

Cost of Living Report

July 2019

Issue
24

Food Costs in the
Northern Territory



About NTCOSS

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is a peak body for the Social and Community Sector in the NT and an advocate for social justice on behalf of people and communities in the NT, who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage.

NTCOSS is a member of the nationwide Councils of Social Service (COSS) network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). The membership of NTCOSS includes community based, not for profit service providers in the social welfare area such as consumer groups, Indigenous and mainstream organisations and interested individuals.

NTCOSS' vision is for

"A fair, inclusive and sustainable Northern Territory where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from all aspects of social, cultural and economic life."

NTCOSS' mission is

"To promote an awareness and understanding of social issues throughout the NT community and to strive towards the development of an equitable and just society."

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INTRODUCTION

This report examines changes in the cost of living over recent years in the Northern Territory, with a particular focus on cost of living pressures for low-income, vulnerable and disadvantaged Territorians.

The report focuses on price changes in key expenditure areas, using Darwin, regional NT, NT wide and national figures.

Section One of the report includes an analysis of cost of living changes for specific income groups, such as Age Pensioners, and Other Government Transfer Recipients (e.g. Newstart, Youth Allowance) by examining national data derived from the ABS Selected Living Cost Index (SLCI) and Centrelink payment data.

Section One also includes an analysis of changes in the ABS Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Darwin across a range of expenditure areas that are most relevant to low income households, covering the bare essentials which make up the majority of expenditure items for these households.

Given that CPI figures only reflect trends for capital cities (and Australia as a whole), the report draws on other sources to show trends in price movement for the Northern Territory, as well as for some regional locations. Regional housing, fuel, transport and food price and/or expenditure data is highlighted using various sources of information including NT Government Economic Brief data regarding fuel prices, the Real Estate Institute of the Northern Territory (REINT) housing price data, the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) and SGS Economics and Planning's Transport Affordability Index Data, data from the NT Government's My Fuel NT website as well as the NT Government's Market Basket Surveys relating to food costs.

Where possible NTCOSS has attempted to use the most recent figures available – in particular for the regional cost of living snapshot data, to ensure currency of data. This does mean, given the variability in the sources of data, that there are some different time periods referred to for some cost of living areas (e.g. the most recent AAA & SGS figures at the time of writing the report were for the December 2018 quarter, while the most recent NT Government Economic Brief (Fuel) data available was for June 2019).

Section Two of the report has a specific focus on food and the impact of price changes and expenditure patterns on low income households. Data is derived from ABS CPI information, the ABS Household Expenditure Survey data, as well as data from the Northern Territory's Market Basket Surveys (MBS). The report includes an in-depth analysis of changes in food prices and expenditure across the Northern Territory, in particular focusing on remote areas.

Section Three provides a summary of a number of studies which examine issues related to increasing healthy food intake, which has helped inform some of the recommendations made in this report.

REPORT SUMMARY – SNAPSHOT OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Cost of Living Changes – Consumer Price Index, Darwin

Consumer Price Index – over the past year (ending March 2019)

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) has remained low in Darwin across the last year at 0.4%, vs the national increase of 1.3%.

Some **price increases** have occurred in key expenditure areas:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------|
| • Gas & other household fuels | 2.4% |
| • Medical and hospital services | 3.6% |
| • Education | 2.6% |
| • Gas & other household fuels | 2.4% |
| • Food & non-alcoholic beverages | 2.1% |

Fuel CPI down bringing some relief for motorists

Some **price decreases** have occurred in key expenditure areas:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| • Automotive Fuel | 10.6% |
| • Audio, visual and computing equipment | 7.0% |
| • Child care | 5.9% |
| • Telecommunication & equipment/services | 5.2% |
| • Rents | 4.4% |

Consumer Price Index – over the past quarter (ending March 2019)

The CPI All groups for Darwin decreased in the past quarter (down 0.8% vs 0.0% nationally) (ABS 2019d).

Several expenditure areas saw a **significant increase** in the quarter

- | | |
|---------------------------|------|
| • Vegetables | 7.5% |
| • Pharmaceutical products | 5.0% |
| • Fruit | 3.8% |

(ABS 2019d)

Darwin Region

Fuel Prices **Down** (June 2018-June 2019) (NT Gov 2019b)

- Unleaded 91 6.9%
- Diesel 4.7%

Transport Expenditure **Up** (Dec 2017-Dec 2018) (AAA & SGS 2019)

- Insurance 38.0%
- Fuel 10.6%

Food Prices Major Supermarkets **Down** (2016-2017) (NT Government 2019d)

- Healthy Food Basket 20.8%
- Current Diet Basket 2.8%

Food Prices Remote Stores **Up** (2016-2017) (NT Government 2019d)

- Healthy Food Basket 4.6%
- Current Diet Basket 2.7%

Lowest available House Prices **Down** (Mar 2018-Mar 2019) (REINT 2019)

- 3BR Houses 6.7%
- 4BR Houses 27.4%

Lowest available Unit Prices mostly **Down** (Mar 2018-Mar 2019) REINT 2019)

- 1BR Units 27.7%
- 2BR Units 11.8%
- But 3BR Unit prices **Up** 2.0%

Palmerston

Housing: House Prices **Down** (Mar 2018-Mar 2019) (REINT 2019)

- 3BR Houses 6.8%
- 4BR Houses 9.1%

Housing: Unit Prices **Down** (Mar 2018-Mar 2019) (REINT 2019)

- 1BR Units 9.1%
- 2BR Units 1.3%

Regional Cost of Living Snapshots Summary

Katherine Region

Fuel Prices Down (June 2018-June 2019) (NT Government 2019b)

- Unleaded 91 4.6%

Food Prices Remote Stores Up (2016-2017) (NT Government 2019d)

- Healthy Food Basket 6.1%
- Current Diet Basket 5.5%

Housing: House Prices Up/No Change (Mar 2018-Mar 2019) (REINT 2019)

- 3BR Houses 2.4%
- 4BR Houses 0.0%

Housing: Unit Prices Down (Mar 2018-Mar 2019) (REINT 2019)

- 1BR Units 13.2%
- 2BR Units 1.6%

East Arnhem Region

Food Prices Major Supermarkets Down (2016-2017) (NT Government 2019d)

- Healthy Food Basket 15.7%
- Current Diet Basket 12.4%

Food at Remote Stores Down (2016-2017) (NT Government 2019d)

- Healthy Food 0.9%
- Current Diet Basket 1.0%

Regional Cost of Living Snapshots Summary

Alice Springs Region

- **Fuel Prices Up** (June 2018-June 2019) (NT Government 2019b)

- Unleaded 91 **2.9%**

Transport Expenditure Up (Dec 2017-Dec 2018) (AAA & SGS 2019)

- Insurance **26.5%**
- Fuel **12.9%**

Food Prices at Major Supermarkets Down (2016-2017) (NT Government 2019d)

- Healthy Food **6.1%**
- Current Diet Basket **2.8%**

Food at Remote Stores Up (2016-2017) (NT Government 2019d)

- Healthy Food **1.2%**
- Current Diet Basket **1.9%**

Housing: House Prices Up (REINT 2019)

- 2BR Houses **10.7%**
- 3BR Houses **1.0%**
- 4BR Houses **0.7%**

Housing: Unit Prices No change/Down (REINT 2019)

- 1BR Units **0.0%**
- 2BR Units **5.1%**
- 3BR Units **0.0%**

Tennant Creek

Fuel Prices Up (June 2018-June 2019) (NT Government 2019b)

- Unleaded 91 **2.2%**

Fuel Prices in Remote Parts of the NT: MYFuel NT Data at July 2019

- While some regional areas have seen average price decreases in the past year, **motorists in most remote areas still pay extraordinarily high fuel prices.**
- **Unleaded 91: 250.0 cpl (Central Australian region); 241.0** (Tiwi Islands);
- **Low Aromatic Fuel: 295.0 cpl;** as high as **330.0** in May 2019 (East Arnhem region);
- **Diesel: 295.0 cpl** (East Arnhem region); **272.0 cpl** (Top End Rural).

(NT Government 2019c)

Cost of Living Increases vs Payment Rates

- The rate of increase in the cost of living (measured by the SLCI) for single people on Newstart with children has risen at a faster rate than the payments;
- Living costs for Newstart recipients with 2 children rose by \$2.87 per week over the past year, which means annual living costs are \$150 higher than a year ago.

(ABS 2019a; Centrelink 2018, Centrelink 2019)

Inadequacy of Newstart and Youth Allowance Payments

- Newstart and Youth Allowance payments continue to lag behind pensions - \$178 and \$227 lower per week respectively; (Centrelink 2019)
- More than half (55%) of people on Newstart live below the poverty line. In addition, for every eight people who are looking for paid work (or for an increase in hours), there is only one job available. (ACOSS 2018a)

Raise the Rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance

- Base rate payments of Newstart and Youth Allowance are clearly inadequate;
- There is an **urgent need for the Federal Government to increase payment rates by \$75 per week which would** make an immediate difference to cost of living pressure for many low-income Territory households;
- The NT Government may be limited in influencing the price of certain goods and services like food and fuel, but they can determine the rate of concessions for eligible low-income households as well as eligibility;
- Increasing eligibility for some concessions to all low-income households would reduce cost of living pressure for many.

Food Prices and Expenditure in the NT

Food prices in Darwin rising slower than other costs: Over the past decade

- CPI for 'food and non-alcoholic beverages' ('food') has risen slower (11.5%) than Darwin 'all groups' CPI (19.6%), & below the national 'food' CPI (13.5%);
- Nearly all CPI sub categories of 'food' have risen at a slower rate than the 'all groups' CPI - apart from 'takeaway and fast foods';
- In the last quarter, however, CPI for 'vegetables' rose 7.5% and 'fruit' 3.8%.
(ABS 2019d).

In recent years, household expenditure on food in the NT has decreased

Between the 2009/10 & 2015/16 ABS Household Expenditure Survey (HES)

- For NT households, ave. expenditure on food went from \$257 to \$254 p/w
Food as a proportion of total expenditure remained steady at 14.9%;
- For Darwin households, expenditure on food rose from \$246 to \$256 p/w
Food as a proportion of total expenditure rose from 14.6% to 15.5% but is still lower than what it was in the 1998-99 HES (17.7%).
(ABS 2017).

Expenditure on food in the NT is 2nd highest in the country, but the proportion of income spent on food (12.3%) is the lowest (ABS 2017).

HOWEVER: Food cost of living pressures for many Low Income Households are high

- Households in the lowest 20% of incomes are spending twice as much (25.4%) as a proportion of income as the richest 20% of households (9.4%) on food and non-alcoholic beverages;
- Lone person households aged 65+ in the NT, who have very low incomes spend 22.2% of their income on food vs NT all household average of 12.3%;
- Public housing households (based on national figures) spend a greater proportion of income (16.5%) on food than the national average (13.9%).
(ABS 2017).

Remote households face excessive food costs

- The same basket of healthy food on average costs \$319 (60%) more in a remote community store than a major supermarket;
- The gap between the cost of food in remote stores and major supermarkets is widening: In 2012 a healthy food basket cost 22% more in remote stores than in the major supermarkets; in 2016 the difference was 42%, but in 2017 the difference had risen to 60%;
- A Healthy Food Basket purchased from an NT Remote Store will require 34% of the household income for a family of six (more than double the national household average of disposable income required for food and non-alcoholic beverage expenditure (13.9%);

(NT Government 2019d; ABS 2017).

NTCOSS recommends that the Northern Territory Government:

1. Data Collection

- Provide sufficient resources to ensure all regions are covered by the biennial Market Basket Survey (e.g. Tennant Creek region was not covered in 2016, 2017).
- Ensure that the biennial Market Basket Survey full report is made available in a timely fashion. NTCOSS recommends that this be by the end of January immediately following the year of the survey.

2. Household Infrastructure and Equipment

- Develop strategies to increase and improve storage and food preparation facilities for households in remote communities – including mechanisms for no-interest loan schemes (e.g. Good Shepherd Microfinance's NLS Scheme) to be more accessible for remote residents to purchase reliable and energy efficient fridges, stoves and microwave ovens.
- Ensure power is accessible, constant and affordable for food storage and cooking – e.g.
 - Ensure people who meet eligibility criteria are registered for the NT Concession Scheme.
 - Extend NT Concession Scheme to all Newstart recipients – commencing with remote residents, given the high cost of living pressures they face.
 - Explore initiatives to increase individual household access to energy efficient appliances and renewable energy including solar power to reduce power costs.

3. Transport issues

- Identify gaps in regional centre public transport to ensure low income residents are able to shop at more affordable stores that are not within walking distance of where they live (and provide an alternative to the more costly taxi and minibuss services).
- Provide capped subsidies for NT Concession Scheme Recipients to use remote private transport services (e.g. Bush bus and Bodhi Bus) to regional centres to periodically shop for bulk food items and groceries.

4. Locally Grown Produce

- Establish arrangements for locally grown or harvested produce to be distributed through local stores (as per recommendations in the 2009 'Everybody's Business' Report, which are still highly relevant today).

NTCOSS recommends that the Commonwealth Government:

1. Remote Stores

- Introduce targeted measures to reduce the price of healthy foods, including options for subsidised freight. This recommendation is consistent with the findings of the Menzies SHOP@RIC Stores Healthy Options Project; and is supported by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).
- That adequate resources continue to be allocated to ensure ongoing licensing compliance for remote stores as well as training and support for store managers and staff around healthy foods, food promotion etc., both directly and through provision of training resources.

2. Sugar Tax

- Extend and adequately resource strategies to discourage the purchase of less healthy foods, particularly those high in sugar, alongside promotion of healthy foods
- Adopt ACOSS' recommendation for the introduction of a 'sugar tax' (Federal Budget Priorities Statement to the 2018/2019) aimed at reducing consumption of sugary drinks and bringing down obesity rates, and that revenue raised through the 'sugar tax' be aimed at subsidising the cost of freighting healthy foods to halt the rapid growth in healthy food prices and start reducing those prices to affordable levels.

3. ABS Food Security Data

- Update national data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food security through development and application of a monitoring tool that adequately assesses 'food access', 'food utilisation', 'stability over time' and 'food availability'¹ as part of the Australian National Health Survey.

4. Inadequacy of Income Support Payments



Increase the base rate of allowance payments, e.g. Newstart, Youth Allowance by \$75 per week. In addition, these payments must be indexed to wage and price movements.

¹ McKay et al 2019 Measuring and Understanding Food Insecurity in Australia: A Systematic Review, School of Health and Social Development, Faculty of Health, Deakin University, Feb 2019

SECTION ONE - PRICE CHANGES, LIVING COST INDEXES & INCOMES





















Price Movement in Goods and Services (CPI) in Darwin over the past year

Table 1a: Changes in CPI (All groups) over past year (ending March 2019)

Darwin		0.8%	vs Australia		0.0% (in last quarter - to March 2019)
Darwin		0.4%	vs Australia		1.3% (over past year – to March 2019)

ABS 2019d, Table 10, 11.













Table 1b: Significant CPI Changes in CPI Darwin vs National over the past year (to March 2019)

Increases in Darwin over past 12 months	Decreases in Darwin over past 12 months
<i>Medical and hospital services</i>  3.6% vs Australia  4.1%	<i>Automotive Fuel</i>  10.6% vs Australia  3.5%
<i>Education</i>  2.6% vs Australia  2.9%	<i>Audio, visual and computing equipment</i>  7.0% vs Australia  7.7%
<i>Gas & other household fuels</i>  2.4% vs Australia  1.8%	<i>Child Care</i>  5.9% vs Australia  8.0%
<i>Food & non-alcoholic beverages</i>  2.1% vs Australia  2.3%	<i>Telecommunication & equipment/services</i>  5.2% vs Australia  5.0%
<i>Insurance</i>  1.1% vs Australia  2.0%	<i>Rents</i>  4.4% vs Australia  0.4%

ABS 2019d, Table 10.

Note: Alcohol increased by 4.5% vs Australia 1.9%. The difference is most likely attributable to the introduction of the floor price on takeaway alcohol of \$1.30 per standard drink across the NT from 1 Oct 2018. Tobacco increased by 14.1% vs Australia 13.8%, in the past year.

Table 1c: Significant CPI Changes in Darwin vs National over the past quarter (to March 2019)

Increases in Darwin over past 3 months	Decreases in Darwin over past 3 months
<i>Vegetables</i>  7.5% vs Australia  7.7%	<i>Automotive fuel</i>  14.3% vs Australia  8.7%
<i>Pharmaceutical products</i>  5.0% vs Australia  5.0%	<i>Audio, visual, computing media & services</i>  3.9% vs Australia  2.5%
<i>Fruit</i>  3.8% vs Australia  1.8%	<i>Rents</i>  1.7% vs Australia  0.1%

ABS 2019d, Table 11.

Note for Figures 1b and 1c, major CPI categories are displayed in bold; with sub-categories in italics. See also Appendix A

CPI changes over past year in Darwin (ending March 2019): Fuel CPI Down/Low overall CPI

The CPI All groups for Darwin rose by only 0.4% over the past year vs 1.3% nationally (ABS 2019d). Some significant rises have occurred in Darwin, within CPI categories/sub-categories.

- 'Medical and hospital services' rose by 3.6% (vs up 4.1% nationally)
- 'Education' rose by 2.6% (vs up 2.9% nationally)
- The CPI for 'gas & other household fuels' rose by 2.4% (vs down 1.8% nationally)
- 'Food & non-alcoholic beverages' rose by 2.1% (vs up 2.3% nationally) (ABS 2019d).

Price rises in key areas like gas, hospital and medical services and food **have a greater impact on low-income households**, as expenditure on these items uses a greater proportion of weekly income.

CPI Decreases over the past year in Darwin (ending March 2019)

Fuel CPI down brings relief for motorists

Notable CPI decreases occurred in the following areas:

- Automotive fuel down 10.6% (vs down 3.5% nationally)
- Audio, visual and computing equipment down 7.0% (vs down 7.7% nationally)
- Child care down 5.9% (vs down 8.0% nationally)ⁱ
- Rents down 4.4%, against the national trend (up 0.4%) (ABS 2019d).

The significant decrease in the fuel CPI has brought some **budgetary relief to Darwin motorists and has far exceeded the decrease across the rest of the country** (ABS 2019d). **The CPI figures are specific to Darwin but are not, however, representative of all areas of the NT.**

NT Government Economic Brief Fuel Data for the year ending March 2019ⁱⁱ, shows that unleaded fuel prices decreased in Darwin 10.8cpl (6.9%) and Katherine 3.6 cpl (2.2%). In Alice Springs, however, prices rose 8.9 cpl (5.0%) as did Tennant Creek prices up 4.9cp (2.7%) (NT Government 2018a; 2019a). Similarly, for diesel, while Darwin had a 3 cpl (2.0%) decrease, the regional average price rose by 12.4 cpl (7.1%), and the NT average rose 3.0 cpl (1.9%) (NT Government 2018a; 2019a).

The **CPI for rents in Darwin has dropped for 17 quarters in a row** (ABS 2019d), but **for some Darwin households, rents are still out of reach**. Anglicare's (2019a) Rental Affordability Snapshot, showed rental prices continue to place a strain on many lower income households in the country, especially those reliant on Centrelink payments. Out of all of the rental properties surveyed in Darwin, **not one single property was affordable for a single person on Newstart or Youth Allowance**. In addition, the Darwin rents CPI doesn't reflect price changes across other parts of the NT. REINT data (2019, p.26,27) reveals that some rent prices in Alice Springs (3&4BR houses) and Katherine (3BR) increased slightly. In addition, some parts of Darwin experienced rent increases.

CPI changes over the past quarter in Darwin (ending March 2019)

Over the past quarter the most significant rises that occurred in Darwin were:

- CPI for 'vegetables' up by 7.5 % (similar to national rise of 7.7%), and 'fruit' up by 3.8%
- CPI for 'pharmaceutical products' up by 5.0% (same as the national increase) mainly due to "the cyclical reduction in the proportion of consumers who qualify for subsidies under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) (ABS 2019c).

Selected Living Cost Index (SLCI) for Income Support Recipients

An examination of price movement for goods and services purchased by low-income households helps assess how well the income support system helps people to keep up with rising living costs. The ABS Selected Living Cost Index (SLCI) measures the cost of various baskets of goods which are specific to a number of different household types – such as ‘Age Pension’, ‘Other Government Transfer Recipient’ households, ‘Employee’ households and ‘Self-Funded Retirees’ (ABS 2018a). Other government transfer recipient households includes ‘households whose principal source of income is a government pension or benefit other than the Age Pension or Veteran’s Affairs pension’- e.g. Newstart or Youth Allowance (ABS 2019b).

The report examines the SLCI figures in the context of income support payment to determine if they are keeping pace with rising living costs. The Living Cost Indexes have been designed to answer the question: “By how much would after-tax money incomes need to change to allow households to purchase the same quantity of consumer goods and services that they purchased in the base period?” (ABS 2019a).

NTCOSS is specifically focused on the cost of baskets which apply to ‘Age Pension’ and ‘Other Government Transfer Recipient’ households, given that it is these households which are more likely to be representative of low-income and disadvantaged households. Comparisons are also made with expenditure for both Employee households and Self-Funded Retiree households. This is to get a sense of the shift in the rate of changes in costs of living for low-income households vs. higher income households.

Movement in the Selected Living Cost Index (SLCI) National figures Mar 2018 – Mar 2019

Table 2a: Changes in SLCI figures over the past year (to March 2019)

National CPI all groups	↑	1.3%	
SLCI for Age Pensioners	↑	1.4%	which is <u>above</u> CPI increase
SLCI for Other Government Transfer Recipients	↑	1.6%	which is <u>above</u> CPI increase
SLCI for Employee Households	↑	1.4%	which is <u>above</u> CPI increase
SLCI for Self-funded Retirees	↑	1.6%	which is <u>above</u> CPI increase

ABS 2019a; ABS 2019d, Table 10.

Table 2b: Changes in SLCI figures over the past quarter (to March 2019)

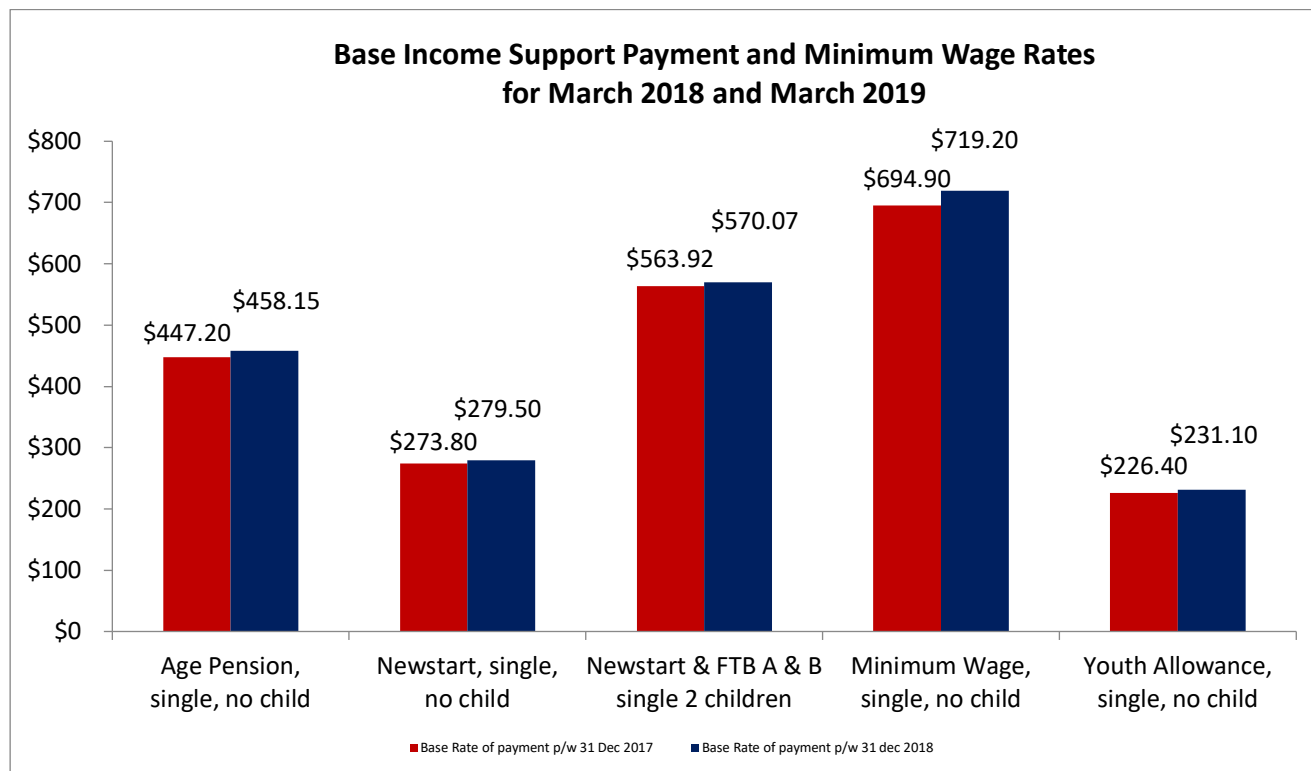
National CPI all groups	↑	0.0%	
SLCI for Age Pensioners	↑	0.3%	which is <u>above</u> CPI increase
SLCI for Other Government Transfer Recipients	↑	0.2%	which is <u>above</u> CPI increase
SLCI for Employee Households	↑	0.0%	Same as CPI increase
SLCI for Self-funded Retirees	↓	0.2%	<u>below</u> CPI increase

ABS 2019a; ABS 2019d, Table 11.

How well are Income Support Payments keeping up with rising Living Costs?

Figure 1 shows the change in various income support payment rates as well as the minimum wage over the past year:

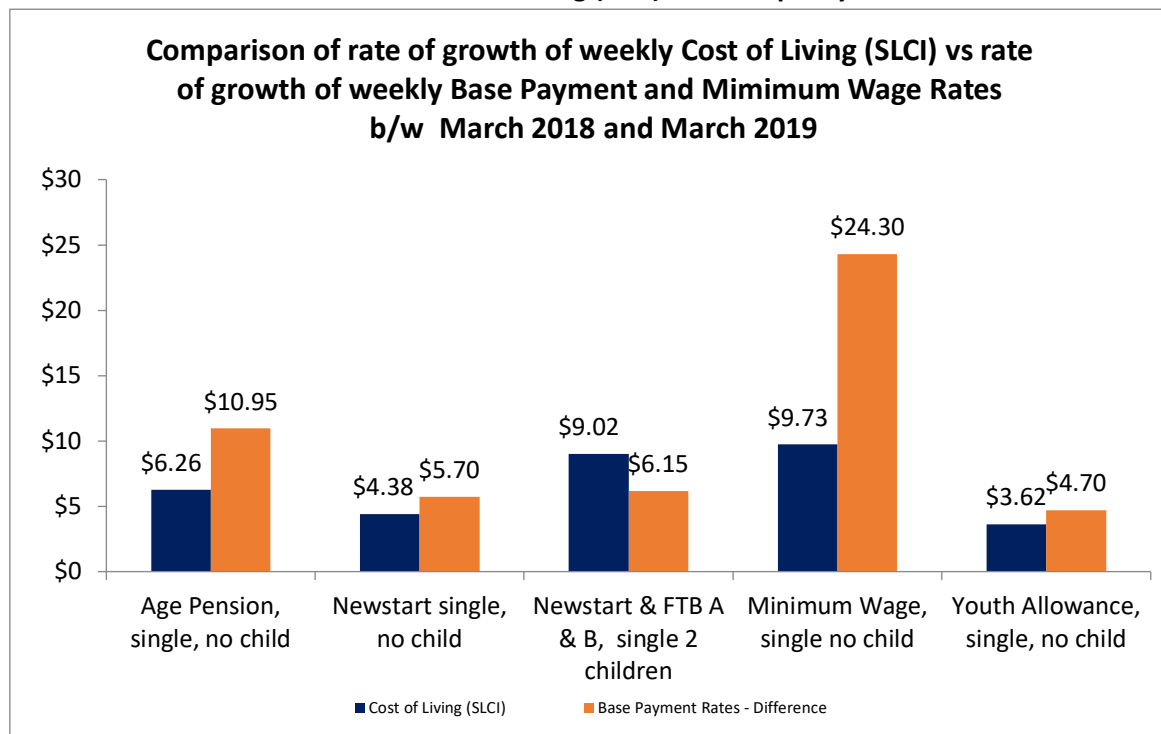
Figure 1: Selected Income Support Payments and Minimum Wage Rates March 2018 – March 2019



Centrelink 2018, p. 2, 5, 13, 25, 27, 32-33, 40-41; Centrelink 2019, p. 2, 5, 13, 25, 28, 33-34, 40-41; Fair Work Commission, 2018. (NB: For simplicity, some supplements & Rent Assistance not included in Fig 2, as they can vary from person to person). In addition, the base rate of payment for the Age Pension is identical to the Disability Support Pension rate, but for simplicity reference is made to the Age Pension throughout this report.

Where an income support payment is someone's sole source of income, being able to regularly save a substantial amount of the weekly payment is not an easy task. In Figure 2, the dollar value of changes in cost of living over the past year has been calculated for a single person who is on the base level of payments, and assumes that they spend all of their income. This dollar value is compared with the relevant change in income over the past year.

Figure 2: Growth in Selected Incomes vs Cost of Living (SLCI) over the past year



*Centrelink 2018, p. 2, 5, 13, 25, 27, 32-33, 40-41; Centrelink 2019, p. 2, 5, 13, 25, 28, 33-34, 40-41;
Fair Work Commission, 2018; ABS 2019a.*

Figure 2 shows that over the past year:

- For single pensioners, the rise in the rate of pension over the past year has been **\$4.69 per week above the rise in the cost of living** – meaning payments are currently keeping up with cost of living increases;
- For single Newstart recipients without children, the rise in the rate of Newstart over the past year has been **\$1.32 per week above the rise in the cost of living** – meaning payments are currently keeping up with cost of living rises;
- For single Newstart recipients with two children, the rise in the rate of Newstart and Family tax benefit payments (combined) over the past year has been **\$2.87 per week lower than the rise in the cost of living over the past year** meaning payments are not keeping up with cost of living rises. This means recipients are around **\$150 per year worse off** than they were a year ago;
- For single Youth Allowance recipients, the rise in the rate of Youth Allowance over the past year has been **\$1.38 per week above the rise in the cost of living** – meaning the payment is currently keeping up with cost of living increases; and
- For a single person (no children) on the minimum wage, the rise in the minimum wage over the past year has been **\$14.57 per week above the rise in the cost of living**, meaning the minimum wage was more than keeping up with cost of living rises for these employees.

(Note: The rate of growth of the SLCI is calculated by multiplying the March 2018 base payment rate by the percentage increase in the SLCI over the past year for the relevant payment type).

Struggling on Newstart and Youth Allowance

Living on \$279.50 per week on Newstart (single rate) or \$231.10 per week on Youth Allowance (single rate) means housing, food, transport, health and utilities bills all have to be squeezed into a very small payment. At March 2019 these payments were around \$440-\$488 under the Minimum Wage² of \$719.20 per week (Fair Work Commission, 2018). Where unexpected bills occur (e.g. large electricity bills), other essential items might have to be forgone (e.g. less money for food).

People on Newstart and Youth Allowance include sole parents, people with disability or mental illness, long term unemployed, and people (Newstart only) aged between 50-64, many of whom face significant employment barriers. In addition, for every eight people who are looking for paid work (or for an increase in hours), there is only one job available (ACOSS 2018a, p.1).

It is also very difficult for people to have the energy to successfully look for work, if they are homeless or worried about putting food on their table, are also required to participate in a range of income related activities (e.g. ParentsNext) and are merely trying to survive because they are living below the poverty line.

Pension Indexation System and the Inadequacy of Allowance Payments

Newstart, Youth Allowance and other base-level benefit allowances are indexed only to the CPI (whereas pension payment increases are linked to Male Total Average Weekly Earnings and prices (CPI), which means that increases in allowances may not always keep up with the cost of living rises, as described above – whereas pensions generally do keep up.

More than half (55%) of people on Newstart live below the poverty line (ACOSS 2018a, p.1). Clearly **\$40 a day is simply not enough to live on**. At the moment, the **Newstart Allowance is \$178 per week lower than the Age Pension**, while the **Youth Allowance is \$227 below**.

Figure 2 and 3 reinforce the importance of the current method of indexation for adjusting pension rates every six months, where payment increases are linked to Male Total Average Weekly Earnings and prices (CPI). This generally ensures that pensions do not drop behind society averages (see Explanatory Note 4), with figures from the past year a case in point.

Raising the Rate of Newstart and Youth Allowance

NTCOSS reinforces its support for the Australian Council of Social Services' (ACOSS 2018a) Raise the Rate Campaign which is calling for the Australian Government to increase Newstart payments by \$75 per week, see <https://www.acoss.org.au/raisetherate/>

There is widespread support for this across a broad cross section of the community. Recently, the Reserve Bank governor, Philip Lowe (Lowe 2019), suggested that an increase in Newstart would be 'good for the economy'.

² NOTE: The Minimum Wage figure referred to of \$719.20 is for a 38-hour week (before tax) for the period 1 July 2017 – 30 June 2019.

Regional Snapshot of Cost of Living Changes in the NT

Table 3a Darwin Region – Price & Expenditure Changes over Time

Price Changes		
Fuel Darwin Region	Ave. Price (June 2019)	Price Change b/w June 2018-June 2019
Unleaded	144.7 cpl	↓ 10.8 cpl (6.9%)
Diesel	148.0 cpl	↓ 7.3 cpl (4.7%)
Weekly Food Basket	Ave. Price (Mid 2017)	Change b/w Mid 2016 – Mid 2017
Darwin District Supermarket Average	Healthy Basket \$510	↓ \$134 (20.8%)
	Current Diet Basket \$633	↓ \$72 (10.2%)
Darwin District Remote Store Average	Healthy Basket \$843	↑ \$37 (4.6%)
	Current Diet Basket \$913	↑ \$24 (2.7%)
*Cheapest March 2019 price in one of the three Northern Suburbs was chosen		
Rental Housing Darwin – (Cheapest*)	Median Weekly Rent	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
3 BR House	\$420 DN	↓ \$30 (6.7%)
4 BR House	\$490 DNE	↓ \$185 (27.4%)
1BR Unit	\$210 DN	↓ \$80.50 (27.7%)
2BR Unit	\$300 DN	↓ \$40 (11.8%)
	\$300 DNE	↓ \$80 (21.1%)
3 BR Unit	\$382.5 DN	↑ \$7.50 (2%)
Residential Sales	Median Sales Price	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
House	\$492,500 DN	↑ \$41,000 (9.1%)
Unit	\$244.500 DN	↓ \$95,500 (28.1%)

Price Changes		
Transport Expenditure Darwin	Expenditure Weekly (Dec 2018)	Price Change b/w Dec 2017-Dec 2018
Car Loan Payments	\$123.48	↑ \$1.77 (1.5%)
Registration and Licensing	\$29.42	↑ \$0.42 (1.4%)
Insurance	\$32.37	↑ \$8.92 (38.0%)
Servicing & tyres	\$29.73	↑ \$0.73 (2.5%)
Fuel	\$78.04	↑ \$7.48 (10.6%)
Public Transport	\$20.00	No change
Roadside Assistance	\$1.90	No change
Transport Total	\$314.94	↑ \$19.31 (6.5%)
Rental Housing - Palmerston	Median Weekly Rent	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
3 BR House	\$410	↓ \$40 (6.8%)
4 BR House	\$500	↓ \$50 (9.1%)
2BR Unit	\$300	↓ \$30 (9.1%)
3 BR Unit	\$395	↓ \$5.00 (1.3%)
Residential Sales Palmerston	Median Sales Price	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
House	\$445,000	↓ \$5000 (1.1%)
Unit	\$274,500	↑ \$500 (0.2%)

Cheapest Available rental in Darwin Suburbs: DN = Darwin North; DNE = Darwin North East.

NT Government 2017a, p.10; NT Government 2017b, p.1,2; NT Government 2018b p.1,2; NT Government 2019b p.1,2; NT Government 2019d p.1,2; REINT 2018,p.5,7,24,25; REINT 2019 P.5,7,26,27; AAA & SGS 2018, p.29; AAA & SGS 2019, p.27.

Table 3b Katherine Region – Price & Expenditure Changes over Time

Price Changes			Price Changes		
Fuel Katherine Region	Ave. Price (June 2019)	Price Change b/w June 2018-June 2019	Rental Housing Katherine	Median Weekly Rent	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
Unleaded	164.8 cpl	↓ 7.9 cpl (4.6%)	3 BR House	\$420	↑ \$10 (2.4%)
Weekly Food Basket	Ave. Price (Mid 2017)	Price Change	4 BR House	\$500	No change
Katherine District Remote Store Average	Healthy Basket \$851	↑ \$49 (6.1%)	1BR Unit	\$230	↓ \$35 (13.2%)
	Current Diet Basket \$925	↑ \$48 (5.5%)	2BR Unit	\$310	↓ \$5 (1.6%)
Residential Sales Katherine	Median Sales Price	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019	Residential Sales Katherine	Median Sales Price	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
Houses	\$335,000	↑ \$20,000 (8.1%)	Units	\$220,000	Figures not available 02/19

Note 3 BR Figures for Katherine not available for March 2019.

NT Government 2017b, p.1,2; NT Government 2018b p.1,2; NT Government 2019b p.1,2; NT Government 2019d p.1; REINT 2018, p.5,7,24,25; REINT 2019 P.5,7,26,27.

Table 3c East Arnhem Region – Price & Expenditure Changes over Time

Price Changes					Price Changes		
Fuel Prices MY Fuel NT data		Ave. Price (June 2019)	Change in past yr (end June 2019)		Food	Median Weekly \$	Change b/w Mid 2016 - Mid 2017
Low aromatic fuel		246.0 cpl	↓ 3.3 cpl (1.3%)		East Arnhem District Supermarket Average	Healthy Basket \$554	↓ \$103 (15.7%)
Diesel		229.3 cpl	↑ 6.0 cpl (2.7%)			Current Diet Basket \$688	↓ \$97 (12.4%)
Highest Prices at 8 July 2019					East Arnhem District Remote Store Average	Healthy Basket \$816	↓ \$7 (0.9%)
Low aromatic fuel	295.0	Diesel	295.0 cpl			Current Diet Basket \$920	↓ \$9 (1.0%)

NT Government 2017a, p10; NT Government 2017b, p.1; NT Government 2019c; NT Government 2019d p.1.

Table 3d Central Australian Region – Price & Expenditure Changes over Time

Price Changes			Price Changes		
Fuel Cent. Australian Region	Ave. Price (June 2019)	Price Change b/w June 2018-June 2019	Transport Expenditure Alice Springs	Expenditure Weekly (Dec 2018)	Price Change b/w Dec 2017-Dec 2018
Alice Springs Unleaded	189.0 cpl	↑ 5.3 cpl (2.9%)	Car Loan Payments	\$123.48	↑ \$1.77 (1.5%)
Tennant Creek Unleaded	193.7 cpl	↑ 4.1 cpl (2.2%)	Registration and Licensing	\$29.42	↑ \$0.42 (1.4%)
Weekly Food Basket	Ave. Price (Mid 2017)	Price Change b/w 2016-2107	Insurance	\$25.16	↑ \$5.27 (26.5%)
Alice Springs District Supermarket Average	Healthy Basket \$541	↓ \$35 (6.1%)	Servicing & tyres	\$32.86	↑ \$0.79 (2.5%)
	Current Diet Basket \$653	↓ \$19 (2.8%)	Fuel	\$88.02	↑ \$10.04 (12.9%)
Alice Springs District Remote Store Average	Healthy Basket \$870	↑ \$10 (1.2%)	Roadside Assistance	\$1.90	No change
	Current Diet Basket \$923	↑ \$17 (1.9%)	Transport Total	\$300.84	↑ \$18.28 (6.5%)
Rental Housing Alice Springs	Median Weekly Rent	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019	Rental Housing Alice Springs	Median Weekly Rent	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
2 BR House	\$465	↑ \$45 (10.7%)	1BR Unit	\$300	No change
3 BR House	\$505	↑ \$5 (1.0%)	2BR Unit	\$370	↓ \$20 (5.1%)
4 BR House	\$680	↑ \$5 (0.7%)	3 BR Unit	\$492.50	No change
Residential Sales Alice Springs	Median Sales Price	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019	Residential Sales Tenant Creek	Median Sales Price	Price Change b/w Mar 2018-Mar 2019
House	\$457,000	↓ \$10,000 (2.1%)	House	\$221,000	↓ \$70,000 (46.4%)
Unit	\$325,000	No change	Unit	\$430,000* *Only one sale for the year	↑ \$258,500 (150.7%)

NT Government 2017a, p. 10; NT Government 2017b, p.1; NT Government 2018b p.1,2; NT Government 2019b p.1,2; NT Government 2019d p.1; REINT 2018,p.5,7,24,25; REINT 2019 P.5,7,26,27; AAA & SGS 2018, p.29; AAA & SGS 2019, p.27.

Note: It is assumed by the TAI that the regional household does not incur public transport costs. This is due to a lack of reliable services and low usage rates in the regional locations analysed; AAA & SGS 2019, p.29.

My Fuel Data across the NT: Extraordinarily High Remote Fuel Prices

MyFuel NT figures need to be interpreted with some caution, as the average figures supplied do not provide a weighted average. Despite the limitations in the data, the My Fuel App is a useful tool for getting a picture of fuel prices across all regions and many smaller communities across the NT. In particular the data does reveal the extremely high prices charged in some areas of the NT, at particular points in time, e.g. as at 9 July 2019:

Table 4 My Fuel Highest Price Data at 9 July 2019

Fuel Type	Highest Price(s)	Region
Unleaded Fuel	250 cpl	Central Australian region
	241 cpl	Tiwi Island
Low Aromatic Fuel	295 cpl	East Arnhem
	264 cpl	Top End Rural
	260 cpl	Central Australian region
Diesel	295 cpl	East Arnhem
	272 cpl	Top End Rural
	260 cpl	Central Australian region

NT Government, 2019c.

In addition, the variation in prices within the same region are at times extraordinary. These prices for example, were found in the East Arnhem region on the same day in May (8 May 2019):

- 330.0 cents per litre at a petrol station in Milyakburra;
- 122.6 cents per litre in Alyangula (Arnhem Land) Township Service Station. (NT Government 2019c).

SECTION TWO: IMPACT OF FOOD COSTS ON NT HOUSEHOLDS

Overview

The price of food is a significant issue to examine in terms of its impact on Northern Territory household budgets, with food taking up the second largest slice of weekly household expenditure (behind housing) (ABS, 2017 Table 13.9A). In addition, food is a non-discretionary essential expenditure area for all households with nutritious food essential to the health and wellbeing of all Territorians.

Food costs impact on cost of living issues and also impact on health outcomes for many people. Evidence shows that people living in poverty are more likely to suffer ill health than those on higher incomes. Jan et al (2012, p.29-31) notes that chronic illness and disability is associated with economic hardship, which then affects health behaviours, “thereby completing a cycle in which poor health leads to poverty, which then leads to poor health”. There are well established links between a poor diet and the development of chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, heart disease and some cancers (AIHW, 2014).

For some people in low income households, skipping meals or regularly going without adequate food can be a choice they make to ensure their children are fed, which compromises their own nutritional intake. Improving the availability, variety, quality and affordability of fruits and vegetables has been a priority identified in both Northern Territory and national nutrition policies for quite some time (NT Government 2012, p. 25). In the Northern Territory an important goal has been to “improve access and affordability of fresh food” in order to increase the very low daily intake of fruit and negligible intake of vegetables by Aboriginal people in remote areas (NT Government 2012, p. 25).

Two significant developments occurred in 2007 with the Australian Government establishing Outback Stores, “a company set up to manage stores on behalf of remote communities to ensure their commercial viability and a reliable supply of healthy, affordable food” (NT Government 2017a, p. 20).

Later in 2007, the Australian Government “commenced licensing of remote stores to improve both the management of stores and the quality of food they provide” with licensing conditions requiring stores “to have a reasonable range of groceries and consumer items, including healthy food and drinks” (NT Government 2017a, p. 20).

Some years prior to this, in 1995, the then NT Department of Health and Community Services developed the NT Food and Nutrition Policy, which led to the development of “a tool to monitor food cost, availability, variety and quality in remote community stores” (NT Government 2017a, p.4), leading to the Market Basket Survey (MBS), a survey of remote stores in the NT examining issues such as price and availability of food groups (which had been an annual survey, but is now biennial).

The 2016 MBS cited strong evidence that “an adequate intake of vegetables is protective against cardiovascular disease and recent research has strengthened the evidence of the beneficial effects of

various non-starchy vegetables in reducing risk of some site-specific cancers” (NT Government 2017a, p.20). According to the National Health Survey (2017-18) **only 7.5% of adult Australians consume the recommended amounts of vegetables** (vs 10.3% for the NT), while 51.3% of Australians consume the recommended amounts of fruit (vs 47.7% for the NT); but only 5.4% of Australians consume the recommended amounts of both (vs 6.6% NT) (ABS 2019f).

On average, adult males usually consume 1.7 serves of fruit, and women 1.8 serves per day; while adult males consume 2.3 serves of vegetables and women 2.5 serves (which puts both at around half the recommended amount), (ABS 2019f). In relation to children (2-17 y.o.) **only 6.3% consume the recommended amounts of vegetables** (vs 6.6% for the NT), while 73% consume the recommended amounts of fruit (vs 79.7% for the NT); but only 6% of children consume the recommended amounts of both (vs 7.7% NT) (ABS 2019f).

While these figures show the NT faring better than the national average on a range of measures, very remote areas and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were excluded, which is around 20.3% of the NT population (ABS 2019f). This means the above figures are not reflective of the overall NT population - and in particular do not reflect the remote and very remote NT population.

Other survey data has found that that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote areas are less likely to have an adequate intake of vegetables, with only 6% reporting an adequate intake” (NT Government 2017a, p. 20). Fruit intake is also crucial, with strong evidence to show that “including fruit in the diet is protective against cardiovascular disease and there is a protective effect against a number of chronic diseases when vegetables and fruit have been studied together” (NT Government 2017a, p.20).

While there have been significant improvements made in terms of increasing access to fresh fruit and vegetables in remote areas of the NT since 2000 (NT Government 2017a, p. 3) an examination of the cost of healthy food is critical, given the persistence of low consumption of fruit and vegetables.

When documenting changes in the cost of food, it is imperative to examine the impact of changes in the price of ‘healthy’ food items. This report looks at consumer price index (CPI) data that can be used to track the cost of healthy foods over a period of time, to see if these food items are becoming more, or less, affordable. One limitation of the CPI data is that ‘healthy’ food categories also include unhealthy foods (such as biscuits, cakes, lollies, potato chips and soft drinks) (ABS 2015). In light of this the report has also examined a one-off set of data produced by the ABS which tracks changes in CPI for food groups aligned with the Australian Dietary Guidelines for the period 2001-2014 – allowing for a more accurate look at the price changes for healthy foods.

A number of studies noted by Kettings et al (2009, p 566, 570), show that low-income Australians are less likely to buy and eat healthy food, and are not eating foods in line with broad public health recommendations. Whilst there are a number of factors, cost is certainly one. Kettings et al’s own

study estimates that those on income support would need to spend approximately one-third of their weekly income to afford a healthy diet (Kettings et al, 2009, p 566, 570). This is exactly the reality facing large numbers of households in remote Aboriginal communities, as this report will highlight.

Other factors, apart from price, impact on the choices people make about food purchases when they go shopping. There are other related issues, such as access to appropriate food storage and preparation facilities (e.g. whitegoods) in order to be able to prepare healthy meals, as well as the issue of having continuous access to electricity. Another important issue that will be covered in the report is that of access to transport and how it can impact on access to food. All of these factors create a challenge to public health campaigns aimed at improving the diets of the Australian population.

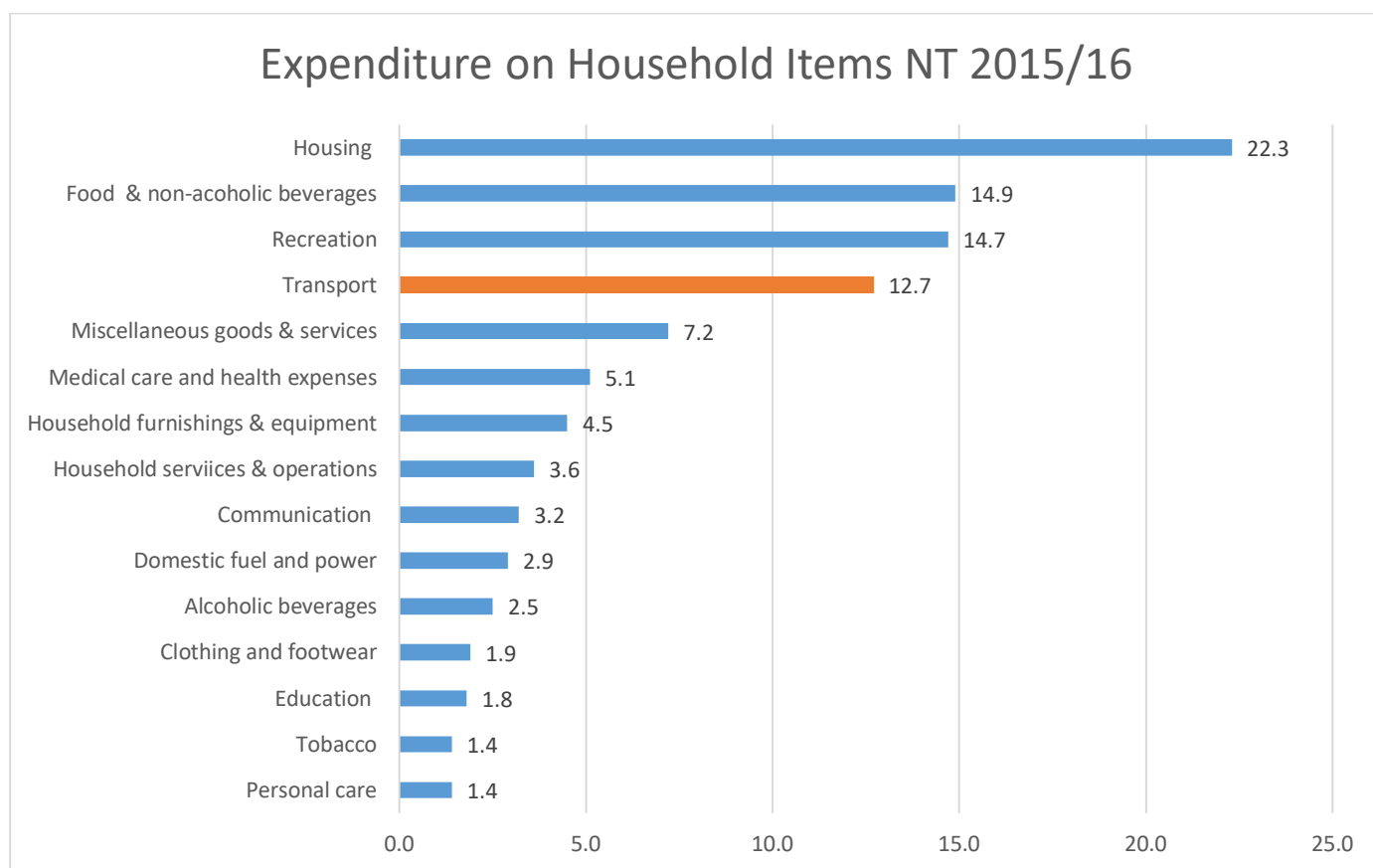
KEY FINDINGS – FOOD EXPENDITURE

Food Expenditure in relation to Total Expenditure for NT Households

ABS Household Expenditure Survey (HES) 2015/16: Food Expenditure

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of household expenditure for all NT households derived from the most recent Household Expenditure Survey (HES) released in 2017. This data shows that expenditure on food constitutes the second highest expenditure category for NT households

Figure 3 Food Expenditure as a Proportion of Total Household Expenditure (%) in the NT, 2015/16



ABS 2017, Table 13.9A.

Note: There is an important limitation with HES data, as it does not include very remote or Indigenous communities, which for the Northern Territory means that around 22% of the population was not included in the HES data, which will have an effect on the “aggregate estimates” for the NT (ABS 2017). Incomes in very remote areas and Indigenous communities are generally lower than the Territory average and the price of food has historically been far more expensive in remote communities compared with Darwin and the major town centres. Therefore, this report examines other data in relation to food prices and expenditure in the NT, to examine what is happening in remote areas.

Food Expenditure Northern Territory Households – in relation to Income

Expenditure on Food as a Proportion of Income – NT vs other States/Territories

Table 5 Weekly Expenditure as a Proportion of Weekly Mean Disposable Income for the four highest HES Expenditure Areas – All States/Territories

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Aust
Housing	17.2%	15.4%	16.8%	14.9%	16.4%	14.9%	18.3%	15.2%	16.4%
Food	13.7%	14.6%	13.4%	14.3%	13.3%	15.3%	12.3%	13.9%	13.9%
Recreation	10.0%	10.1%	10.0%	9.0%	9.9%	10.1%	12.0%	12.4%	10.1%
Transport	12.0%	13.1%	12.6%	11.0%	10.2%	13.4%	10.4%	11.6%	12.1%

ABS 2017, Table 13.8, 13.9A. Note Capital city figures relates to metropolitan areas.

NT households on average spend the lowest proportion of their weekly disposable income on food, out of all states and territories. Housing is the greatest expenditure area for households nationally, and the NT has the highest proportion of income spent on housing costs. *(Similar trends are seen in Darwin in relation to percentages and positioning amongst all of the capital cities, with expenditure of food representing 12.6% of weekly disposable income vs capital city average of 13.8% (ABS 2017³).*

Expenditure on Food as a Proportion of Income for NT vs National: Food Sub Categories

Table 2 shows that NT households on average spend a greater amount on food per week than the national average, and in fact have the second highest level of expenditure on food in the country (behind only the ACT). NT households spend a little bit more (\$4) per week on meat, fish and seafood combined, than the national average, as well as more on meals out and fast foods. It is uncertain whether this is due to higher prices or the higher average incomes of NT households, enabling them to purchase more of these products.

Alcohol expenditure is one area where the NT spends significantly above than the national average - nearly \$11 per week more – or one third higher. The high rate of alcohol consumption in the NT is well documented (and highly concerning), so this figure is not unexpected.

³ The Capital City average figure comes from ABS 2017, Tables 13.2, 13.3A.

How Darwin households compare with the NT as a whole

Expenditure patterns for Darwin households are similar to the NT across the various food groups (and alcohol) in terms of both dollar amounts expended (Darwin \$299.22 vs NT \$297.02), as well as the percentages of disposable income spent on food (14.9% vs 14.4%).

When discussing HES Figures in this report, the focus will tend to be on expenditure across the NT as a whole (as opposed to Darwin), to be representative of the broader population, as far as this is possible. In addition, the expenditure patterns for the NT are fairly consistent with the patterns seen in Darwin, so they are fairly representative of Darwin as well.

**Table 6 Weekly Food* and Alcohol Expenditure and as % of Disposable Income: NT vs National:
Based on 2015/16 Household Expenditure Survey**

	Northern Territory Average		National Average	
	Weekly Expenditure	% of Weekly disposable income	Weekly Expenditure	% of Weekly disposable income
FOOD AND NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES				
Food and non-alcoholic beverages nfd^	\$25.07	1.2%	\$15.25	0.9%
Bakery products, flours and cereals	\$16.49	0.8%	\$19.87	1.2%
Meat (excluding fish and seafood)	\$30.70	1.5%	\$27.02	1.6%
Fish and seafood	\$6.33	0.3%	\$5.46	0.3%
Eggs and egg products	\$1.67	0.08%	\$1.86	0.1%
Dairy products	\$16.74	0.8%	\$15.12	0.9%
Edible oils and fats	\$1.61	0.08%	\$1.49	0.09%
Fruit and nuts	\$15.71	0.8%	\$14.77	0.9%
Vegetables	\$18.76	0.9%	\$15.32	0.9%
Condiments – confectionary, food additives, prepared meals	\$22.89	1.1%	\$25.57	1.5%
Non-alcoholic beverages	\$16.74	0.8%	\$15.00	0.9%
Meals out and fast foods	\$84.23	4.1%	\$80.43	4.7%
Other food and non-alcoholic beverages	\$0.19^^	0.01%	\$0.22	0.01%
TOTAL ALL FOOD EXPENDITURE	\$254.12	12.3%	\$236.97	13.9%
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES	\$42.90	2.1%	\$31.95	1.9%
TOTAL ALL FOOD & ALCOHOL EXPENDITURE	\$297.02	14.4%	\$268.92	15.8%
Weekly Mean Household Disposable Income	\$2073	-	\$1706	-

ABS 2017 Table 13.8, 13.9A.

* Food refers to 'Food and non-alcoholic beverages' ^not further defined

^^ Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

Table 7 Food and non-alcoholic beverages and alcohol: Weekly expenditure and proportion of mean disposable income – Comparison of States/Territories – 2015/16

2015-16 Figures	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
Food & non-alcoholic beverages	\$248.75	\$243.98	\$218.45	\$210.59	\$237.33	\$199.98	\$254.12	\$270.89	\$236.97
Food - % of Mean Disposable Income	13.7%	14.6%	13.4%	14.3%	13.3%	15.3%	12.3%	13.9%	13.9%
Alcohol	\$34.04	\$32.21	\$31.27	\$26.72	\$30.78	\$29.03	\$42.90	\$30.15	\$32.07
Alcohol - % of Mean Disposable Income	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	1.8%	1.7%	2.2%	2.1%	1.6%	1.9%
Food & Alcohol combined	\$282.79	\$276.19	\$249.72	\$237.31	\$268.11	\$229.01	\$297.02	\$301.04	\$269.04
Food & Alcohol Combined % of Mean Disposable Income	15.5%	16.5%	15.3%	16.1%	15.0%	17.5%	14.3%	15.5%	15.8%
Ave. Weekly Mean Disposable Income	\$1,820	\$1,670	\$1,629	\$1,472	\$1,789	\$1,309	\$2,073	\$1,942	\$1,706

ABS 2017, Table 13.8, 13.9A.

Food Expenditure for Northern Territory Households Over Time

Expenditure by Territory households on food is the second highest in the country, but requires the lowest proportion of disposable income (12.3% - vs national average 13.9%).

This is also true for Darwin households (12.6% vs capital city average of 13.8%).

Food Expenditure comparing 2015/16 HES data with HES data from previous years, Northern Territory and Australia

Table 8a shows that between 2003/04 and 2015/16 expenditure on food by NT households has increased by \$24 per week in real terms, while the average total goods and services expenditure for NT households has increased by \$277 per week (in real terms) over the same period. As a result, **expenditure on food takes up a slightly smaller slice of the expenditure pie** (down from 16.2% to 14.9% of expenditure over this period) (ABS 2017; ABS 2019e).

The data also shows that expenditure on food in real terms has gone down slightly since 2009-10 compared with 2015/16, decreasing by \$3.63 per week (ABS 2017, ABS 2019e) meaning based on these figures **NT households are better off compared with 2009/10 – with food more affordable than previously**. It is important to remember, however, that these HES figures exclude the remote areas of the NT so do not represent all Territory households.

Darwin vs Capital Cities

Table 8b shows that the average total goods and services expenditure for Darwin households has increased by \$200 in real terms since 1998-99, and as a result, **food expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure has decreased** over this time (from 17.4% to 15.5%).

Similarly, food expenditure at the national level has actually increased overall (for both Australia, and the capital cities average), but food as a proportion of expenditure is lower now than in 1998-99).

Food expenditure in Darwin in real terms decreased between 1998-199 and 2003-04, before rising over the last two HES survey periods, including a \$10 per week rise between 2009/10 and 2015/16. This represents a 4% increase in expenditure over this period (which is well under the 14.5% increase in the generic CPI (All groups) figure for Darwin for the commensurate period (Dec 2009 – Dec 2015) (ABS 2019d).

In addition, food expenditure for Darwin only increased by \$5 per week in real terms, between 1998/99 and 2015/16.

This means that based on 2015/16 figures **food is relatively more affordable for Darwin households**, compared with previous years.

Table 8a NT vs Australia: Comparison of Food Expenditure levels across recent HES Surveys (using 2015/16 dollars)

Food Expenditure	\$ figures converted to 2015-16 \$		
	2003-04	2009-10	2015-16
Northern Territory	\$230.43	\$257.75	\$254.12
% of Total Expenditure	16.2%	14.9%	14.9%
<i>Total Household Expenditure</i>	<i>\$1423.01</i>	<i>\$1724.21</i>	<i>\$1700.04</i>
Australia	\$208.44	\$234.73	\$236.97
% of Total Expenditure	17.1%	16.5%	16.6%
<i>Total Household Expenditure</i>	<i>\$1217.39</i>	<i>\$1421.13</i>	<i>\$1425.03</i>

ABS 2000, Table 5; ABS 2006, Table 5; ABS 2011, Table 27A; ABS 2017, Table 13.8, 13.9A; ABS 2019e.

Note NT figures not available for 1998-99.

Table 8b Darwin vs Capital Cities: Comparison of Food Expenditure levels across recent HES Surveys (using 2015/16 dollars)

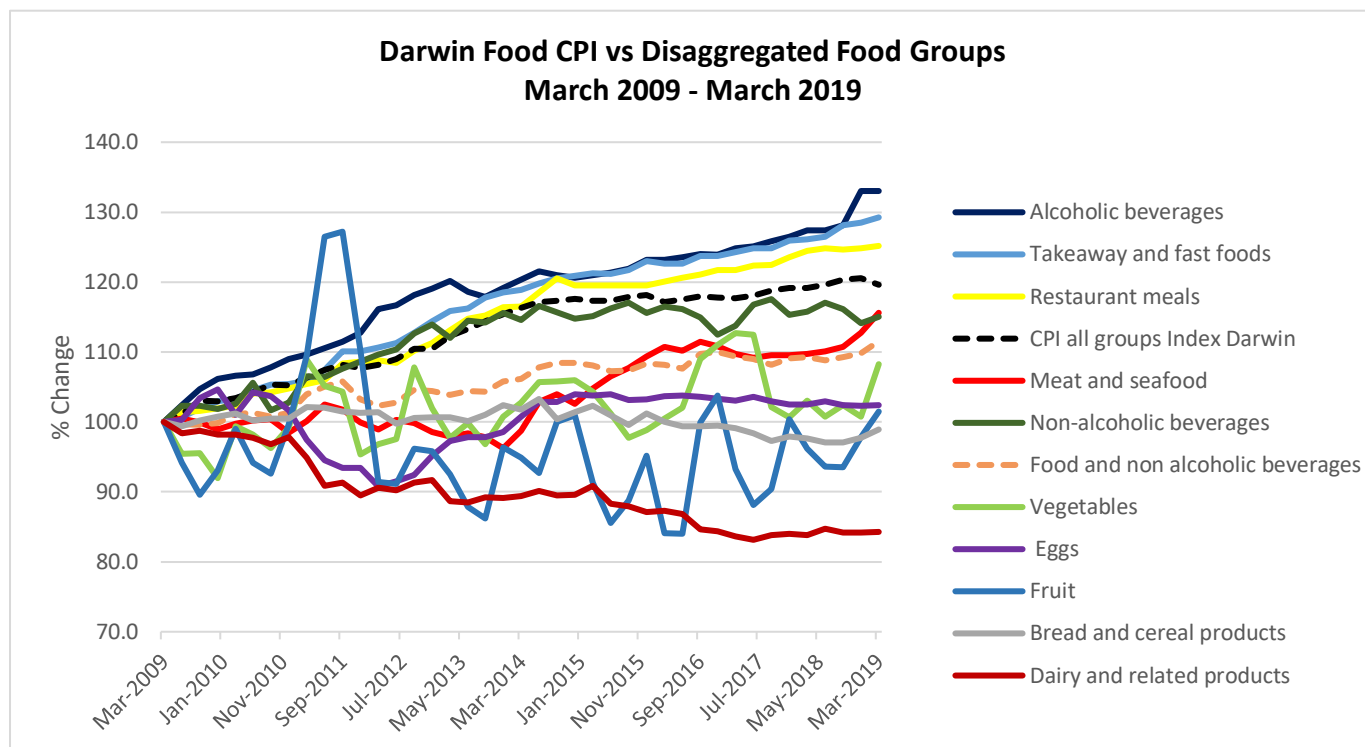
Food Expenditure	\$ figures converted to 2015-16 \$			
	1998-99	2003-04	2009-10	2015-16
Darwin	\$251.92	\$234.68	\$246.40	\$256.28
% of Total Expenditure	17.4%	15.9%	14.6%	15.5%
<i>Total Household Expenditure</i>	<i>\$1449.17</i>	<i>\$1479.35</i>	<i>\$1682.43</i>	<i>\$1649.32</i>
Capital Cities Average	203.03*	\$218.66	\$249.99	\$254.96
% of Total Expenditure	18.2%	16.9%	16.6%	16.6%
<i>Total Expenditure</i>	<i>\$1117.52</i>	<i>\$1291.75</i>	<i>\$1505.63</i>	<i>\$1536.60</i>

ABS 2000, Table 5; ABS 2006, Table 8; ABS 2011, Table 23A; ABS 2017, Table 13.2, 13.3A; ABS 2019e.

KEY FINDINGS – FOOD PRICE CHANGES

Price changes for Food & non-alcoholic beverages in Darwin

Figure 4 Food Price Changes in Darwin



ABS 2019d, Table 11.

Table 9 Percentage Change in CPI for all Food Sub-Categories for year ending March 2019: Darwin

Food*	Bread & cereals	Meat & seafood	Dairy & related	Fruit	Veg	Eggs	Non-alcoholic drinks	Restaurant Meals	Takeaway & fast food	Alcoholic beverages	CPI All groups Darwin
	2.1%	5.3%	0.5%	5.5%	5.1%	-0.2%	-0.7%	0.6%	2.5%	4.5%	0.4%

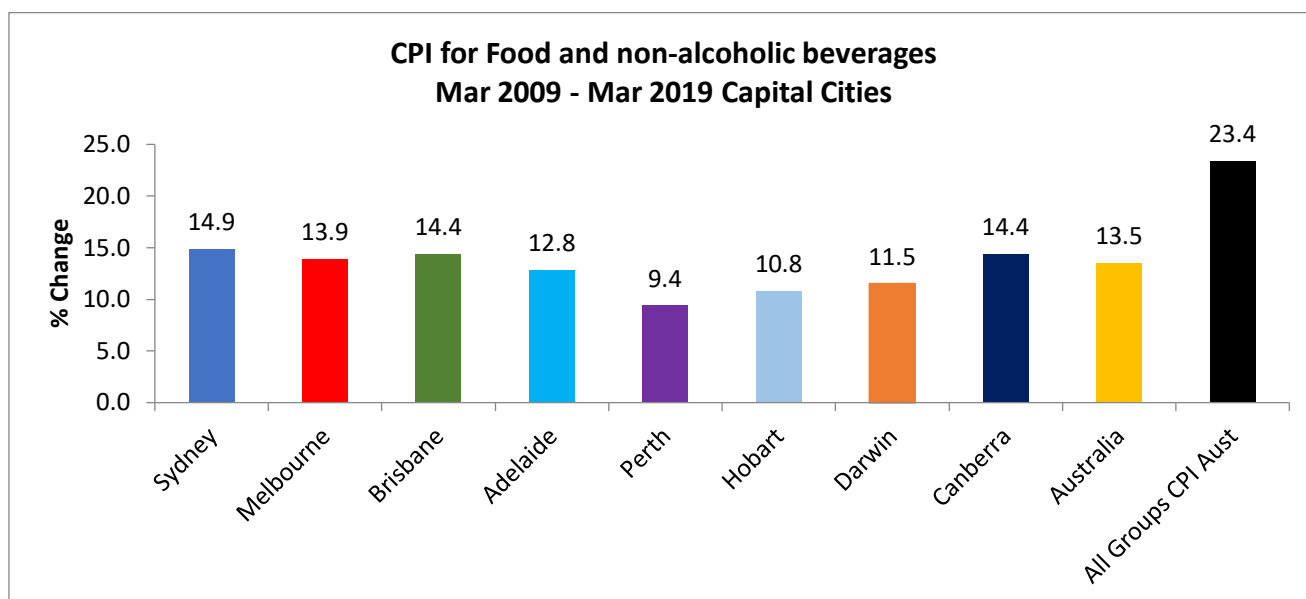
ABS 2019d, Table 11.

Summary of Darwin CPI changes for 'Food and non-alcoholic beverages' for over the past decade:

- 'Food and non-alcoholic beverages' (11.5%) tracked below the generic CPI for the whole decade (19.6%);
- 'Alcoholic Beverages' (33.0%) and 'Takeaway and fast foods' (29.2%) were the only CPI sub groups to rise above the generic all groups CPI for Darwin;
- 'Non-alcoholic beverages' (15.1%) tracked below the generic 'all groups' CPI (19.6%) but above the CPI increase for 'food' and 'non-alcoholic beverages' (11.5%);
- 'Dairy and related products' (-15.7%) as well as 'bread and cereals' (-1.1%) actually decreased.
- All other Darwin food sub-groups (i.e. all the staple food groups) either rose at a rate below (or the same as) the generic CPI and 'food' and 'non-alcoholic beverages' CPI;
- Interestingly, since December 2013, however, the CPI for 'meat and seafoods' has risen 20.1% (having earlier decreased by 3.8% between March 2009 and December 2013). (ABS 2019d).

CPI Figures for Food & non-alcoholic beverages in Darwin over time

Figure 5 Change in CPI for 'Food and non-alcoholic beverages' for all Capital Cities March 2009-March 2019



ABS 2019d, Table 11.

Over the last ten years, in all capital cities the CPI for 'food and non-alcoholic beverages' had growth well below the 'all groups' CPI figure for Australia. Darwin (11.5%) had the 3rd lowest rate of growth in CPI for 'food', and below the national rate of growth for CPI for 'food' (13.5%) and well below the national CPI 'all groups' figure (23.4%).

CPI Past year

Table 10 Food and non-alcoholic beverages: Percentage change in CPI March 2018 - March 2019

Syd	Melb	Bris	Adel	Perth	Hob	Darw	Canb	Aust
2.1%	2.5%	2.9%	2.3%	2.3%	1.9%	2.1%	3.1%	2.3%

ABS 2019d, Table 10.

Over the past year all capital cities saw the CPI for 'food' increase, but Darwin did experience one of the slowest rises, 2.1% (equal 2nd lowest) and below the national average of 2.3% (ABS 2019d).

Relative Importance of Food Expenditure Area and Price Changes

Table 11 Food CPI Changes over past 10 years and importance of expenditure area, Darwin

CPI Expenditure Category Darwin, related to HES Category	% change in CPI over last 10 years for related HES category	% of Food & Alcohol expenditure Darwin (HES 2015/16)	Household Expenditure Survey (HES) Category Darwin
Bread and cereal products CPI	-1.1%	5.1%	Bakery products, flour and cereals
Meat and seafood	15.6%	12.8%	Meat including fish and seafood*
Dairy and related products	-15.7%	5.6%	Dairy Products
Fruit	1.5%	5.0%	Fruit and Nuts
Vegetables	8.3%	5.7%	Vegetables
Eggs	2.4%	0.6%	Eggs
Non-alcoholic beverages	15.1%	5.4%	Non-alcoholic beverages
Meals out and takeaway foods	27.7%	28.7%	Meals out and fast foods
(All) Food and non-alcoholic beverages	11.5%	85.7%	Food and non-alcoholic beverages
Alcoholic beverages	33.0%	14.3%	Alcoholic beverages
CPI All Groups Darwin	19.6%		-

ABS 2017a Table 13.9A, and ABS 2019d Table 10.

* Note: The two separate HES categories of 'meat excluding fish and seafood' and 'fish and seafood' have been combined in this table, as the CPI has a combined 'meat and fish and seafood' category. In the same way 'fruit and nuts' and 'vegetables' are combined in the HES category. In this table percentages won't add up to 100%, as only the major - not all CPI and HES categories are included.

Table 11 looks at CPI changes for a number of food sub categories in relation to their significance as a food expenditure area using HES figures, with Darwin figures examined as there are no CPI figures for the NT. While there may be a mix of healthy and unhealthy foods amongst each of the CPI food expenditure categories, it is noteworthy that the category with the highest increase in CPI over the past decade is 'takeaway and fast foods' (29.2%) which generally does not contain healthy food items – and this rate is almost double the next greatest increase as far as food sub-categories go.

The 'takeaway and fast food' HES category constitutes a significant proportion of household expenditure on 'food & non-alcoholic beverages', which will put cost of living pressure on some households. 'Alcohol' has also increased in price at a similar rate (33%) to 'takeaway and fast foods'. The need for measures to encourage a shift towards healthier food options will be covered later in the report.

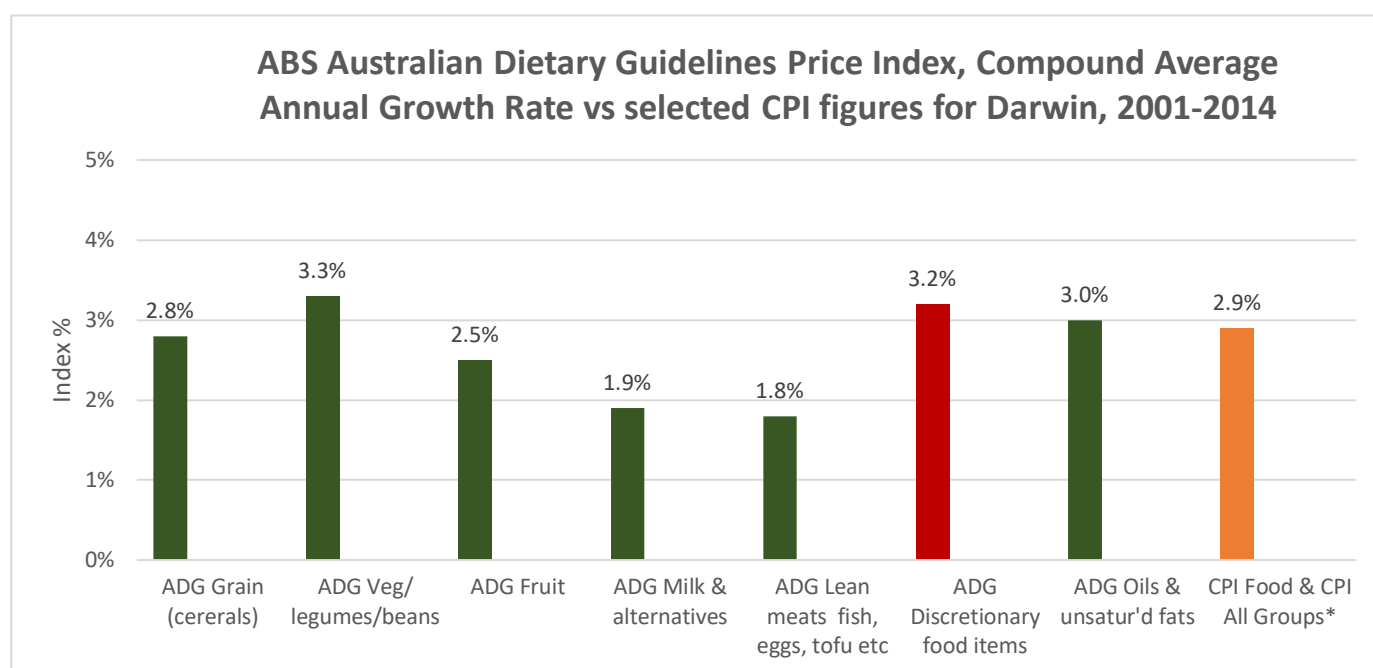
Overall good news on CPI for food in Darwin over the past decade.

The CPI for all essential food items have increased at a rate under the generic 'all groups' CPI. Only 'takeaway and fast foods' and 'alcohol' have seen large CPI rises, well above general inflation. The growth in the overall CPI for food has also been much lower than most other capitals – bar Perth and Hobart.

Examination of CPI changes for Healthy Food Groups 2001-2014

The ABS, along with the Department of Health, analysed historical Consumer Price Index (CPI) data with reference to the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG) food groups to construct new ADG Price Indexes (ADGPIs) on a one-off basis for the period 2001-2014 (ABS 2016a). “The ADG provide evidence-based advice on the amount and types of food that Australians should eat for good health, maintenance of a healthy body weight and the prevention of chronic conditions such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes” (ABS 2016a).

Figure 6 Australian Dietary Guidelines figures Darwin, 2001-2014



ABS 2016b⁴ (see Appendices for list of products included in ADG figures).

Note the CPI figure for Food for Darwin and All Groups were the same, therefore are combined here into the one bar.

Figure 6 shows that ‘vegetables and legumes/beans’ (3.3%) was the only core ADG food group which rose at a greater rate than the CPI for ‘food’ and the generic ‘all groups’ CPI figure (both 2.9%). In comparison, the national rise in the ADGPI for ‘vegetables and legumes/beans’ was 3.8%, so relative to the average rise across the rest of the country, the rise in Darwin was not so steep (ABS 2016b).

⁴ Full names of ADG product expenditure areas

ADG Grain (cereal) foods; mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties

ADG Vegetables and legumes/beans

ADG Fruit

ADG Milk, yoghurt, cheese and alternatives, mostly reduced fat

ADG Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds

ADG Discretionary food items

ADG Oils and unsaturated fats

Source: ABS 2018d

It is worth noting that 'discretionary food items' also rose above the rate of the Darwin 'food' CPI and the 'all groups' CPI. *(Note: 'discretionary food items' are all foods considered to be of little nutritional value and which tend to be high in saturated fats, sugars, salt and/or alcohol (ABS 2016b)).*

While the compound average annual growth for four of the five core healthy food groups was below the rise in All groups CPI, it is of some concern that for this period **the cost of 'vegetables, legumes and beans' had the greatest annual growth in price out of all food groups**, when it is so important that this food group is made accessible and affordable - particularly to lower income households.

The vegetables contained in the ADGPI figures are essentially the same as those used in the CPI figures (as the majority of vegetables would be considered healthy food). A comparison of the overall change in CPI for 'vegetables' for Darwin for this same period (63.9%) and the change in the ADGPI for 'vegetables' for Darwin (63.3%) over this whole period indicates that the CPI figure for 'vegetables' can be reliably used as indicative of the ADGPI (healthy food) figure for 'vegetables' (Figures derived from ABS 2016a; ABS 2019d).

While 'restaurant meals' and 'takeaway and fast foods' couldn't be included in the ADG CPI figures, the compound average annual growth rates for these CPI figures for the same period show an increase in the CPI for 'restaurant meals' and 'take away and fast foods' of 3.3% and 3.8% respectively, above the growth rate in the All groups CPI (ABS 2016).

Calculations of the change in CPI for 'vegetables' for the period after the ADGPI figures were calculated (March 2015-March 2019), show that until recently the CPI for 'vegetables' actually decreased by 3.5% up until the end of December 2018, while the 'all groups' CPI rose 1.9% over this period, which meant good news for NT households for that period. In the last quarter, however, **the CPI for 'vegetables' rose by 7.5%** - which is a significant concern given the importance of vegetable intake for ensuring a nutritious balanced diet.

The question of whether healthy food is becoming more affordable compared with unhealthy food is not straightforward, but the Northern Territory is fortunate that regular Market Basket Surveys (MBS) are conducted which now examine price changes for both a healthy basket, as well as a current diet basket (which contains healthy and unhealthy items), which provides data for comparison. The MBS figures are examined later in the report.

Food Costs - Northern Territory and Darwin: A Summary of CPI and HES data

The Household Expenditure Survey figures and CPI data examined to date cast a fairly positive light on affordability in terms of both food prices and food expenditure for Darwin and NT households over recent years.

- The NT has the second highest level of household expenditure on food (\$254.12) in the country on average, behind the ACT (\$270.89) and above the national average (\$236.97);
- While NT households spend on average a little more (\$18 per week) than the national average on food – this is balanced out by the overall higher average disposable incomes which are \$300 above the national average (and the highest in the country);
- NT food expenditure as a proportion of weekly mean disposable household incomes is 12.3% and is the lowest out of all states and territories (13.9%);
- For the majority of food expenditure sub categories, NT household expenditure is below or the same as the national average in terms of proportion of disposable income;
- The rises in CPI for ‘food’ and ‘non-alcoholic beverages’ in Darwin over the past decade have remained below the general CPI (inflation) level;
- In addition, HES expenditure figures for the NT show that food as a proportion of overall expenditure has decreased since 1998-99, and household expenditure in real terms has gone down in the NT between 2009-10 and 2015-16, and in Darwin expenditure in real terms has gone up by only a few dollars since 1998-99;
- ‘Vegetables’ have historically risen at a relatively high rate, before the CPI dropped between March 2015 and December 2018, but then rose steeply in the most recent quarter (7.5%).

(ABS 2017; ABS 2019d).

These average figures however, can hide what is happening for sub categories of household types, or for households in particular geographical areas - such as in remote communities. A limitation of the household expenditure data is that it does not include households “defined as very remote or Indigenous communities” in the NT (ABS 2017), where incomes are on average much lower and the price of food is more expensive. The issue of food prices in remote areas will be explored in some depth later in this report.

On top of this, a more detailed exploration of NT and national HES data reveals that there are some population groups within the NT who may not be experiencing the lower prices and expenditure enjoyed by other Territorians.

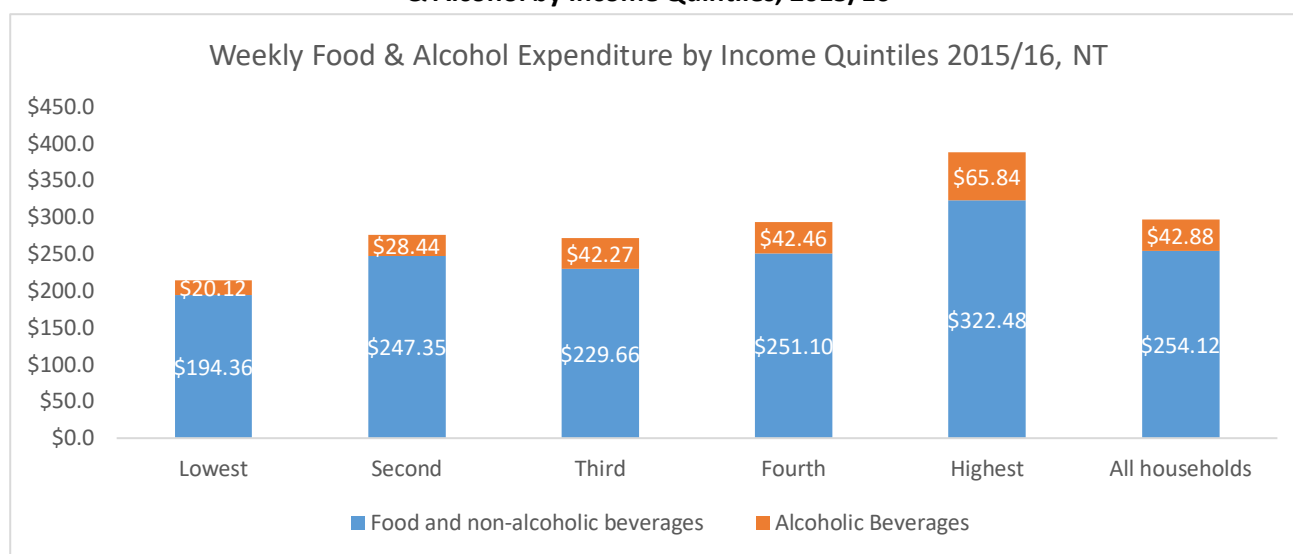
A significant limitation of the household expenditure data is that “households in collection districts defined as very remote or Indigenous communities” are excluded from the HES data (ABS 2017, Summary). While across the Australian population these exclusions have only a minor impact on aggregate estimates, in the NT “such households account for about 22% of the population.” This means a very significant proportion of the NT population is excluded from the data. In addition, in remote communities, incomes are on average much lower and the price of food is more expensive – meaning food affordability issues in these very remote areas is not represented by the HES data.

Low Income Households

While the overall average figures for Darwin and the NT may appear to bring positive news - averages can actually mask what is happening for particular population groups. The following figures show household expenditure on food (and non-alcoholic beverages) as well as alcoholic beverages for different household income levels – to allow an examination of spending patterns by income level.

Household Expenditure on food by different household types by Equivalised Disposable Household Income Quintiles

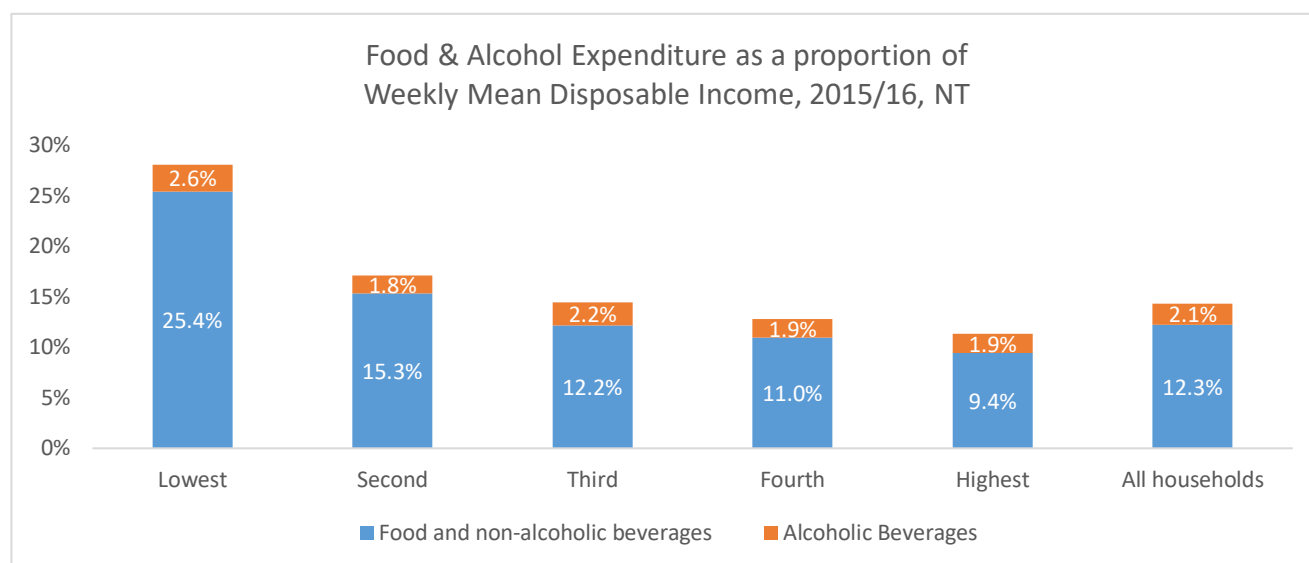
Figure 7a: NT, Weekly Expenditure: Food and non-alcoholic beverages & Alcohol by Income Quintiles, 2015/16



ABS 2017, Table 20.1.

* Note: For the 1st 2nd and 4th quintiles, the estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

Figure 7b: NT, Proportion of Weekly Mean Disposable Income spent on Food and non-alcoholic beverages & Alcohol, by Income Quintiles, 2015/16



ABS 2017, Table 20.1, 20.2.

* Note: For the 1st 2nd and 4th quintiles, the estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

While the lowest income quintile households in the NT spend the least amount of money on ‘food’ and ‘non-alcoholic beverages’ each week, they spend a much greater proportion of their income (25.4%) than the NT ‘all households’ average (12.3%) and a higher proportion than each of the other income groups, and more than double the proportion of income used by the highest income quintile. (ABS 2017). The lowest income quintile households in the NT also spend a larger amount (\$50 more) and a greater proportion of their income on food costs compared to national figures for the lowest income quintile households (24.5%⁵) (ABS 2017).

Specific Households of Concern

Lone Person Households

- For lone person households for persons 65+ in the NT, the average mean disposable income is only \$464 – that’s \$153 below the national average figure of \$617 (ABS 2017);
- These households are spending \$102 per week on food, \$15 more than the national average for this household type, and this weekly expenditure equates to 22% of their income – around 8% above the national average (ABS 2017);
- It must also be noted that these household types have much lower housing costs, \$79 per week compared with \$259.18 for the average lone person household – which will ease some financial pressure. Many lone person households would have paid off their home mortgage which frees up income for expenditure in other areas (ABS 2017);
- The extremely low income, however, is of concern and warrants further exploration. (See Figures in Appendix).

Public Housing Tenants – National Figures

National figures relating to household tenure types highlight that those households with the lowest incomes are **state/territory housing authority households, where average disposable incomes are only \$733 per week** compared with an all household average of \$1706 nationally (ABS 2017).

Public housing households spend proportionally much more of their income on food (16.3%) than the national average (13.9%) (ABS 2017). While these are national figures, there are likely to be a significant number of Northern Territory public housing residents spending a significant proportion of their income on food, given the NT has the highest proportion of people in public housing out of all state and territories. 5.4% of Territory households live in some form of social housing compared to the next highest state SA at 2.75% (AIHW, 2018). Many of these households in the NT will face significant household budgetary challenges in relation to food costs (See Figures in Appendix).

Remote Public Housing Households

In addition to the households highlighted above, the needs of households in remote areas (the majority of whom are in public housing, but not reflected in these figures), is paramount and these issues will be explored in the section below.

⁵ The national figure for the lowest income quintile households of 24.5% is derived from ABS 2017, Tables 3.1, 3.2.

Every two years, a Market Basket Survey (MBS) takes place in the Northern Territory. In the survey, a Healthy Food Basket (HFB) and Current Diet Basket (CDB) is priced in each of the stores. The respective baskets are sufficient to provide foods for a hypothetical family of six⁶ for a fortnight (NT Government (2017a, p.3). The HFB is based on foods recommended in the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating, while the CDB (introduced to the MBS in 2016) is based on the most recent survey of dietary patterns of Aboriginal people in Australia (NT Government 2017, p.3).

In the most recent (2017) Market Basket Survey[^], 71 remote stores were surveyed – as well as a supermarket and corner stores in some of the major towns/cities in each of the district centres (not possible in all areas for this survey), to allow for a comparison of prices. Note, not every major centre had a supermarket surveyed in the 2017 MBS (e.g. Katherine, Tennant Creek).

[^]Note: At the time of writing of this report, the full 2017 MBS had not been publicly released – so all reference to 2017 figures comes from the NT Market Basket Survey Summary Report 2017.

Recent developments regarding food availability in remote areas

Prior to examining remote food prices contained in the MBS data, it is important to note some positive developments that have emerged in recent years in particular the availability and variety of some healthy foods. For example:

- The number of varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables in remote stores has increased between the first survey in 2000 and 2017; 81% of fresh fruits were rated to be of ‘good’ quality across the fresh fruit surveyed in 2017; and 84% of fresh vegetables were rated to be of ‘good’ quality across the fresh vegetables surveyed in 2017 (NT Government 2019d, p. 3).
- In 2016, on average 94% of items in the food basket were available, or usually available, in the remote stores surveyed (NT Government 2017a, p.10) *Note figures for 2017 not yet available.*

Main Findings regarding Food Costs from the 2017 Market Basket Survey Summary Report

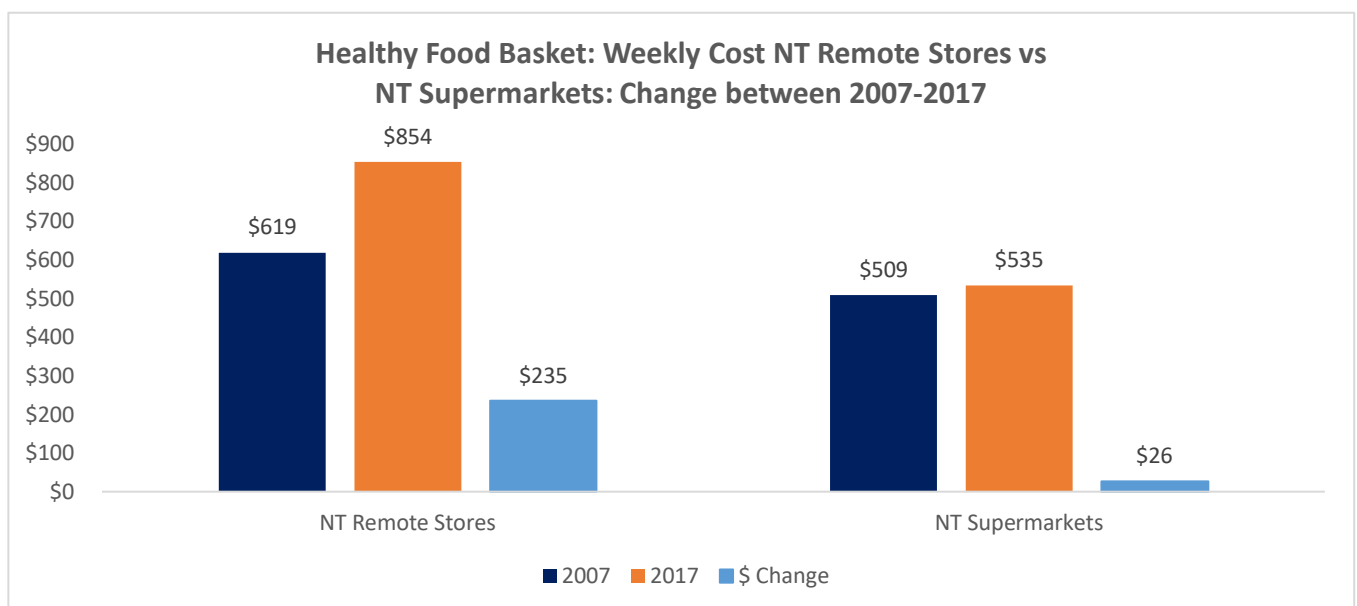
- Between 2007-2017, remote store prices for Healthy Food Baskets have rapidly increased (up \$235), while in NT supermarkets the rise has been \$26 (though there have been some price fluctuations in over the years, with the last year being a case in point).
- Over the last year, remote store prices for the Healthy Food Basket have increased by \$21 on average but NT supermarkets prices have dropped markedly (down \$71).
- Over the last year, remote store prices for the Current Diet Basket have increased by \$22 on average, but NT supermarkets prices have dropped (down \$36).
- In 2017, remote store prices were much higher for both the Healthy Food Basket (by \$319) and the Current Diet Basket (by \$262) compared with NT supermarket prices.

⁶ The income for the family is based on the three adult household members being in receipt of income support payments (Explanatory Notes 7).

- This rising gap between the price of food in remote stores vs district supermarkets means that in 2017 it cost nearly 60% more for the same Healthy Food Basket on average in a remote store, compared with an NT supermarket.
- This difference in prices between NT remote stores and NT supermarkets has steadily increased over the years – having been as low as 18% in 2004.
- In 2017, remote store prices for all healthy food items were much higher than the average NT Supermarket price with the difference for meat products the highest (\$98).
- A Healthy Food Basket actually costs less than an unhealthy (Current Diet Basket) however this does not take into account the additional costs of preparing healthy meals from scratch, including refrigeration, power, cooking equipment etc.
- In 20017, the average cost of a Current Diet Basket was around 8% higher than the Healthy Food Basket in NT Remote Stores (\$920 compared to \$854) and 23% higher in NT Supermarkets (\$658 compared to \$535).

Change in the price of the Healthy Food Basket over the past decade (2007-2017)

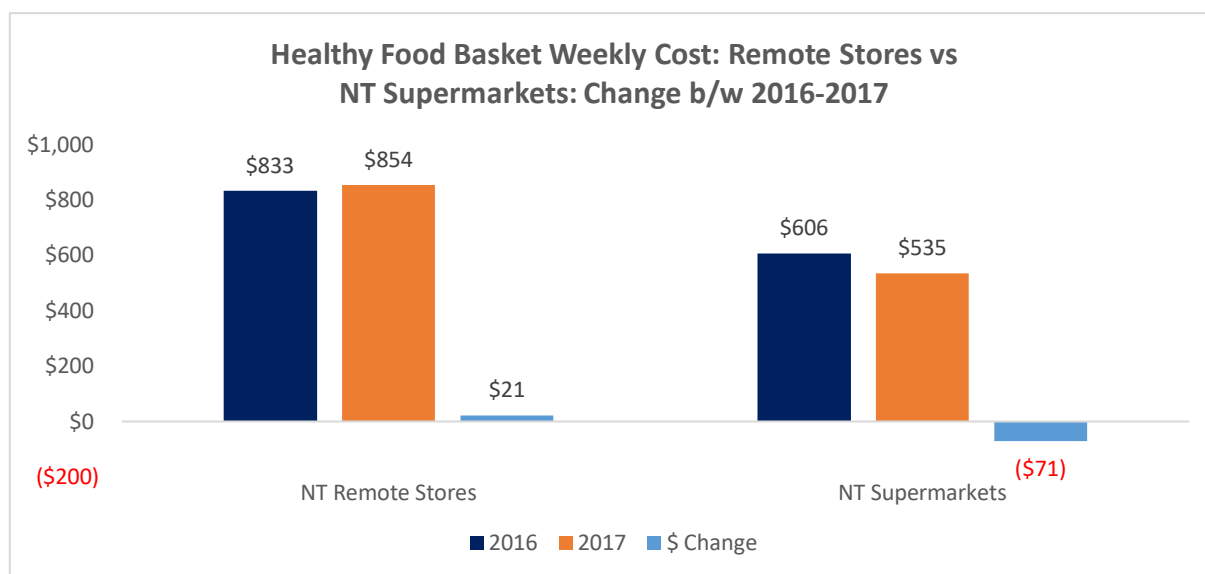
**Figure 8: Healthy Food Basket Remote Store Ave. vs NT Supermarkets Ave.
Weekly Cost: Change between 2007-2017**



NT Government 2017a, p. 3, NT Government 2019d p.1.

Change in the price of the Healthy Food and Current Diet Baskets 2016-2017

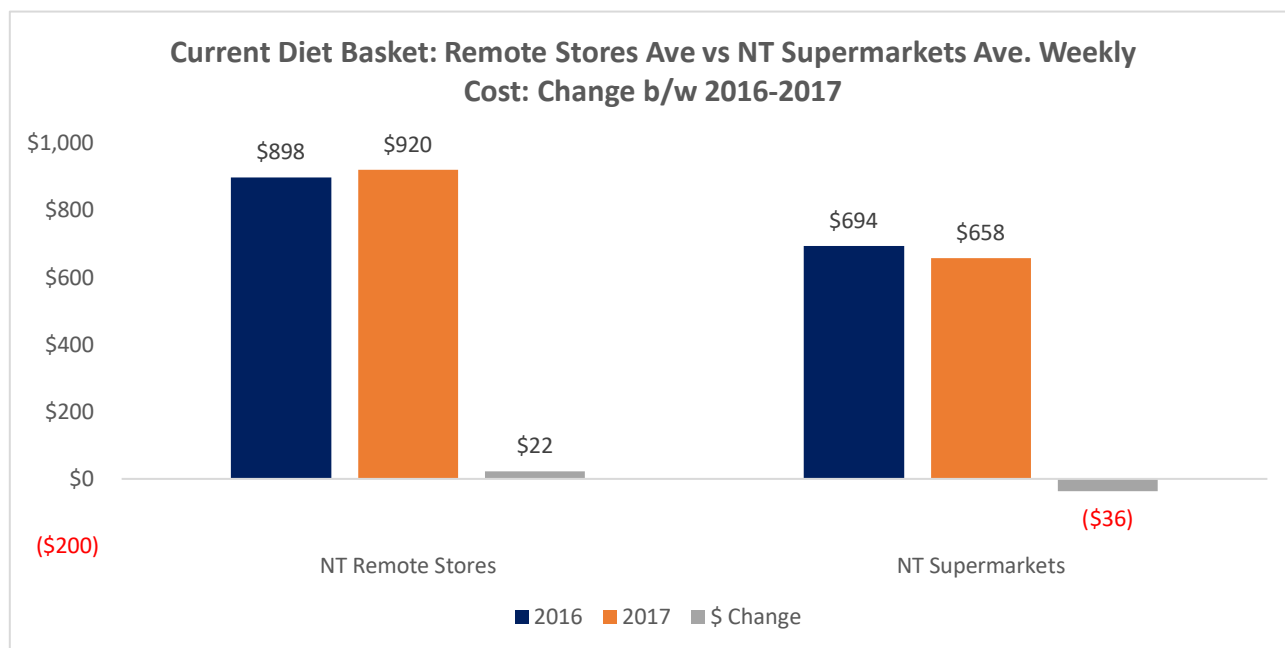
**Figure 9: Healthy Food Basket: Remote Stores Ave. vs NT Supermarkets Ave.
Weekly Cost: Change 2016 – 2017**



NT Government 2017a, p. 3; NT Government 2019d, p. 2.

From NTCOSS' analysis, the absence of some stores from some survey data (e.g. both supermarkets and NT Remote Stores for Tennant Creek 2016 and 2017; and NT Supermarket data for Katherine in 2017) will have had some impact on the average figures, but not overly significant (*See p.41 below re Note re the absence of some supermarkets from survey data*).

**Figure 10: Current Diet Basket: Remote Stores Ave. vs NT Supermarkets Ave.
Weekly Cost: Change between 2016 – 2017**

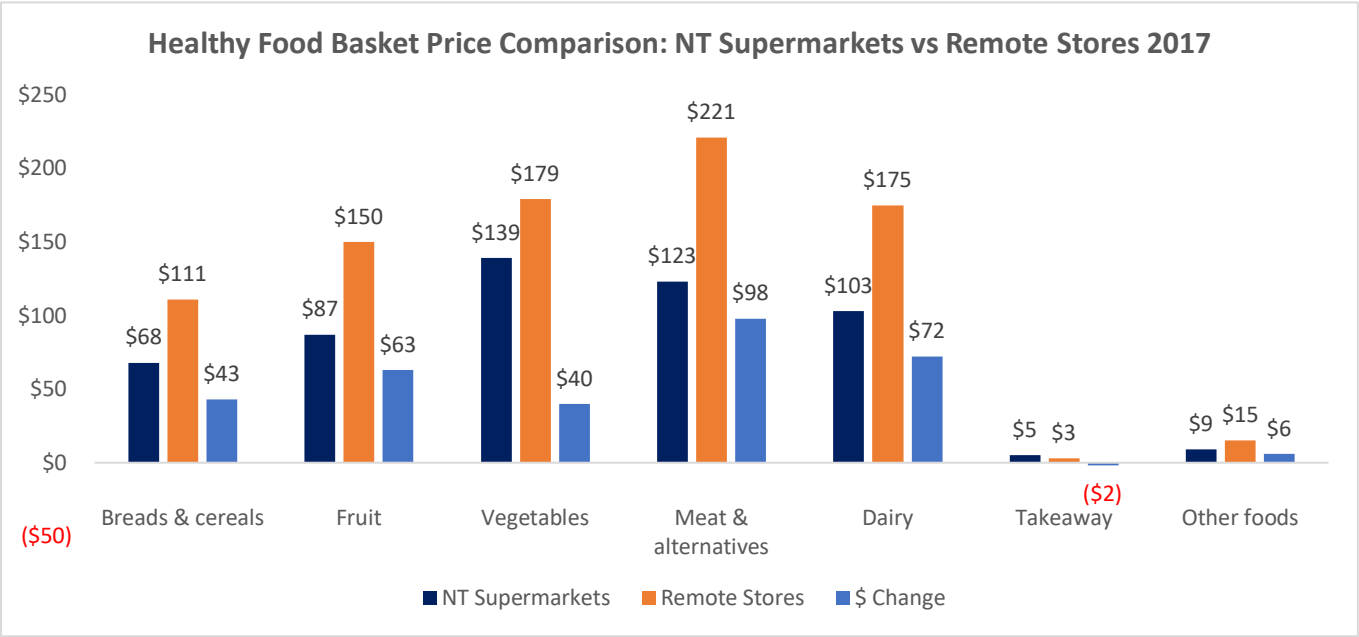


NT Government 2017a, p. 3; NT Government 2019d, p.2.

Prices of Individual Food Expenditure Areas in the Healthy Food Basket: Remote Store Prices vs NT Supermarkets

An examination of the different food groups which make up the 2017 Healthy Food Basket in 2017, shows that remote store prices for all healthy food items are much higher than the average NT supermarket prices, with the difference for meat products the highest (\$98), with dairy (\$72) and fruit (\$63) also having a significant price disparity.

Figure 11: Healthy Food Basket Price Comparison of NT Supermarkets with Remote Stores, 2017



NT Government 2019d, p.2.

Table 12: Healthy Food Basket: Summary of Percentage difference in prices for food groups comparing Remote Stores Ave. and NT Supermarket Ave., 2017

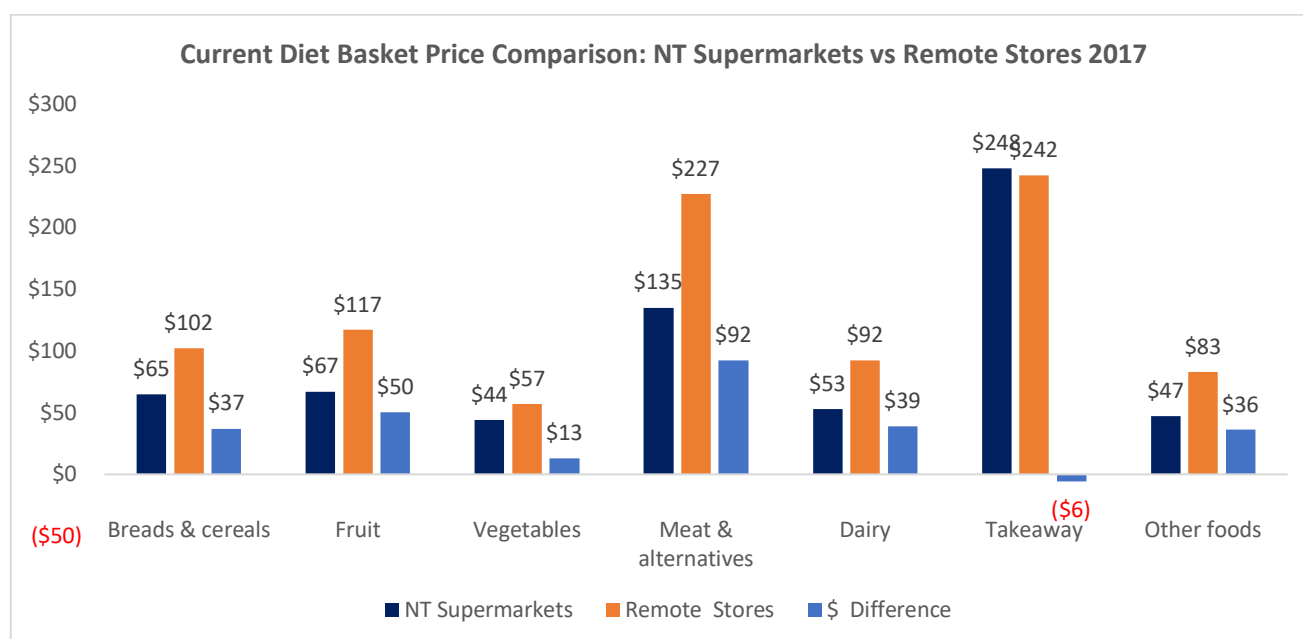
Food Group	Breads & cereals	Fruit	Vegetables	Meat & alternative	Dairy	Takeaway	Other foods
	63.2%	72.4%	28.8%	79.9%	69.9%	-40.0%	66.7%

NT Government 2019d, p.2.

Current Diet Basket: Remote Store Prices vs NT Supermarkets

An examination of the different food groups which make up the 2017 Current Diet Basket in 2017 remote store prices for all healthy food items are much higher than the average NT supermarket price with the difference for meat products the highest (\$92), with fruit (\$50) also having a significant price disparity. There was very little price disparity between the takeaway component of the Current Diet Basket, with the NT remote store average in fact being \$6 cheaper than the NT Supermarket average.

Figure 12: Current Diet Basket: Price Comparison of NT Supermarkets with Remote Stores, 2017



NT Government 2019d, p.2.

Table 12: Current Diet Basket: Summary of Percentage difference in prices for food groups comparing Remote Stores Ave. and NT Supermarket Ave., 2017

Food Group	Breads & cereals	Fruit	Vegetables	Meat & alternative	Dairy	Takeaway	Other foods
% Change	56.9%	74.6%	29.5%	68.1%	73.6%	-2.4%	76.6%

NT Government 2019d, p.2.

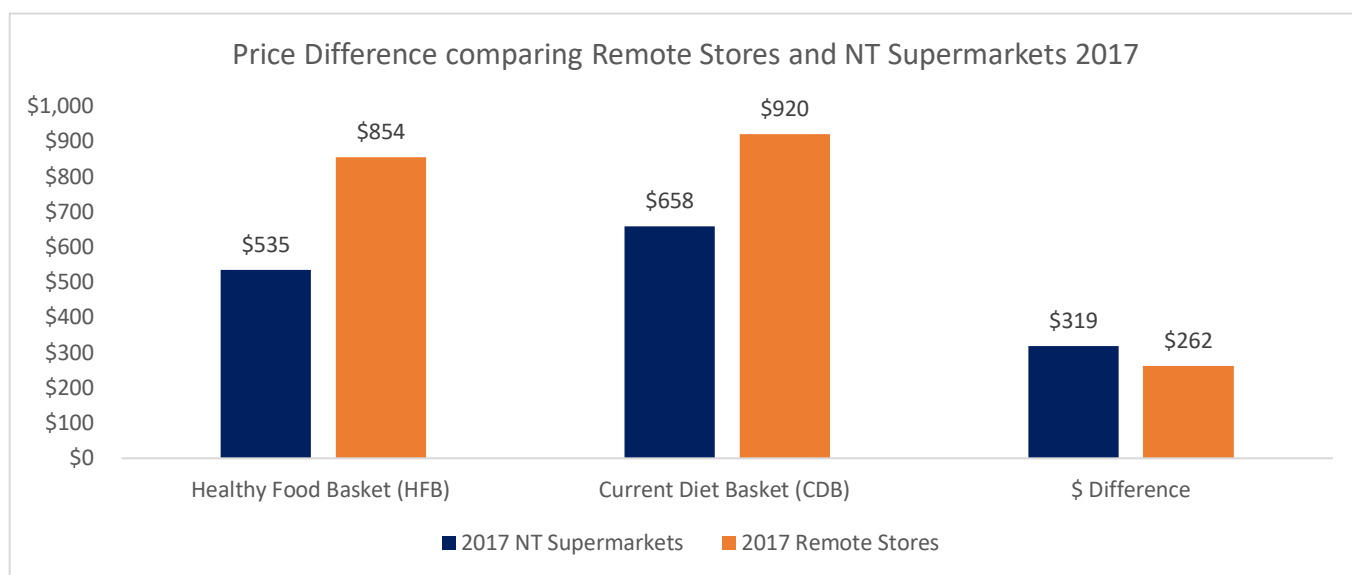
For both the Healthy Food Basket and the Current Diet Basket, the greatest difference in price for any food product between the remote stores average and the NT supermarket average is for meat - \$98 (HFB) and \$92 (CDB). Given the central role that meat plays in the diet for people living on remote communities, the high prices will contribute significantly to cost of living pressures. It is also notable from Figure 6 above, that the ADGPI for Lean meats, fish etc. rose the slowest out of all of the core (healthy) food groups examined over 2001-2014 – while the price of meat in NT remote stores rose by 74% during this same period (NT Government 2017a, p.10; NT Government 2019d p. 2). It is noteworthy that the CPI for ‘meat and seafoods’ has risen 20.1% since December 2013 (ABS 2019d). It will be interesting to examine the trend in remote meat prices in future Market Basket Surveys.

It is also significant and a concern that takeaway food makes up more than a quarter of the Current Diet Basket, though it must be noted that the CBD is based on the most recent survey of dietary patterns of Aboriginal people in Australia, rather than being specific only to the NT, and dietary patterns may be different between Aboriginal people on the East Coast of Australia and the those in NT. Nonetheless, measures to address the high intake of takeaway in remote areas are needed, and these issues are covered further below.

Significant Price Disparity between NT Remote Stores and NT Supermarkets

In 2017, remote store prices were much higher for both the Healthy Food Basket (by \$319) and the Current Diet Basket (by \$262) compared with NT supermarket prices

Figure 13 Healthy Food Basket vs Current Diet Basket: Remote Stores vs NT Supermarkets, 2017



NT Government 20017a, p.3; NT Government 2019d.

Figure 13 shows the price disparity in percentage figures – which is nearly 60% when comparing the average cost of the Healthy Food Basket in an NT remote store (\$854) with the cost in an NT Supermarket (\$535).

Figure 13 also shows a 40% price disparity when comparing the NT remote store average (\$920) with the NT supermarket average (\$658) for the Current Diet Basket.

In 2017 it cost **60% more** for the same healthy basket of goods in a remote store, compared with a NT supermarket. For the Current Diet Basket, the difference was **40%**.

Note re the Absence of some Supermarkets from survey data

Barkly Data

The Barkly supermarket was not surveyed in 2016 or 2017 (nor in 2015). Historically the Barkly supermarket has been more expensive than the other NT supermarkets. In 2014 - the last time the Barkly supermarket was included in the survey - a Healthy Food Basket cost \$613 (vs NT supermarket average of \$558) and the Barkly figure pushed the average up by \$14 for that year's figures (NT Government 2014, p.10). This means the 2016 and 2017 average figures might have both been slightly higher, had the Barkly been included, but the overall difference in the average figure comparing the two years would not have been expected to change substantially. The last time remote store figures for the Barkly were included was 2014, and the Barkly average (\$838) was not far above the NT remote store average (\$824) (NT Government 2014, p.10).

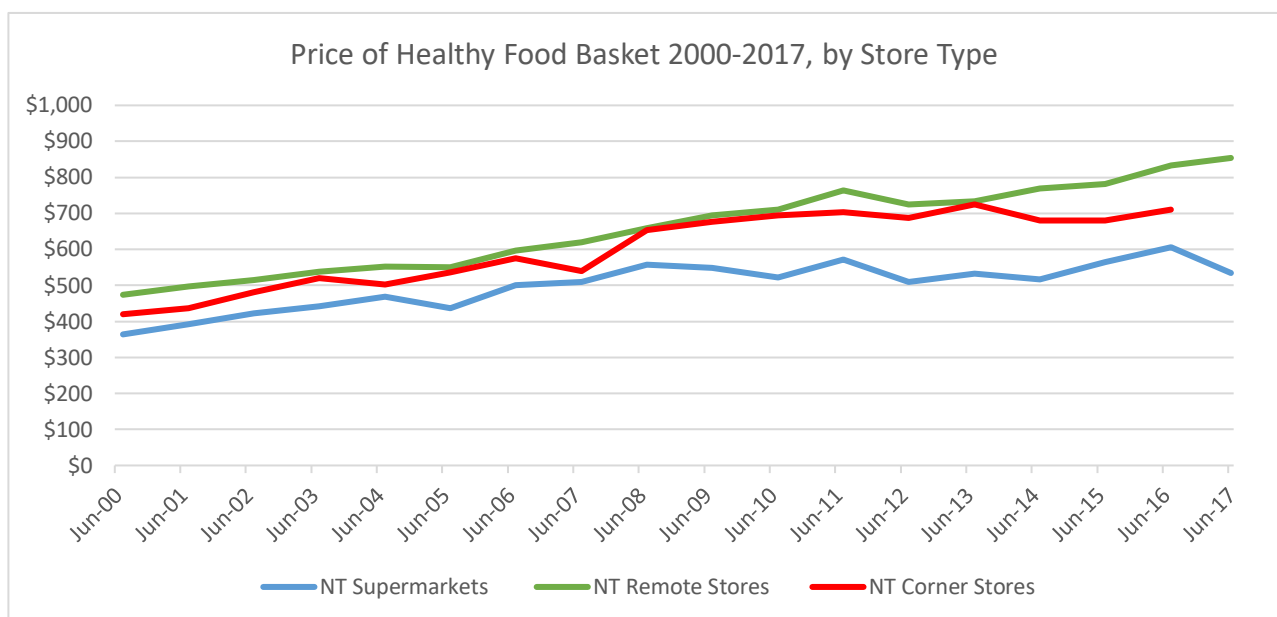
Katherine Data

The absence of figures for supermarkets in Katherine in the 2017 data will have had some impact on the average figures, however, in 2016 Katherine had the lowest prices out of all regions for both the Healthy Food Basket and the Current Diet Basket for both NT supermarkets and NT remote stores⁷, so if anything the NT supermarket average might have been lower in 2017. If 2016 prices for Katherine are a guide then there would have been minimal impact on the gap between NT remote stores and NT supermarkets in 2017.

Changes over time in the price difference between NT Supermarkets and Remote Stores

The changes in the price of the Healthy Food Basket over time in NT remote stores, district supermarkets and corner stores from 2000-2017 can be seen in Figure 14 below - which shows the growing gap in prices between NT remote stores and NT supermarkets since 2008. While the gap has been accentuated by the drop in average prices in NT supermarkets in the past year, it is clear the gap has been widening ever since 2008, as Figure 15 also reinforces.

Figure 14 Change in Price of Healthy Food Basket by Store Type 2000-2017



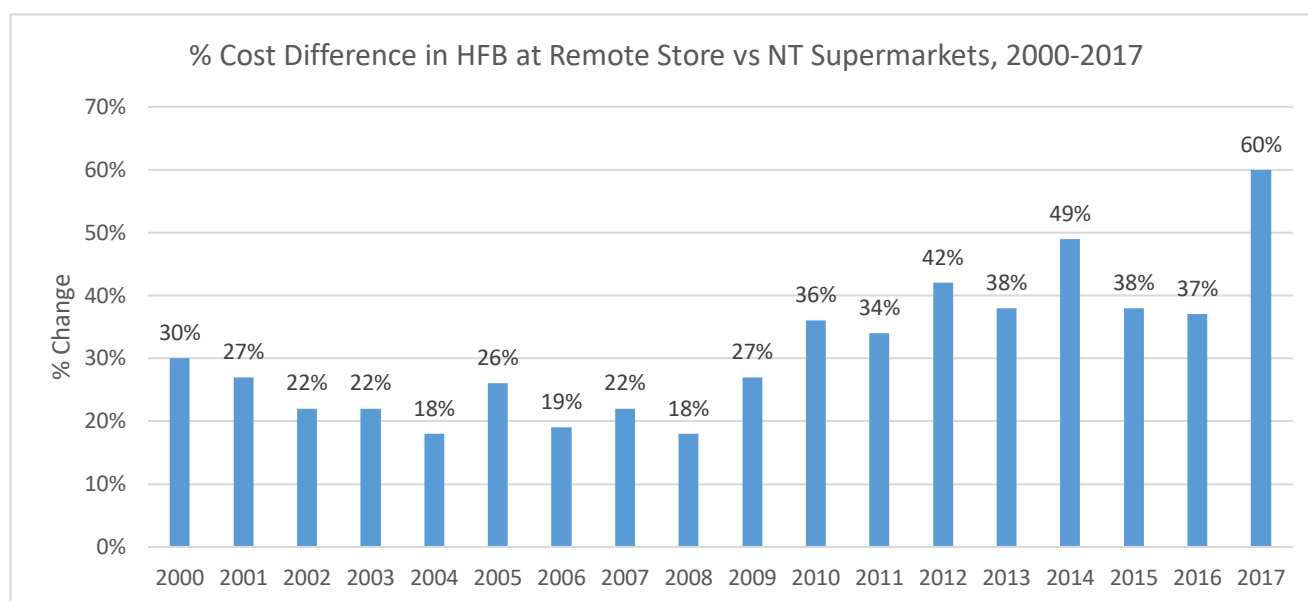
NT Government 2017a, p.16; NT Government 2019d, p.2.

Note: Corner store data not available in the 2017 Market Basket Survey Summary Report (NT Government 2019d)

As previously stated, in 2017 it cost nearly 60% more for the same Healthy Food Basket on average in a remote store, compared with an NT supermarket. This difference has steadily increased over the years – having been as low as 18% in 2004, but rising to 42% in 2016, before the increase to 60% in 2017 (with the average cost in NT supermarkets decreasing by \$71 and the NT Remote Store average price increasing by \$21 in 2017 (NT Government 2017a; NT Government 2019d, p.2).

⁷ \$559 vs \$606 (HFB NT Supermarket); \$613 vs \$694 (CDB NT Supermarket); \$802 vs \$533 (HFB NT Remote Store); \$877 vs \$898 (HDB NT Supermarket), Source: NT Government 2016, p.10.

Figure 15 Percentage difference comparing NT Remote Store Average and NT Supermarket Average Cost of Healthy Food Basket 2000-2017



Source: NT Government 2017, p.16; NT Government 2019d, p.2

Households who depend on remote stores for their shopping are paying a whopping \$319 more for the Healthy Food Basket than households who shop at NT supermarkets. That's 60% more. In 2004 and 2008 the difference in price was only 18%.

In addition, prices in remote stores have risen at a greater rate (80%) than prices in NT District Supermarkets (19%) since 2000. (NT Government 2019, p.16.

Healthy Food Basket cheaper than the Current Diet Basket

Over the two years that costs for both the Healthy Food Basket and the Current Diet Basket have been collated, the MBS data has shown that a healthy basket costs less than an unhealthy (Current Diet Basket). The Current Diet Basket compared to the Healthy Food Basket is:

- 23% higher in district centre supermarkets - \$658 compared to \$535 (15% in 2016);
- 8% higher in remote stores - \$920 compared to \$854 (8% in 2016).

(NT Government 2017b, NT Government 2019d).

While the Healthy Food Basket is cheaper than the Current Diet Basket– it must be noted that the Healthy Food Basket it still very expensive in its own right especially when purchased from a NT remote store, and there are additional costs involved in food storage and preparation to consider, such as whitegoods and electricity costs.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) (2008, cited in Brimblecombe et al 2017b, p.566-67), “three primary dimensions underpin food security”, namely:

- (i) “Food availability, where sufficient quantities of nutritious food are available on a consistent basis”;
- (ii) “Food access, where there are sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet”;
- (iii) “Food use, where there is appropriate use of food, based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation”;
and,
- (iv) “Stability of these three dimensions over time”.

The FAO (2008) describes that where the first three dimensions are functioning optimally it results in a situation of food security “where all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (cited in Brimblecombe et al 2017b, p. 566).

Achieving food security as defined here is a significant challenge for many low-income households and communities across the NT – with many households “over-crowded and/or have only rudimentary cooking and storage facilities, making home food preparation challenging” (Brimblecombe et al 2018, p.1424).

Impacts of Food Insecurity on Households

- Where food insecurity is accompanied by low income and other economic stressors, “dietary quality and quantity for many people fluctuates from bad to worse across pay cycles” (Brimblecombe et al 2018, p.1424).
- Food insecurity contributes to an extremely high prevalence of nutrition-related disease amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (ABS, 2013; AIHW, 2011).
- The 2012/13 ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, the only such survey to date reported that 22% of adults were living in a household that in the last 12 months had run out of food and had not been able to buy more compared with 3.6% for all Australians (ABS 2015, cited in Brimblecombe et al 2017b, p. 566). In all, **31 % of Indigenous adults in remote Australia report food insecurity** compared with 3.7% for all Australians (ABS 2015 cited in Brimblecombe et al 2018, p.1424).

ABS Food Security Data

In their 2019 report, ‘Measuring and Understanding Food Insecurity in Australia: A Systematic Review’, Mackay et al. identify that food insecurity research in Australia is not based on the application of consistent measures which risks unreliable results and underreporting (2019, p.2). They argue this situation is exacerbated by the infrequency of National Health Surveys which

measure the extent and severity of food insecurity which means data is often outdated. The measures that have been applied in Australian research range from the commonly used single item question⁸, (as per the three yearly Australian National Health Survey), right through to the use of the full or shortened version of the 18 question United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM). According to Mackay et al., depending on the tool applied, the results can vary significantly with the risk that ‘the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in Australia is likely underreported’ (2019 p.1).

Mackay et al. argue for the development of a consistent and contextually relevant food insecurity measure to be developed for future food insecurity research in Australia (2019, p. 2).

NTCOSS endorses this recommendation and believes that it is imperative to update and expand the national data set on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food insecurity through development and application of a monitoring tool that adequately assesses ‘food access’, ‘food utilisation’, ‘stability over time’ and ‘food availability’ (as articulated by MacKay et al 2019, p. 1), which could be done as part of the Australian National Health Survey. This would improve the data available and help inform future policy and practice approaches.

Investment in Remote Stores

The investment in licensing and infrastructure from the Commonwealth Government, which began in 2007, has been a really important step. More recent amendments to the Stronger Futures Act extended (up until 2022), and modified the licensing system after reviews by CIRCA and the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). These include the licensing of all stores that provide food staples (increasing to a total of 110 in the NT by 2022 (there are currently around 90 licenced stores). The Act also extends funding for a risk-based licensing approach, which informs “the degree and frequency of store monitoring and assessment” (Commonwealth Government 2016, p.35-36).

A number of positive trends have emerged through remote stores in recent years.

Outback Stores

Figures from Outback Stores, for example, have seen improvements in fruit and vegetable sales and a reduction in the sale of sugar in recent years.

- 430 tonnes of fruit and vegetables were sold in the 2017/18 year (which represents a 4.5% (24 tonnes) increase on the previous year);
 - 7.6 tonnes less sugar was sold in 2017/18 compared with the previous year (in 2016/17, 11.5 tonnes less sugar was sold, compared with 2015/16);
 - 2017/18 and 2016/17 both saw a decrease in sugary drinks of 6.6% on the previous year
 - In 2017/18 water sales increased by 3.4% and diet drinks sales by 3.4%;
- (Outback Stores 2017, p.2; 2018, p.2, 7).

⁸ The single item qn. asks, “In the last 12 months was there any time you have run out of food and not been able to purchase more?”

Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) Stores

For a very significant period - over 30 years - ALPA has been subsidising fruit and vegetables, without government funding, “in an effort to promote healthy eating and work towards preventing chronic diseases” (ALPA 2019).

- On top of this, ALPA Stores now “subsidise all freight on frozen, tinned and dried vegetables in member stores” which helps make the cost of healthy foods more affordable;
- ALPA has also increased healthy takeaway foods options in their takeaway outlets, which has led to a 5% increase in the amount of healthy foods sold (timeframe not stated);
- In late 2014, ALPA Stores reduced the price of bottled water to \$1 a bottle. Since then bottled water has had “the fastest increasing sales, compared to soft drinks & juices”;
- In addition, a range of resources have been developed through ALPA (e.g., posters and labelling to identify health foods in store, Nutrition Checklist App for store staff, Aurukun Healthy Choice Reward Scheme⁹).

(ALPA 2019).

Comment: Despite all of this work, across a vast number of remote stores, average NT remote store pricing remains unacceptably high and is getting higher. There is a critical need to maximise the investment the Commonwealth Government has made since 2007. Adequate resources need to continue to be allocated to ensure ongoing licensing compliance for remote stores¹⁰ as well as training and support for store managers and staff around healthy foods, food promotion etc. - both directly and through provision of training resources. The licensing system is due for review in 2022 (with an option for continuing) and NTCOSS believes that in any new arrangements a priority should be placed on reducing the prices of healthy foods.

The situation in the APY Lands (SA) is highly relevant to these issues. While extensive work has been done there around decreasing sugar intake, increasing the availability and affordability of healthy foods (especially vegetables and fruit) and the improvement in some nutrient intakes as a consequence, “the overall effect has been a decrease in total diet quality since 1986” (Lee et al 2015, p. 1), (see also p. 51). Lee et al (2015, p. 7-8) also concluded that “in the absence of supportive regulation and market intervention, adequate and sustained resources are required to improve nutrition and prevent diet-related chronic disease on the APY Lands”.

It is notable from the Outback Stores data that sales of healthy foods have increased, despite the high prices, which seems to suggest that if pricing came down, sales of healthy foods would increase even further. Further investment in the NT is clearly warranted around pricing initiatives and efforts to reduce unhealthy foods to ensure the sustainability and growth of existing positive outcomes,

⁹ “anyone in Aurukun who purchases \$20 of fruit and vegetables at the Island & Cape store is rewarded with a \$10 voucher off their next purchase of fruit and veg.”

¹⁰ The Prime Minister & Cabinet Remote Store licensing team to ensure compliance, data reporting and regular, high quality training and support for all store managers, community store Aboriginal Corporation board members and staff around ‘health issues in communities; types of oils; fat and sugar in foods; fat functions and sources; label reading; sugar sweetened beverages; healthy takeaway snacks; recipe modification; store policies; store layout and placement to promote of healthy options; promotion of baby/infant foods and formula; Market Basket Surveys and the Health Star Rating system’ (NT Government 2015)

because if affordability remains an issue, then many of the positive developments underway could be at risk.

The ALPA stores provide a model for further consideration across all stores – in their subsidies on freight on particular healthy foods. If adopted, this could lead to a drop in the price of the MBS Healthy Food Basket in coming years. By comprehensively addressing pricing - and other factors highlighted in this report - more equitable pricing across all remote stores could be possible.

The layout of stores and the ways that certain goods are promoted also impact on the choices people make, which is why NTCOSS has recommended (given that the process of licensing all remote stores is nearly complete) that adequate resources continue to be allocated to ensure ongoing licensing compliance as well as training and support for store managers and staff around healthy foods, food promotion etc., both directly and through the provision of training resources.

Income Levels and Affordability in Remote NT

A Healthy Food Basket (\$854) purchased from an NT Remote Store will require 34% of the weekly household income for a family of six. This is more than double the national household average of disposable income required for food and non-alcoholic beverage expenditure (13.9%), while the current diet basket (\$920) would require 37% of weekly household income for a family of six. These figures are cause for alarm. Lee & Lewis (2018, p.4) describe that internationally, a benchmark of 30% of income has been used as a cut-off point to indicate affordability of a diet. Spending above this benchmark places many NT households under enormous financial stress – severely depleting the income that is available for other essential items.

Of further concern is that the income levels of Indigenous people in remote areas are falling. Markham and Biddle (2018, p. iii) analysed data from the last three censuses (2006, 2011 and 2016) and found a “growing divergence between the incomes of Indigenous people in urban areas and remote areas.”

While income levels for Indigenous people in urban areas have grown steadily, with the \$57 increase in real terms for median disposable equivalised household income between 2011 and 2016 very much welcomed, very remote areas experienced a fall of \$12 per week (Markham and Biddle 2018, p. iii). The authors urged “Urgent policy action...to ameliorate the growing prevalence of poverty among Indigenous people in very remote Australia” (Markham and Biddle 2018, p. iii).

As Section One of this report highlights, the payment levels for people on income support such as Newstart and Youth Allowance are inadequate for keeping up with cost of living requirements. Research from the University of NSW (2017, cited in ACOSS 2018a), showed that it costs a single person a minimum of \$433 per week to cover basic household expenses such as “housing, food, transport etc.” – but this amount is more than \$150 over the base rate of Newstart.

Other Factors Impacting on Households' Access to Healthy & Affordable Food

Transport

People living in remote communities intermittently shop in regional centres where food is cheaper than the local community store, however to do this they must also spend significant amounts on fuel, repairs and maintenance for private cars or long-distance bus fares (where few services offer concession tickets).

A lack of access to private transport or public buses is also a significant barrier to accessing healthy and affordable food in regional centres like Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine – with many people forced to rely on taxis and minibuses to transport them to shopping centres, where high costs eat into household budgets. Alternatively, some people rely on smaller stores or petrol stations which may be within walking distance of where they live, and therefore easier to access – but where prices are higher, and choice of fresh foods limited, with fast food an easy option.

Addressing access to food, clearly must also involve addressing access to transport, especially with the current extremely high fuel prices in many remote areas (see Section One of this Report) which impact greatly on household budgets. Transport options for exploration could include support for flexible local transport solutions similar to the mini bus service in Tennant Creek that charges set fees for NT concession recipients enabling community members to access stores where there is a greater variety of healthy food at cheaper prices.¹¹

Access to Affordable Energy and Energy Efficient Appliances

As outlined earlier in this report, lack of access to whitegoods/appliances plays a significant role in decisions people make about what food they can buy. Where someone does not have appropriate storage and cooking facilities, their motivations for buying fresh food are limited, and so they are more likely to purchase processed foods.

Even where households have access to the appropriate whitegoods for storage and food preparation, having access to continuous electricity is another vital issue. It is critical that measures are in place to ensure power is accessible, constant and affordable for food storage and cooking.

The NT Government can play a significant role in improving this situation by, for example, working to ensure that people who would meet eligibility people are registered for the NT Concession Scheme. In addition, NTCOSS has advocated over the past decade for the NT Concession Scheme (formerly the NT Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme) to be expanded to all recipients of Centrelink Health Care Cards (particularly Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients). Given what we know about the extremely high costs of petrol and food faced by remote community residents – NTCOSS

¹¹ For example, the Tennant Creek Transport service assists in transporting community members to the town supermarket, which helps reduce reliance on smaller fast food outlets or petrol stations for access to food.

argues that as a first step, the NT Government could expand the eligibility of the NT Concession Scheme to all Health Centrelink Care Card Holders resident in remote communities.

In addition, opportunities must be explored to increase individual household access to energy efficient and renewable energy options, including solar power to reduce electricity costs. There are several schemes already operating in Australia that provide examples of possible approaches the NT could emulate in terms of increasing access to energy efficient appliances.

- The NSW Government offers an **Appliance Replacement Offer**, which reduces the upfront cost to eligible customers by 40-50% when upgrading their old fridge or Television with a new energy efficient model, saving up to \$200 a year on energy bills for eligible customers;¹²
- The SA Government offers the **Retailer Energy Efficiency Scheme (REES)**, where most energy retailers in SA are “required to provide incentives for SA households and businesses to achieve energy savings to potentially lower their energy bills”, for example,
 - “Energy Audits will be made available for a number of low-income households in the “priority group”, to help assess current energy use practices, compare usage to energy efficient practices and identify practical ways to be more energy efficient at home;
 - Energy Efficiency Activities will be made available to South Australian households and many businesses through incentives offered by any retailer with REES targets in a particular year, for the installation of a number of pre-approved Energy Efficiency Activities. These may include activities such as the installation of efficient lighting products, low-flow showerheads and ceiling insulation”.
- The Queensland Government in the recent past offered an **Energy Efficient Appliance Rebate Scheme** for Queensland householders who purchased an eligible energy efficient appliance by June 30 2018 received rebates of up to \$300 (where customers purchased an “eligible 4-star or higher energy-rated fridge, washing machine or air conditioner” (Superfund Partners 2019).

Similar schemes also exist in other countries.

Housing Supply and Maintenance

While housing is not a specific focus of this report, the supply and maintenance of appropriate, quality and affordable housing has a significant impact on the ability of households to prepare healthy food.

One of the barriers to healthy eating (highlighted below under ‘Summary of Barriers to Healthy Eating’) is “having to providing for a large number of people in the household (Brimblecombe et al 2018, p. 1425). There is a need for long term solutions to address overcrowding, which will make a

¹² To be eligible, a customer must: -Be a NSW resident; -Own a fridge six years old or older, and want to replace it; or -Own a plasma or cathode ray tube (CRT) television and want to replace it; -Hold one of the following valid concession cards

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Health Care Card or Low-Income Health Care Card from Centrelink
- Veterans? Affairs Gold Card (NSW Government 2019)

difference in terms of people's ability to prepare and cook food, as well as reduce wear and tear on kitchens.

Inadequate food storage and equipment for preparation (Brimblecombe et al 2018, p. 1425) has also be identified as a significant barrier to healthy eating. This underscores the important role housing authorities play in terms of regular maintenance of housing in ensuring cooking facilities (ovens/stoves) are always workable, as well as the need for energy efficient appliance schemes.

Access to Credit for Low Income Households

The establishment of no interest loan schemes over recent decades, has been an extremely important development providing safe, fair and affordable loans for people on low incomes. There are barriers though for some people to accessing such schemes particularly those living in remote communities.

Access to No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) – Requirements for Applicants

For example, to apply for a NILS loan an applicant must provide:

- Photo ID;
- A three-month bank statement;
- Any loan or lease statement;
- Tenancy Reference/Agreement (proof of residence);
- Power bill (only if applicable – not needed for prepaid power);
- Quotes for items client wants to purchase.

There is also the requirement to have an interview with a staff member, which can be done at an office or over the phone, though paperwork does need to be provided prior to any phone interview. (Anglicare 2019b)

While the NILS is available across the whole of the NT for those who are eligible, the reality it is that the process is very difficult for residents of remote communities and some residents of major centres. NTCOSS recommends a review of the scheme and the application process to enable more people in need to access the NILS scheme. This may include incentives for local Aboriginal controlled organisations to auspice the scheme in remote communities.

Concerns about Appliance Rental Schemes and Same Day Loan Schemes

Various forms of credit are available for low income households, though there are high fees, charges and penalties for not maintaining payment schedules. It does appear that remote community residents, when they visit major centres, are able to access appliance rental schemes or same day loan schemes. In short, these schemes are very costly, and may put people under enormous financial pressure.

SECTION THREE: SUMMARY OF STUDIES INTO INCREASING HEALTHY FOOD INTAKE

Mai Wiru: Nutrition in remote Aboriginal communities: Lessons from Mai Wiru and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

Work published by Lee et al (2015, p. 1), was undertaken in order to “examine the impact of efforts to improve nutrition on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands from 1986, especially in Mai Wiru (good food) stores”.

- Literature search undertaken;
- Dietary intake of the five APY communities that have a Mai Wiru store was examined in 2012;
- Assessments undertaken of in all seven APY community stores at intervals from 2012;
 - The price of a standard market basket of basic food;
 - implementation of store nutrition policy requirements and healthy food checklists;
- Results were compared with available data from 1986.

Findings

- Despite significant efforts leading to outcome such as a decrease in sugar intake and an increase in the availability of healthy foods and these foods becoming more affordable (fruit and vegetables in particular), as well as improvement in some nutrient intakes as a result, “the overall effect has been a decrease in total diet quality since 1986”;
- The decrease in total diet quality appears to be a result of an “increased supply and intake of discretionary foods high in saturated fat, added sugar and salt, particularly sugar sweetened beverages, convenience meals and take-away foods”;
- The authors concluded that the improvements observed “confirm that residing in these communities can help Aboriginal residents exert control over key aspects of their food supply”, but they believe however that “the overall findings...reflect broader changes to the general Australian food supply, and reinforce the notion that, **in the absence of supportive regulation and market intervention, adequate and sustained resources are required to improve nutrition and prevent diet-related chronic disease on the APY Lands**”.

(Lee et al 2015, p.1)

SHOP@RIC Research Collaborative Study

In the 2014 SHOP@RIC study, a 20% discount on fruit and vegetables (fresh or frozen), sugar, and artificially sweetened soft drinks was applied at the population level for 24 weeks in 20 communities in remote Indigenous Australia where the community store was managed by the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) or Outback Stores (OBS) (Brimblecombe et al, 2017a, p. 1).

The study found:

- There was a 12.7% increase in overall fruit and vegetable purchases (greater for fruit*);
- The increase equated to 12 grams per person per day – which is the equivalent of 15% of a serving for the whole of the population (including infants and elderly people) ;
- Fruit and vegetables purchases increased (19.8% or 18 grams per person per day) once the discount had ceased - in the follow up (post intervention) period of 24 weeks – which could be due to the retail environment being very different in the post intervention period, compared with the pre intervention periodⁱⁱⁱ;

- Consumer education (“vegetable promotion through cooking demonstration, taste testing, and information materials provided in-store”) had an encouraging effect on vegetable purchases
- Purchases of bottled water increased, while purchases of diet soft drinks did not increase
**The greater increase in fruit purchases compared with vegetables was possibly due to fruit’s relative “convenience, perceived affordability, and palatability”.*

(Brimblecombe et al, 2017a, p. 1,3,8,11).

While the 12 grams per person per day increase in fresh fruit and vegetables purchases during the research period may not appear a large increase, it is important to note that the baseline intake of fruit and vegetables (fresh or frozen) for the population studied was very low – only 90.8 grams per person per day (Brimblecombe et al 2017a, p.4). The 12 grams therefore equates to a 13% increase on the pre study intake, while the 18 gram post study increase equate to a 20% increase on the pre study intake). When considered in this light the increases are quite substantial, and given that infants, for example, were included in the total population study, the 20% increase would have been even higher in reality for the actual population group consuming fresh fruit and vegetables.

Implications of SHOP@RIC Study

- Price subsidies can work, and the outcome from this study contradicts long held views among “some retailers and health practitioners” that “Indigenous people in remote Australia do not respond to price changes”;
- Population wide interventions make sense and can “shift the distribution of risk factors in the whole population rather than targeting high-risk individuals only”;
- The process of offering a more substantial price discount on a rotating limited selection of fruit and vegetable products” is highlighted as a tool that, with further investigation, “could potentially have a bigger impact on fruit and vegetable purchasing”;
- Implementing a more intense consumer education program could be effective in increasing purchases of fruit and vegetables but would require “the involvement and full commitment of retailers, community leaders, and public health nutritionists” and would also need additional resources which could be a barrier. This investment would need to be weighed up against the benefits of price discounting.

(Brimblecombe 2017a, p. 8, 9, 11).

‘Everybody’s Business’ - Report into Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Community Stores - House of Representatives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee (2009)

This 2009 House of Representatives Committee made a number of recommendations in relation to the cost of food in remote areas, which included for the Australian Government to support community garden, traditional food and farming projects in remote Indigenous communities for the local production of food... (Recommendation 18) and to look at arrangements for locally grown or harvested produce to be distributed through local stores (Rec. 19) (2009, p. xviii).

In addition, the Committee recommended the Australian Government consider transparent cross-subsidisation models, if appropriate (Recommendation 13); and future consideration be given to a

freight subsidy for fresh produce for the Torres Strait (Rec. 23) (House of Representatives, 2009, p. xvii, xix). In addition, the committee recommended the Australian Government commission a regional cost of living study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote communities in Australia and report by the end of 2010 (Rec 21) (House of Representatives 2009, p. xix). The issues highlighted in this report remain just as relevant today.

Note: The need for support for access to traditional foods is also highlighted by Brimblecombe et al (2014, p.397), in the context of “improving diet—and thereby health outcomes” and “the role of traditional food in representing cultural identity”.

ACOSS Recommendation for a Sugar Tax

In their 2018 submission to the Select Committee into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) highlighted the very high and increasing rates of obesity in Australia, especially among children (with the rates some of the highest in OECD countries) (ACOSS 2018b, p.1).

Amongst a range of initiatives ACOSS argued that the strategy should include the discouragement of “the production and consumption of water based drinks with added sugar, since these often have a very high sugar content and have no nutritional value” and when over-used, create “negative externalities” (i.e. where costs are borne by the whole community) (ACOSS 2018b, p.2).

ACOSS recommended that a sugar tax be implemented in Australia, in conjunction with social tax reforms, enabling revenue raised to go towards expenditure on improving public health and reducing obesity, including healthy eating and sports programs in schools. Of particular interest to this report and for the Northern Territory was the recommendation for a “public subsidy for the transport of fresh food to remote areas”, which ACOSS argues would be “a direct, equitable and cost effective way to improve health” (2018b, p.2) and would have “immediate benefits for dental health” (ACOSS 2018b, p.2).

ACOSS identify that such taxes “must be accompanied by effective regulation, promotion, and support services”. They also highlight that as a social tax a ‘sugar tax’ should end up reducing consumption of the harmful products being taxed and would therefore not be a long-term source of public revenue. *Brimblecombe et al (2017a, p.12) have also commented that “researchers have shown....that adoption of a revenue-neutral tax on less healthy foods to subsidise fruits and vegetables” provides the best opportunity for health benefits.*

Basiccard and Cashless Debit Card

The 2014 Evaluation of NT New Income Management by ANU’s Social Policy Research Centre highlighted that people spend less on fruit and vegetables when using a Basiccard, when compared with any other type of payment; they also spend a lot on soft drinks when using a Basiccard (Bray et al, 2019, p. 141). The trend regarding soft drinks is very concerning and, in the context of the planned imminent rollout of the Cashless Debit Card across the NT, warrants further investigation.

Summary of Barriers to Healthy Eating

While high food prices have been identified as a key factor influencing the purchasing of healthy foods, there is a vast range of other influences that also have a significant impact, including:

- Having to providing for a large number of people in the household (Brimblecombe et al 2018, p. 1425);
- Inadequate food storage and equipment for preparation (Brimblecombe et al 2018, p. 1425);
- Perceptions of affordability because of inadequate food storage and equipment (Brimblecombe et al, 2018, p. 1430);
- Limited self-efficacy¹³ [be to cook and try new vegetables (Brimblecombe et al 2018, p. 1430).
- Understanding a food system that has no apparent similar cultural representations or rules¹⁴ (Brimblecombe et al, 2014, p.396);
- A perceived lack of knowledge among participants in relation to introduced foods that have become integral to their lives (Brimblecombe et al, 2014, p.397);
- The need to address food insecurity, barriers to healthy eating and low-self efficacy to cook and try new vegetables first – before price discount consumer education can be effective (Brimblecombe et al 2018, 1431).

Barriers to Eating Vegetables Specifically:

A Deloitte Access Economics (DAE) (2016) report focused on barriers to eating vegetables, including:

- Not knowing the recommended servings of vegetables and/or “individuals misperceiving the quantities of food they actually eat” (Anderson, 1993, p. cited in DAE 2016, p.26);
- “Misperceptions of the effort required for cooking” (Anderson et al, 1998, p. cited in DAE 2016, p.26);
- Concern about the time required for food preparation (Pomerleau et al, 2005, cited in DAE 2016, p.26);
- In addition, “many programs for promoting healthy eating (for example, in schools or workplaces) are seen as too costly or time-consuming to sustain” (Pomerleau et al, 2005, cited in DAE 2016, p.26).

Significant efforts will need to be implemented on the ground in individual communities with community members and other stakeholders, to develop local solutions to the barriers to healthy food purchasing and intake as well as healthy food preparation, for example, in order to increase the volume of healthy food purchased. The Good Food Planning Tool (developed by Brimblecombe et al 2015, p.54) is one model that could be considered for community engagement. This model was designed to promote local planning and action in remote Indigenous communities, in order to “improve local food environments, local food security, and community, household and individual health and well-being” (Brimblecombe et al 2015, p.54).

¹³ Self-efficacy (def): belief that he or she can execute a behaviour required (Oxford Dictionary)

¹⁴ The knowledge system that participants based their knowledge of food on related to much more than just the nutrient composition of food and the association of food with health and disease. It considered the meaning of food within its social and cultural context and the ability to be able to identify and connect with the food and the food system (Brindlecombe 2014, p.397)

CONCLUSION

The analysis of data related to food expenditure and pricing in the Northern Territory is complex. The broad average figures from the Household Expenditure Survey (HES) for the NT overall and Darwin, and the CPI data for Darwin both cast a fairly positive light overall on affordability in terms of both food prices and food expenditure for the majority of households in the NT.

While expenditure on food in the NT (\$254) is the 2nd highest in the country, the weekly amount Territory households spent on food in 2015/16 had decreased in real terms compared with 2009/10 – making food relatively more affordable. In addition, the proportion of income spent on food (12.3%) is the lowest out of all states and territories (av. 13.9%).

For households in Darwin over the last decade, the prices of most food groups have risen slower (11.5%) than Darwin's general inflation rate (19.6%) - apart from discretionary items such as restaurant meals and takeaway and fast foods, as well as alcoholic beverages.

But there are many low-income households in the NT facing food cost of living pressures which may be masked by the average figures. The poorest households in the NT spend a much greater proportion of income on food and non-alcoholic beverages (25.4%), compared with those in higher income brackets richest 20% of households (9.4%). In addition, the HES figures do not include very remote households or Indigenous communities, but other data sources (e.g. the Northern Territory Government's Market Basket Surveys) make it clear there are real issues with affordability of food.

Price is unarguably an issue in the remote areas of the Northern Territory with the huge and growing price differential between remote stores and NT supermarkets clear evidence of this. Strategies are urgently needed to bring down the high price of healthy foods in remote stores to encourage the purchasing of these healthy options, but price is not the only factor.

Low incomes, the lack of access to household infrastructure and equipment, the need for access to continuous household energy, issues around confidence in relation to cooking vegetables, as well as reliable and affordable transport all impact on the ability and motivation for households to purchase healthy food. Many homes have inadequate storage and food preparation facilities and many residents cannot afford the continuous electricity needed for food storage and cooking, particularly in the hot summer months.

NTCOSS has also highlighted the need for more thorough food pricing data collection and resourcing to ensure this can occur. In particular it is imperative that all regions and all stores types be covered in the biennial Market Basket Survey, and that this information is made available in a timely fashion to allow for targeted responses to the areas of greatest need.

NTCOSS recommends the implementation of strategies that discourage the purchase of less healthy foods, particularly those high in sugar, alongside the promotion of healthy foods - and supports the adoption of ACOSS' recommendation for the introduction of a 'sugar tax' (Federal Budget Priorities Statement to the 2018/2019) aimed at reducing consumption of sugary drinks and bringing down

obesity rates as well as providing short to medium term income stream to freight subsidies of healthy foods. Options for more locally grown or harvested produce and mechanisms for distribution through local stores also require resourcing and development.

Many issues therefore require addressing at multiple levels. As Brimblecombe (2018, p. 1431-32) argues “it will be challenging to achieve meaningful dietary improvement in remote Indigenous Australia at a population level without addressing the underlying constraints that reinforce unhealthy dietary behaviours...[which] will require long-term investment of government and political commitment”.

Whilst a number of significant achievements have been made through the Commonwealth store licensing and infrastructure program there is still significant work to be done to achieve equitable access to affordable healthy food. If we are to achieve a fair and just Northern Territory, these issues must be addressed as a matter of extreme urgency. Greater resolve must be shown at all levels to address disparities in relation to food prices, and access to infrastructure, education and support to create sustainable conditions where people can make healthy choices around the food they purchase.

Note re the NT Government 2017 Market Basket Survey Full Report

At the time of writing of this NTCOSS report, only the 2017 Market Basket Survey Summary Report had been released, not the full report, which means NTCOSS has not been able to do as full an analysis as intended (i.e. there was no information on Corner Store prices, and no breakdown by region of the costs of the different food groups in the baskets (but only NT remote stores and NT supermarkets average figures). The upcoming release of the full 2017 NT Government Market Basket Survey will allow for a more detailed examination of where pricing and availability issues are most notable, which may help determine strategies for driving change in these areas.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Table 13: CPI Changes, Expenditure Type Darwin vs National over the past year

This table shows the trends in the CPI for all of the 11 CPI categories measured by the ABS in the past year.

Cost of Living area	CPI	
	Past Year March 2018 – March 2019 (% change)	
	Darwin	Australia
Food & non-alcoholic beverages	2.1 %	2.3%
Bread and Cereal Products	1.3%	2.0%
Meat and seafood	5.3%	4.2%
Dairy & related products	0.5%	1.2%
Fruit	5.5%	6.7%
Vegetables	5.1%	5.0%
Alcohol & tobacco	8.1%	6.4%
Alcohol	4.5%	1.9%
Tobacco	14.1%	13.8%
Clothing & Footwear	-1.2%	-0.1%
Housing (includes utilities)	-1.3%	0.8%
Rents	-4.4%	0.4%
New dwelling purchase by owner-occupiers	-0.6%	1.2%
Utilities	1.3%	-0.4%
Water & sewerage	1.2%	1.3%
Electricity	1.2%	-0.6%
Gas and other household fuels	2.4%	-1.8%
Furnishings, household equipment/services	-1.8%	-0.8%
Child care	-5.9%	-8.0%
Health	2.3%	3.1%
Medical and hospital services	3.6%	4.1%
Dental services	1.2%	2.1%
Transport	-3.4%	0.0%
Private Motoring	-3.5%	-0.2%
Automotive fuel	-10.6%	-3.5%
Urban transport fares (Public transport)	0.0%	1.9%
Communication	-4.7%	-4.6%
Telecommunication equipment/ services	-5.2%	-5.0%
Recreation & Culture	-1.2%	0.9%
Audio, visual and computing equipment and services	-4.2%	-3.4%
Audio, visual and computing equipment	-7.0%	-7.7%
Audio, visual and computing media and services	1.3%	3.6%
Education	2.6%	2.9%
Insurance and financial services	2.5%	1.1%
Insurance	1.1%	2.0%
CPI All Groups	0.4%	1.3%

ABS

2019d Data 4, 5, 6.

Appendix B: Housing Price changes over the past 12 months across the NT

Table 14a: Housing Price changes over the past 12 months – Regional Areas

Year Ending March 2019	Palmerston	Katherine	Alice Springs	Tennant Creek
Residential Housing - Median Sales Prices				
Residential House	-1.1%	8.1%	-2.1%	46.4%
Residential Unit/Townhouse	0.2%	N/A	0.0%	150.7%*
Rental Housing - Median Weekly Prices				
3 BR House Rental Prices	-6.8%	2.4%	1.0%	N/A
4BR House Rental Prices	-9.1%	0.0%	0.7%	N/A
1BR Unit/Townhouse Rental Prices	N/A	-13.2%	0.0%	N/A
2BR Unit/Townhouse Rental Prices	-9.1%	-1.6%	-5.1%	N/A
3BR Unit/Townhouse Rental Prices	-1.3%	N/A	0.0%	N/A

REINT 2019, p. 5, 7, 26, 27.

*There was only one sale in the past year in T/Creek for Residential unit/townhouses

Table 14b: Housing Price changes over the past 12 months – Darwin & Suburbs

Prices Year Ending March 2019	Darwin Inner	Darwin North Coastal	Darwin North East	Darwin North
Residential Housing - Median Sales Prices				
Residential House	-4.0%	3.6%	-2.6%	9.1%
Residential Unit/Townhouse	-19.5%	-0.1%	29.2%	-28.1%
Rental Housing - Median Weekly Prices				
3 BR House Rental Prices	0.4%	-8.1%	-3.4%	-6.7%
4BR House Rental Prices	-4.3%	-3.1%	-27.4%	-6.0%
1BR Unit/Townhouse Rental Prices	-8.6%	-5.0%	N/A	-27.7%
2BR Unit/Townhouse Rental Prices	-16.3%	-8.6%	-21.1%	-11.8%
3BR Unit/Townhouse Rental Prices	-12.7%	-11.5%	14.5%	2.0%

REINT 2019, p. 5, 7, 26, 27.

Appendix C: Fuel Prices across major centres of the NT –

Table 15a: Fuel Prices across the NT: Mar 2018-Mar 2019 – Unleaded Fuel and Diesel

Unleaded Petrol (Cents Per Litre)	Ave. Retail Price Mar 2018	Ave. Retail Price Mar 2019	Price change Mar 2018 - Mar 2019	% Change Mar 2018- Mar 2019
Darwin	148.4	135.8	-12.6	-8.5%
Alice Springs	177.5	186.4	+8.9	+5.0%
Katherine	163.8	160.2	-3.6	-2.2%
Tennant Creek	184.1	189.0	+4.9	+2.7%

Diesel (Cents Per Litre)	Ave. Retail Price Mar 2018	Ave. Retail Price Mar 2019	Price change Mar 2018 - Mar 2019	% Change Mar 2018- Mar 2019
Darwin	148.7	145.7	-3.0	-2.0%
Regional Average	173.8	186.2	+12.4	7.1%
NT Average	158.6	161.6	+3.0	+1.9%

Source: NT Government 2018a, p.1, 2; NT Government 2019a, p.1,2.

Includes surrounding areas/regions; ^Weighted average; Note the AIP does not report on diesel prices for individual regional areas.

Table 15b: Fuel Prices across the NT: June 2018-June 2019 – Unleaded Fuel and Diesel

Unleaded Petrol (Cents Per Litre)	Ave. Retail Price June 2018	Ave. Retail Price June 2019	Price change June 2018 - June 2019	% Change June 2018- June 2019
Darwin	155.5	144.7	-10.8	-6.9%
Alice Springs	183.7	189.0	+5.3	+2.9%
Katherine	172.7	164.8	-7.9	-4.6%
Tennant Creek	189.6	193.7	+4.1	+2.2%
NT Ave^	162.5	155.3	-7.2	-4.4%
Australian Ave^	149.8	141.5	-8.3	-5.5%

Diesel* (Cents Per Litre)	Ave. Retail Price June 2018	Ave. Retail Price June 2019	Price change June 2018 - June 2019	% Change June 2018- June 2019
Darwin	155.3	148.0	-7.3	-4.7%
Regional Ave*^	182.1	187.3	+5.2	+2.9%
NT Ave^	165.8	163.4	-2.4	-1.4%
Australian Ave^	154.4	149.1	-5.3	-3.4%

Source: NT Government 2018b, p.1,2; NT Government 2019b, p.1,2.

Includes surrounding areas/regions; ^Weighted average; Note: The AIP does not report on diesel prices for individual regional areas. The June 2018 figures refer to the 4 weeks ending 2 July 2018; June 2019 figures refer to the 4 weeks ending 30 June 2019

Appendix D: MyFuel NT Data over the past year

Table 16a: Unleaded 91 Fuel – Regional Data from My Fuel NT – June 2018 – June 2019

Unleaded 91 Fuel	June 2018	June 2019	Year ending June 2019	9 July 2019
	Ave. Price cpl	Ave. Price cpl	Price Change cpl	Highest Price cpl*
Tiwi Island	241.0	241.0	0.0	241.0
Darwin	155.6	144.3	-11.3	144.9
Litchfield	155.8	146.2	-9.6	153.9
Palmerston	155.9	143.7	-12.2	144.9
Top End Rural	161.3	160.9	-0.4	166.5
Katherine	175.0	174.4	-0.6	205.0
Barkly	181.3	191.7	+10.4	193.0
Cent Aust Region	198.1	207.2	+9.1	250.0

NT Government 2019c.

Table 16b: Low Aromatic Fuel – Regional Data from My Fuel NT – June 2018 – June 2019

Low Aromatic Fuel	June 2018	May 2019	Year ending June 2019	9 July 2019
	Ave. Price cpl	Ave. Price cpl	Price Change cpl	Highest Price cpl*
Tiwi Island	242.5	251.1	+8.6	255.0
East Arnhem	249.3	246.0	-3.3	295.0
Litchfield	N/A	153.9	N/A	N/A
Top End Rural	188.1	198.0	+9.9	264.0
Katherine	174.2	172.1	-2.1	245.0
Barkly	185.4	185.8	+0.4	220.0
Cent Aust Region	190.8	194.3	+3.5	260.0

NT Government 2019c.

Table 16c: Diesel – Regional Data from My Fuel NT – June 2018 – June 2019

Diesel	June 2018	June 2019	Year ending June 2019	9 Jul 2019
	Ave. Price cpl	Ave. Price cpl	Price Change cpl	Highest Price cpl*
Tiwi Island	235.3	244.9	+9.6	250.0
Darwin	155.4	147.2	-8.2	149.9
Palmerston	155.7	147.9	-7.8	147.9
Top End Rural	176.7	187.1	+10.4	272.0
East Arnhem	221.9	227.9	+6.0	295.0
Litchfield	155.7	149.5	-6.2	154.9
Katherine	174.3	174.4	+0.1	245.0
Barkly	185.1	190.4	+5.3	220.0
Cent Aust Region	190.8	199.9	+9.1	260.0

NT Government 2019c.

* The Highest Price refers to the data available on a daily basis from the Fuel Near Me page on the MyFuelNT website – with this price data taken from 9 July 2019

<https://myfuelnt.nt.gov.au/Home/Results?searchOptions=region&Suburb=&SuburbId=0&RegionId=4&FuelCode=U91&BrandIdentifier=>

Appendix E: Transport Affordability Index Data

Table 17: Household Weekly Transport Costs Comparison of Disaggregated Expenditure Areas

– Alice Springs vs Darwin Dec 2017 - Dec 2018

	Darwin		Alice Springs	
	Q4 2017	Q4 2018	Q4 2017	Q4 2018
Car Loan Payments	121.71	\$123.48	\$121.71	\$123.48
Registration and Licencing	\$29.00	\$29.42	\$29.00	\$29.42
Insurance	\$23.45	\$32.37	\$19.89	\$25.16
Servicing & tyres	\$29.00	\$29.73	\$32.07	\$32.86
Fuel	\$70.56	\$78.04	\$77.98	\$88.02
Public Transport ¹⁵	\$20.00	\$20.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Tolls	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Roadside Assistance	\$1.90	\$1.90	\$1.90	\$1.90
Totals	\$295.63	\$314.94	\$282.56	\$300.84

Source: Table adapted from AAA & SGS 2018, p. 29 etc; AAA & SGS 2019, p.27.

Appendix F: Calculations used for Weekly payment rates - used in Figures 1, 2

Table 18a: Weekly Payment Rates at 19 March 2018

	BASE RATE	Pension Support	Energy Supp	FTB A Child u13	FTB B Child 13-15	FTB B	Pharma Benefit	TOTAL PAYMENT
Age Pension (single)	\$407.00	\$33.15	\$7.05					\$447.20
Newstart (single, no children)	\$269.40		\$4.40					\$273.80
Newstart (single, 2 children)	\$289.65		\$4.75*	\$91.42	\$118.93	\$54.32	\$3.10	\$563.92
Youth Allowance (single, no children)	\$222.90		\$3.50					\$226.40

Table 18b: Weekly Payment Rates at 19 March 2019

	BASE RATE	Pension Support	Energy Supp	FTB A Child u13	FTB B Child 13-15	FTB B	Pharma Benefit	TOTAL PAYMENT
Age Pension (single)	\$417.20	\$33.90	\$7.05					\$458.15
Newstart (single, no children)	\$275.10		\$4.40					\$279.50
Newstart (single, 2 children)	\$297.60		\$4.75*	\$91.42	\$118.93	\$54.32	\$3.10	\$570.07
Youth Allowance (single, no children)	\$227.60		\$3.50					\$231.10

Centrelink 2018, p. 2, 5, 13, 25, 27, 32-33, 40-41.; Centrelink 2019, p. 2, 5, 13, 25, 28, 33-34, 40-41.

NB: All figures based on max payment rates where relevant. Two children for Newstart calculation based on one child between 5 and 13 y.o.; and one b/w 13-15 y.o.; *Note: For Newstart (single) with children the Energy Supplement for FTB A and FTB is only payable to recipients who have been receiving the FTB Energy supplement(s) continuously from 19 September 2016. The above calculation is based on a new recipient, who would not be eligible for the additional FTB Energy Supplements.

¹⁵ It is assumed by the TAI that the regional household does not incur public transport costs. This is due to a lack of reliable services and low usage rates in the regional locations analysed.

Appendix G: Table 19: Darwin vs Capital Cities Ave. Weekly Food and Alcohol Expenditure and as a percentage of Weekly Disposable Income

	Darwin		Capital Cities Average	
	Weekly Expenditure	% of Weekly disposable income	Weekly Expenditure	% of Weekly disposable income
FOOD AND NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES				
Food and non-alcoholic beverages nfd[^]	\$28.21	1.4%	\$16.86	0.9%
Bakery products, flours and cereals	\$15.12	0.7%	\$20.53	1.1%
Meat (excluding fish and seafood)	\$31.01	1.5%	\$27.27	1.5%
Fish and seafood	\$7.28	0.4%	\$6.07	0.3%
Eggs and egg products	\$1.76	0.08%	\$2.05	0.1%
Dairy products	\$16.63	0.8%	\$15.20	0.8%
Edible oils and fats	\$1.71	0.08%	\$1.57	0.1%
Fruit and nuts	\$15.07	0.7%	\$15.78	0.9%
Vegetables	\$17.01	1.0%	\$16.24	0.9%
Condiments – confectionary, food additives and prepared meals	\$22.36	1.1%	\$26.04	1.4%
Non-alcoholic beverages	\$16.08	0.8%	\$15.55	0.8%
Meals out and fast foods	\$85.81	4.2%	\$92.08	5.0%
Other food and non-alcoholic beverages	*\$0.22	0.01%	\$0.21	0.01%
TOTAL ALL FOOD EXPENDITURE	\$256.28	12.6%	\$287.78	15.6%
Weekly Mean Household Disposable Income	\$2032		\$1847	
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES				
TOTAL ALL FOOD & ALCOHOL EXPENDITURE	\$299.22	14.7%	\$287.78	15.6%
Weekly Mean Household Disposable Income	\$2032		\$1847	

Source: ABS 2017 Table 13.8, 13.9A.

[^]not further defined; * estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution

Appendix H: Table 20: Market Basket Survey, NT Supermarket vs Remote Stores- % difference year on year
(Data used for Figure 15)

	NT Supermarket	Remote store	\$ Difference	% Difference
2000	\$364	\$474	\$110	30%
2001	\$392	\$497	\$105	27%
2002	\$422	\$515	\$93	22%
2003	\$442	\$538	\$96	22%
2004	\$469	\$552	\$83	18%
2005	\$437	\$551	\$114	26%
2006	\$501	\$597	\$96	19%
2007	\$509	\$619	\$110	22%
2008	\$558	\$659	\$101	18%
2009	\$548	\$695	\$147	27%
2010	\$522	\$710	\$188	36%
2011	\$571	\$764	\$193	34%
2012	\$510	\$725	\$215	42%
2013	\$532	\$733	\$201	38%
2014	\$517	\$770	\$253	49%
2015	\$565	\$782	\$217	38%
2016	\$606	\$833	\$227	37%
2017	\$535	\$854	\$319	60%
Price Rise since 2000	\$171 (46.9%)	\$380 (80.20%)		

Source: NT Government 2017, p.16.

Appendix I: Table 21a Food expenditure by Household Type – Northern Territory Figures

	NT Household Composition						
	<i>Couple family with dependent children</i>	<i>Lone parent with dependent children</i>	<i>Couple only</i>	<i>Couple family with non-dependent children only</i>	<i>Lone person households (All Age Groups)</i>	<i>Lone person households 65+</i>	<i>All households (b)</i>
<i>Total Mean Disposable Income</i>	\$2,220	\$1,918	\$2,186	\$2,348	\$1,135	\$464	\$2,073
<i>Total Goods & Services Expenditure</i>	\$1,916.89	\$1,191.41	\$1,873.82	\$2,236.26	\$965.54	\$449.24	\$1,700.04
<i>NT Food and non-alcoholic beverages</i>	\$275.89	\$268.61	\$271.23	\$295.45	\$118.39	\$102.86	\$254.12
<i>% of Disp. Income</i>	12.4%	14.0%	12.4%	12.6%	10.4%	22.2%	12.3%
<i>National Food Exp.</i>	\$327.72	\$200.89	\$226.54	\$348.18	\$105.94	\$87.49	\$236.97
<i>NT – comparison National food Exp.</i>	\$52 below	\$68 above	\$45 above	\$53 below	\$13 above	\$15 above	\$18 above
<i>National Mean Disp. Income</i>	\$2,366	\$1,231	\$1,635	\$2,571	\$807	\$617	\$1,706
<i>National – Food as % of Total Disp. Income</i>	13.9%	16.3%	13.9%	13.5%	13.1%	14.2%	13.9%
<i>Food as % of Income - NT vs national average</i>	Below National Average (1.5%)	Below National Average (2.3%)	Below National Average (1.5%)	Below National Average (0.9%)	Below National Average (2.7%)	Above National Average (8.0%)	Below National Average (1.6%)

Source: ABS 2017, Table 20.7, 20.8.

Table 21b Average Weekly Food expenditure by Household Tenure, and Expenditure as a proportion of Weekly Household Disposable Income – National Figures

	Owners		Renters					
<i>Weekly Figures</i>	<i>Owner w/o a mortgage</i>	<i>Owner with mortgage</i>	<i>State/Terr housing authority</i>	<i>Private landlord</i>	<i>Other landlord</i>	<i>Total Renters</i>	<i>Other tenure type</i>	<i>All households (b)</i>
<i>Mean Household Disposable Income</i>	\$1441	\$2145	\$733	\$1538	\$1362	\$1439	\$1463	\$1706
<i>Food and non-alcoholic beverages</i>	\$208.65	\$290.51	\$119.73	\$213.13	\$176.26	\$201.67	\$213.45	\$236.97
<i>% of Total Mean Household Disposable Income</i>	14.5%	13.5%	16.3%	13.9%	12.9%	14.0%	14.6%	13.9%

Source: ABS 2017, Table 8.2, 8.3A.

Appendix J: Table 22: Examples of Products Included in ADG Food Groups

<i>ADG food group</i>	<i>Examples of products included</i>
<i>Grains & cereals</i>	<i>Bread</i> <i>Breakfast cereals</i> <i>Pasta</i> <i>Rice</i>
<i>Vegetables</i>	<i>Fresh vegetables</i> <i>Frozen vegetables</i> <i>Canned vegetables</i>
<i>Fruit</i>	<i>Fresh fruit</i> <i>Dried fruit</i> <i>Canned fruit</i>
<i>Milk & alt.</i>	<i>Milk</i> <i>Cheese</i> <i>Yogurt</i>
<i>Meats & alt.</i>	<i>Beef</i> <i>Eggs</i> <i>Veal</i> <i>Lamb</i> <i>Poultry</i> <i>Fresh fish</i>
<i>Discretionary</i>	<i>Nuts</i> <i>Alcohol</i> <i>Biscuits</i> <i>Butter</i> <i>Cakes</i> <i>Chocolates</i> <i>Cocoa and chocolate-based powders</i> <i>Gum</i> <i>Honey</i> <i>Ice-cream</i> <i>Jams</i> <i>Lollies</i> <i>Potato chips</i> <i>Processed meats</i> <i>Salt</i> <i>Sauces and condiments</i> <i>Soft drinks</i> <i>Sugar</i> <i>Water based ice confectionery</i>
<i>Oils & fats</i>	<i>Margarine</i> <i>Other vegetable oils</i>

Source: ABS 2016a, Table 3.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. CPI and Living Cost Indexes

The ABS Selected Living Cost Indexes (SLCI) uses a different methodology to the CPI. CPI is based on acquisition (i.e. the price at the time of acquisition of a product) while the living cost index is based on actual expenditure. This is particularly relevant in relation to housing costs where CPI traces changes in house prices, while the SLCI traces changes in the amount expended each week on housing (e.g. mortgage repayments). Further information is available in the Explanatory Notes to the SLCI's (ABS 2018b).

In that sense, the SLCI's are not a simple disaggregation of CPI and the two are not strictly comparable. However, both indexes are used to measure changes in the cost of living over time (although that is not what CPI was designed for) and given the general usage of the CPI measure and its powerful political and economic status, it is useful to compare the two and highlight the differences for different household types (Adapted from SACOSS 2014, p.9).

The SLCIs are preferred, as a summary measure, over the more well-known CPI, because the CPI is technically not a cost of living measure, as it tracks changes in the price of a specific basket of goods. However, this basket includes goods and services that are not necessarily part of the expenditure of all households - in particular for many low-income households (SACOSS 2014, p.4).

"The Selected Living Cost Indexes (SLCIs), Australia incorporates the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI) and the Analytical Living Cost Indexes (ALCIs). The ALCIs have been compiled and published by the ABS since June 2000 and were developed in recognition of the widespread interest in the extent to which the impact of price change varies across different groups of households in the Australian population" (ABS 2018b).

"ALCIs are prepared for four types of Australian households:

- employee households (i.e. those households whose principal source of income is from wages and salaries);
- age pensioner households (i.e. those households whose principal source of income is the age pension or Veteran's Affairs pension);
- other government transfer recipient households (i.e. those households whose principal source of income is a government pension or benefit other than the age pension or Veteran's Affairs pension); and,
- self-funded retiree households (i.e. those households whose principal source of income is superannuation or property income and where the Household Expenditure Survey (HES) defined reference person is 'retired' (not in the labour force and over 55 years of age)" (ABS 2018b).

2. Limitations of the Selected Living Cost Indexes

The Selected Living Cost Indexes (SLCI's) are more nuanced than the generic CPI in that they measure changes for different household types, but there are still a number of problems with using those indexes to show cost of living changes faced by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the Northern Territory. While it is safe to assume that welfare recipients are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, any household-based data for multi-person households indicates nothing about distribution of power, money and expenditure within a household. This may therefore hide particular (and often gendered) structures of vulnerability and disadvantage. Further, the living cost indexes are not state-based, so particular Northern Territory trends or circumstances may not show up (adapted from SACOSS 2014, p.9).

At the more technical level, the SLCI's are for households whose predominant income is from the described source (e.g. Aged Pension or government transfers), though many households in these categories have other sources of income, or more than one welfare recipient in the same household. Like the CPI, the SLCI's figures reflect broad averages (even if more nuanced), but do not reflect the experience of the poorest in those categories (Adapted from SACOSS 2014, p.9).

Another example of this "averaging problem" is that expenditures on some items, like housing, are too low to reflect the real expenditures and changes for the most vulnerable in the housing market – again, because the worst-case scenarios are "averaged out" by those in the category with other resources. For instance, if one pensioner owned their own home outright they would generally be in a better financial position than a pensioner who has to pay market rents. As an example, if the market rent was \$300 per week, the average expenditure on rent between the two would be \$150 per week, much less than what the renting pensioner was actually paying (adapted from SACOSS 2014, p. 9).

The weightings in the SLCI's are also based on a set point in time (from the 2016-17 Household Final Consumption Expenditure data (ABS 2019a) and can't be changed until the next survey. In the meantime, the price of some necessities may increase rapidly, forcing people to change expenditure patterns to cover the increased cost. Alternatively, or additionally, expenditure patterns may change for a variety of other reasons. However, the weighting in the indexes does not change and therefore does not track the expenditure substitutions and the impact that has on cost of living and lifestyle (adapted from SACOSS 2014, p.9).

The SLCI's household income figures are based on households that are the average size for that household type: which for Aged Pensioners is 1.52 and Other Government Transfer recipients 2.57 (ABS, 2018b). This makes comparison with allowances difficult. This Report primarily focuses on single person households or a single person with two children (to align to the other welfare recipient household average of 2.57 persons). However, this is a proxy rather than statistical correlation (adapted from SACOSS 2014, p. 9-10). While the SLCI's do have some limitations, in terms of tracking cost of living changes overall they provide a "robust statistical base, quarterly tracking of changes and a long time series, which all provide valuable data for analysis" (SACOSS 2014, p.10).

3. Age Pension and Newstart and Youth Allowance Calculations for Figures 1 & 2

These figures reflect payment levels for a single Aged Pensioner; a single Newstart recipient with no children as well as with two children, and a single Youth Allowance recipient. There are clearly going to be variations in payment rates for different recipients, which will be affected by family structure, the number and age of children and receipt of supplements like rent assistance (but for simplicity these are not all factored in here). Payment rates for single people are used – as partner's income for partnered recipients adds further complexity (Adapted from SACOSS 2014, p.10).

4. How Pension Rates are adjusted

“Currently, pensions (including the Age Pension, Service Pension, Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment) are indexed twice each year by the greater of the movement in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost Index (PBLCI). They are then ‘benchmarked’ against a percentage of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE). The combined couple rate is benchmarked to 41.76% of MTAWE; the single rate of pension is set at 66.33% of the combined couple rate (which is equal to around 27.7% of MTAWE). ‘Benchmarked’ means that after it has been indexed, the combined couple rate is checked to see whether it is equal to or higher than 41.76% of MTAWE. If the rate is lower than this percentage, the rates are increased to the appropriate benchmark level” (Parliamentary Library 2014).

“The CPI is a measure of changes in the prices paid by households for a fixed basket of goods and services. Indexing pension rates to CPI maintains the real value of pensions over time. The PBLCI measures the effect of changes in prices of the out-of-pocket living expenses experienced by age pensioner and other households whose main source of income is a government payment. The PBLCI is designed to check whether their disposable incomes have kept pace with price changes. The MTAWE benchmark is not intended to maintain the value of the pension relative to costs; it is seen as ensuring pensioners maintain a certain standard of living, relative to the rest of the population.” (Parliamentary Library 2014). *NB: Allowance payments, such as Newstart and Youth Allowance are indexed to the CPI only. Newstart payments are adjusted 6 monthly - each March and September; while Youth Allowance payments are only adjusted annually, each January.*

5. Conversion of Historical Household Expenditure Figures into Constant Dollars

The figures in Table (Australia) and Table (NT) are calculated by using historical HES figures from the 1998/99, 2003/04 and 2009/10 surveys and using the ABS CPI Inflation Calculator, which enables a calculation of how much purchasing power has changed over time. The expenditure amounts from the previous HES figures (using December 1998; December 2003 and December 2009 as the base year) are converted into December 2015 dollars – to allow for a comparison with the most recent HES figures (2015/16) (ABS 2017e).

<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/Consumer+Price+Index+Inflation+Calculator>

“This application uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication [Consumer Price Index \(Cat. no. 6401.0\)](#) for Quarterly indexes and [Consumer Price Index: Concepts, Sources and Methods \(Cat. no. 6461.0\)](#) for Annual indexes to demonstrate the change in purchasing power of an amount of money between two chosen dates. The difference shown between the user's input value and what the CPI Inflation Calculator outputs demonstrates the effect of inflation over time” (ABS 2017h).

ABS Disclaimer: The ABS has the following disclaimer about the use of the calculator

“The results produced by this Calculator are intended as guides only and should not be regarded as official Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) calculations. While every effort has been made by the ABS to ensure that the data and formulae used to generate the results are accurate, the ABS accepts no liability or responsibility for the resulting calculations. The ABS recommends that users exercise their own care and judgment with respect to the Calculator's use, and interpretation of its results.” (ABS 2017e).

6. NT Government Market Basket Survey

“In 1995 the then Northern Territory (NT) Department of Health and Community Services developed the NT Food and Nutrition Policy. One of the strategies identified in this policy was to develop a tool to monitor food cost, availability, variety and quality in remote community stores. The tool developed was the Market Basket Survey (MBS) and the first survey of a sample of remote stores was conducted in 1998 and the first Territory wide survey was done in 2000.” (2013, p. 4)

“The MBS includes a ‘food basket’ that consists of foods that meet the average energy and recommended nutrient needs of a hypothetical family of 6 people for a fortnight. The family was chosen to represent a cross-section of people who had important nutrient requirements because of their age and sex. The family consists of:

- a grandmother aged 60 years,
- a man aged 35 years,
- a woman aged 33 years,
- a male aged 14 years,
- a girl aged 8 years, and
- a boy aged 4 years.” (NT Government 2017, p.4)

(Income level \$2513.46, based on Centrelink payment rates for March 20-June 30, 2019)

The foods that make up the basket to feed this family can be found in Appendix A of the MBS 2013, while more information on the Fortnightly Income for Hypothetical Family of 6 can be found at Appendix B of the MBS 2013.

In terms of developing the market basket, “The actual selection of brands and sizes was made in consultation with the leading grocery suppliers in the NT and with input from nutritionists regarding their observations in communities. The most commonly sold items were the ones included in the

food basket.” (MBS 2012, p.5). “In addition to collecting information on cost, the MBS also collects information on store management, employment of Aboriginal people, existence of a store nutrition policy, community development initiatives by the store (e.g. sponsorship and donations), nutrition promotions and store worker training.” (NT Government 2012, p.5).

“As part of the survey, a major supermarket and corner store in each of the district centres are also surveyed to enable comparison of prices between urban and remote districts. The corner store is a small suburban supermarket that provides a benchmark store with a similar buying power to the remote stores. The income for the hypothetical family was determined by obtaining Centrelink and Family Assistance figures from the Centrelink website.” (NT Government 2012, p.5).

The 2013 MBS is the fourteenth annual survey of remote community stores in the Northern Territory. As the 2012 MBS (NT Government, p.25) highlighted, “Since the inception of the MBS, a number of changes have occurred that have the potential to impact the results of this survey. In early 2007 the Australian Government announced the establishment of Outback Stores, a company set up to manage stores on behalf of remote communities to ensure their commercial viability and a reliable supply of healthy, affordable food. Outback Stores began operating in its first store in May 2007.”

“In June 2007 the Australian Government announced the NT Emergency Response (NTER) in response to the *Little Children are Sacred Report*. Amongst the measures introduced in the NTER were Income Management (IM) and the licensing of remote stores by the Australian Government’s Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). By September 2007, the first community store was licensed and IM had commenced in that community. There was a gradual roll out of these initiatives to other communities and in January 2012, shortly before commencement of the 2012 MBS, 91 stores were licensed.” (NT Government 2012, p.25)

“The licensing of community stores was designed to improve both the management of stores and the quality of food they provide. As part of licensing conditions stores are expected to have a reasonable range of groceries and consumer items, including healthy food and drinks. The introduction of IM and stores licensing, along with an increase in the number of stores managed by Outback Stores, is therefore likely to have had an impact on some of the information monitored through this survey since 2007.” (NT Government 2012, p.25)

“The Darwin supermarket and corner store were used as the benchmark against which remote community stores are compared. The Darwin stores were chosen because the Darwin region is where the majority of Territorians live and similar surveys in other states use their capital city supermarket prices as the benchmark. The ‘corner stores’ (small suburban supermarkets) provide a benchmark store with a similar buying power to remote stores. (NT Government 2012, p.26).

7. CPI and HES Categories for Food and non-alcoholic beverages

CPI Categories for Food and non-alcoholic beverages

Bread and cereal products
Meat and seafoods
Dairy and related products
Fruit and vegetables
Other food
Non-alcoholic beverages
Meals out and take away foods
(ABS 2017c Table 10)

HES data categories and sub categories for Food and non-alcoholic beverages

Food and non-alcoholic beverages nfd
Bakery products, flour and cereals
Meat (excluding fish and seafood)
Fish and seafood
Eggs and egg products
Dairy products
Edible oils and fats
Fruit and nuts
Vegetables
Condiments, confectionery, food additives and prepared meals
Non-alcoholic beverages
Meals out and fast foods
Other food and non-alcoholic beverages
(ABS 2017b Table 13.9A)

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ⁱ On 2/7/18 the Child Care Subsidy replaced the Child Care Rebate & Child Care Benefit, leading to lower child care costs (ABS 2018c)

ⁱⁱ Note: March 2018-March 2019 figures used to allow for a comparison of the Darwin figures with the Darwin CPI figure for fuel for the same period – but elsewhere through the report figures for the year ending June 2019 are used, to provide the most recent figures.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Given the involvement of retailers and public health nutritionists, and a rapidly growing interest among retailers to use merchandising strategies (using product, price, placement, and promotion) to promote the sales of healthy food, our investigation resulted in a retail environment different to that at baseline" (Brimblecombe et al 2017a, p. 12).