisations. Gather + Grow is one mechanism to support coordinated systemic action in Far North Queensland. Other policy opportunities include the National Indigenous Australians Agency's National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities
- As a monitoring project, this work generates data and evidence that can inform decision making, policy development and health advocacy
- Ongoing annual monitoring is recommended. Continued partnership with local organisations will be important to support data collection and strengthen the project over time

What's next?

- Data and evidence generated through this project are being shared with cross-sector and community stakeholders to inform policy and decision making
- HWQld will continue to monitor and report annually on the cost and affordability of diets across Queensland

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

Appendix A

Table 1: Average fortnightly costs (mean, SD) and affordability (proportion (%) or median and welfare-only household incomes) of a healthy diet in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025.

	2023				2024				2025			
	Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost		Diet affordability	
Remoteness	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare
Remote	$1,362.96	$43.34	53%	39%	$1,031.11	$48.72	39%	29%	$1,180.28	$132.86	40%	32%
Non-remote	$1,041.42	$39.55	28%	31%	$1,081.58	$49.52	29%	31%	$1,118.60	$21.97	28%	31%

Table 2: Average fortnightly costs (mean, SD) and affordability (proportion (%) or median and welfare-only household incomes) of a usual diet in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025.

	2023				2024				2025			
	Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost		Diet affordability	
Remoteness	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare
Remote	$1,833.56	$34.48	71%	53%	$1,658.44	$77.06	62%	46%	$1,668.42	$121.47	56%	45%
Non-remote	$1,340.82	$51.76	37%	40%	$1,364.78	$51.79	36%	39%	$1,438.54	$17.47	35%	40%

Table 3: Average fortnightly costs (mean, SD) and affordability (proportion (%) or median and welfare-only household incomes) of a healthy diet in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025.

		2023				2024				2025			
		Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost		Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost	
Region	**Remoteness**	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare
Brisbane	Non-remote	$1,059.97	$71.36	26%	31%	$1,096.76	$65.21	27%	31%	$1,092.60	$55.73	26%	30%
Cairns	Non-remote	$1,022.86	$7.73	30%	30%	$1,066.40	$33.82	30%	30%	$1,127.33	$10.17	31%	31%
Mackay and Whitsundays	Non-remote									$1,135.87	$0.00	26%	31%
Cape York	Remote	$1,320.38	$82.51	50%	38%	$1,044.58	$106.32	38%	29%	$1,220.96	$227.85	44%	33%
NPA & ITSI	Remote	$1,382.34	$71.11	44%	40%	$1,057.63	$88.54	33%	29%	$1,085.34	$2.88	33%	29%
OTSI	Remote	$1,383.23	$0.00	65%	40%	$1,037.43	$0.00	48%	29%	$1,108.52	$123.59	49%	30%
Lower Gulf	Remote	$1,365.89	$19.75	52%	39%	$984.81	$0.00	36%	27%	$1,275.44	$228.44	46%	34%
Mt Isa & Surrounds	Remote									$1,211.12	$81.52	27%	33%

Table 4: Average fortnightly costs (mean, SD) and affordability (proportion (%) or median and welfare-only household incomes) of a usual diet in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025.

		2023				2024				2025			
		Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost		Diet cost		Diet affordability		Diet cost	
Region	**Remoteness**	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare	Mean	SD	Median	Welfare
Brisbane	Non-remote	$1,351.48	$80.49	34%	40%	$1,335.60	$62.57	32%	38%	$1,479.19	$35.66	35%	41%
Cairns	Non-remote	$1,330.16	$23.03	39%	39%	$1,393.95	$41.01	39%	39%	$1,433.62	$16.76	39%	40%
Mackay and Whitsundays	Non-remote									$1,402.80	$0.00	32%	39%
Cape York	Remote	$1,682.71	$86.36	63%	48%	$1,596.57	$75.87	58%	44%	$1,608.79	$184.31	58%	43%
NPA & ITSI	Remote	$1,895.00	$22.04	61%	54%	$1,711.71	$232.36	53%	47%	$1,616.10	$0.11	49%	44%
OTSI	Remote	$1,919.14	$0.00	90%	55%	$1,630.06	$0.00	75%	45%	$1,632.05	$105.06	73%	44%
Lower Gulf	Remote	$1,837.38	$29.51	70%	53%	$1,695.42	$0.00	62%	47%	$1,759.26	$135.61	63%	48%
Mt Isa & Surrounds	Remote									$1,725.89	$182.25	38%	47%

Appendix B

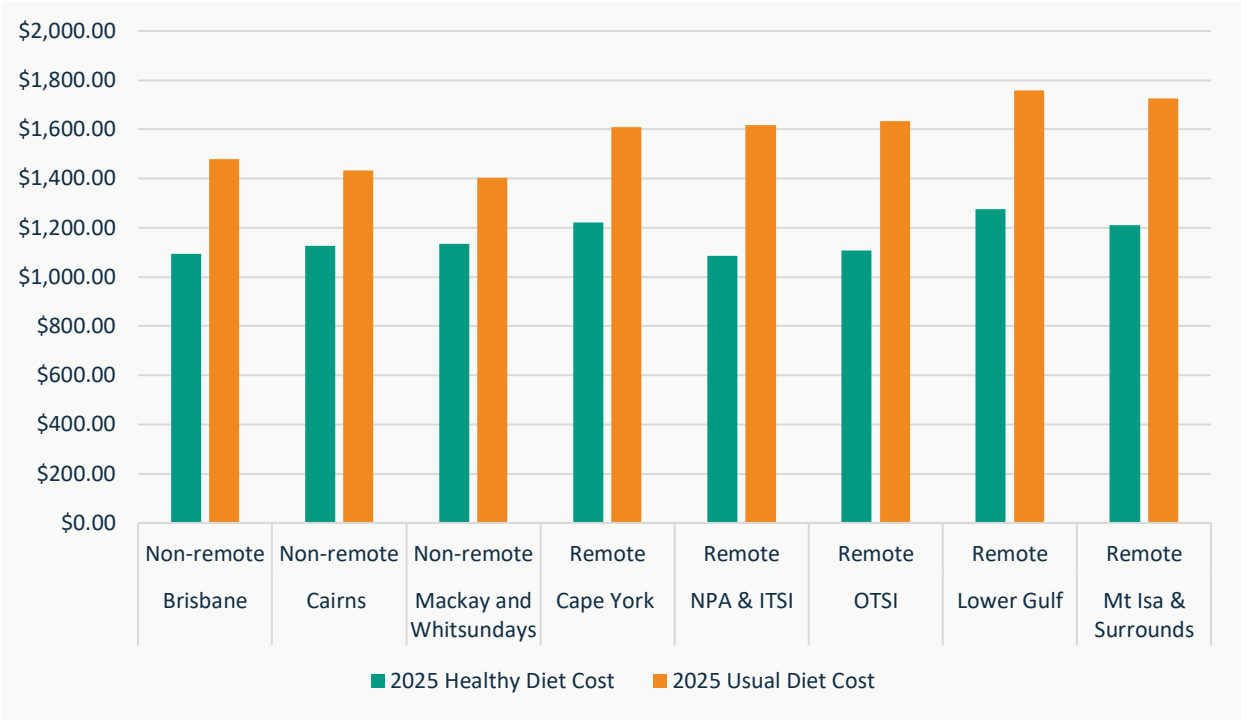


Figure 8: Fortnightly diet cost (AUD$) of a healthy and usual diet in 5 remote and 3 non-remote regions of Queensland.

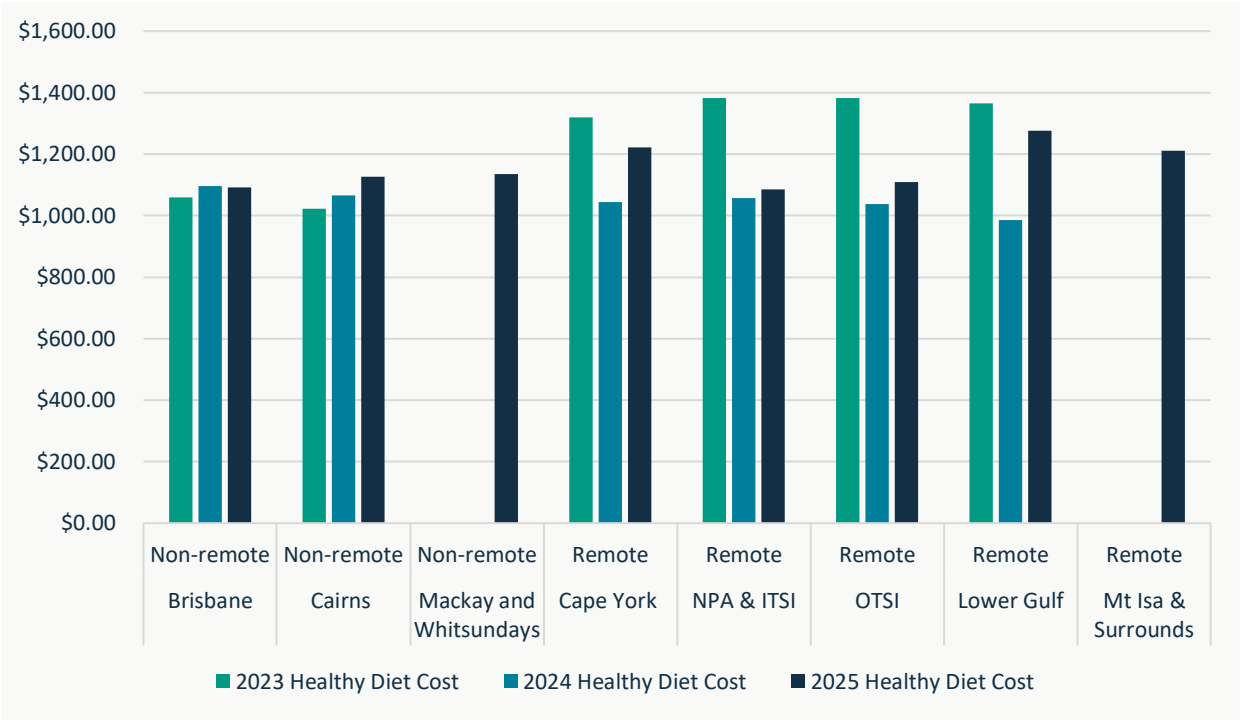


Figure 9: Fortnightly diet cost (AUD$) of a healthy diet in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland across 2023, 2024 and 2025.

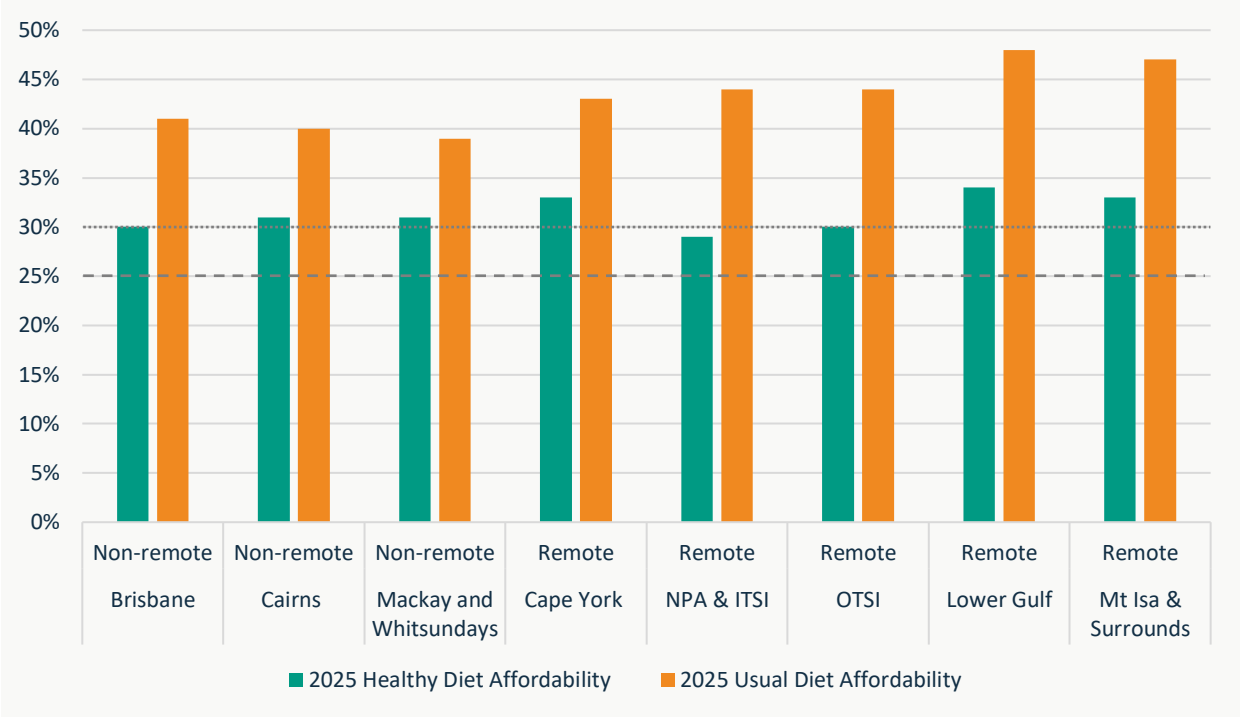


Figure 10: Affordability of a healthy and usual diet for households reliant on welfare-only income in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland. Dashed line represents food stress benchmark at 25% if exceeded. Dotted line represents food unaffordability benchmark at 30% if exceeded.

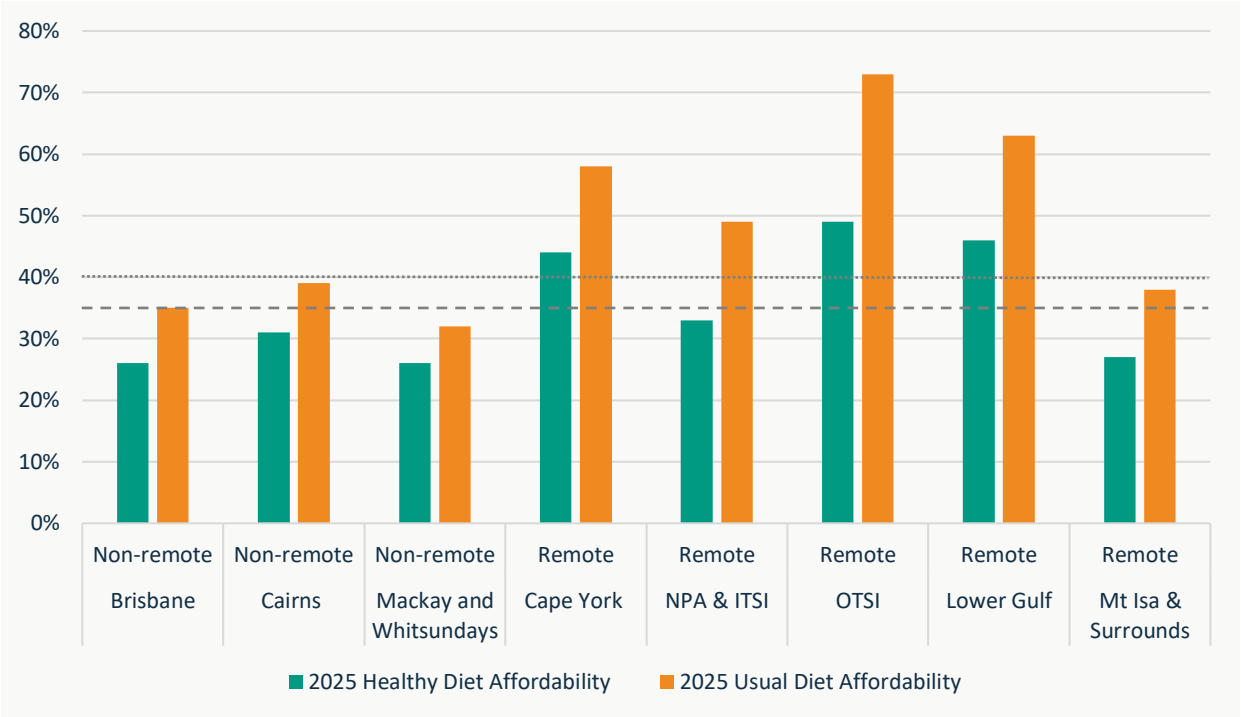


Figure 11: Affordability of a healthy and usual diet for median income households in remote and non-remote regions of Queensland. Dashed line represents food stress benchmark at 25% if exceeded. Dotted line represents food unaffordability benchmark at 30% if exceeded.

health + wellbeing Queensland

We are Queensland's dedicated prevention agency established to drive change, so all Queenslanders have the best change to live a healthier life, no matter who they are, or where they live. For more information visit:

hw.qld.gov.au