

Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments

2019 progress update Northern Territory Government

March 2019

Further details available at
www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

NT
2019



The Australian Prevention
Partnership Centre
Systems and solutions for better health



INFORMAS
Benchmarking food environments

Executive summary

Unhealthy diets and obesity are leading contributors to poor health in Australia. Addressing obesity and improving population diets requires a comprehensive government response at Commonwealth and State/Territory levels.

In 2017, a Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the food and diet-related policies that were in place in each jurisdiction, and identify recommended actions for each government based on international best practice.

This report provides a follow up to the 2017 Food Policy Index report. It summarises and assesses the actions taken by the Northern Territory (NT) Government (July 2016 – December 2018) in relation to the recommended policies identified in the 2017 report.

Key areas in which the Northern Territory Government has made progress



Regular monitoring of unhealthy food prices via market basket surveys



NT Health has continued to fund the NT Heart Foundation branch to implement *Live Lighter* social marketing campaign, including tailored content for remote communities



Ongoing support for remote communities/stores to improve availability of healthy foods and limit availability / sales of unhealthy foods



Recommended action areas for the Northern Territory Government

The 2017 Food Policy Index report prioritised 15 recommendations for action. Recommended focus areas for the next 12-18 months are:



Monitoring and intelligence: Implement ongoing monitoring of food environments, including the marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and the nutritional quality of food available in schools and public sector settings



Food provision: Establish a whole-of-government policy on healthy food provision by applying the NT Health ‘Healthy Choices Made Easy’ policy across all public sector settings as well as settings under government control



Food promotion: Implement policies to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in settings controlled or managed by the Northern Territory Government

Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI)

In 2017, a Food Policy Index was developed for Australia to assess the extent to which governments in Australia were implementing globally recommended policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments.¹

The project was conducted as part of INFORMAS,² an international network of food policy and public health experts. The project implemented the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) tool, developed by INFORMAS to assess government policy across 14 domains related to food environments and applied in >10 countries. As part of the Food-EPI Australia 2017 project, recommended actions for each government (Federal, State and Territory) were developed and prioritised, based on international best practice and consultation with >100 non-government public health experts representing 53 organisations.

Assessment of progress made

The Food-EPI Australia 2017 report identified and prioritised 15 recommended policy actions for the Northern Territory Government, as part of efforts to create healthier food environments and address obesity.

The purpose of this 2019 Progress Update was to assess progress made by the Northern Territory Government in relation to the recommended policy actions.

Government officials from each jurisdiction in Australia provided information on actions taken by their government in relation to the recommended actions from the Food-EPI Australia 2017 report. This included all activities from **July 2016** (the date up to which policies were assessed in the 2017 report) to **December 2018**.

The actions were summarised, and progress in relation to each recommendation was assessed by the project team as ‘Substantive action’, ‘Some action’ or ‘Limited action’, based on the criteria in Table 1. The full details of actions taken and progress made by other jurisdictions are available at: www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

Substantive action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implemented substantive action in relation to all or most components of the recommendation
Some action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implemented action in relation to some components of the recommendation; and/orTaken steps to initiate or formulate plans in relation to the recommendation, but relevant actions have not yet been implemented
Limited action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Taken no substantive action in relation to the recommendation; and/orMade no or very limited progress in the area

Table 1: Criteria for assessment of progress made

¹ Sacks G for the Food-EPI Australia project team. Policies for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments: scorecard and priority recommendations for Australian governments. Melbourne: Deakin University, 2017. Available at: www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

² www.informas.org

Actions taken (July 2016 - December 2018) by the Northern Territory Government in relation to the recommended policies from the 2017 Food Policy Index report

	Domain	Recommended policy action	Progress in relation to recommended action	Assessment
NT1	Monitoring and intelligence	Implement ongoing monitoring of food environments, including the marketing of unhealthy foods to children, and the nutritional quality of food available in schools and public sector settings	NT Health conducts regular audits of compliance with the 'Healthy Choices Made Easy' policy for provision of food and drinks in NT health premises.	Some action
NT2	Food provision	Improve awareness and compliance with existing canteen policy in all schools, by extending reporting mechanisms, incentives and support systems	NT Health continues to work with canteens in NT schools and the NT Department of Education to support the implementation of the 'Canteen, nutrition and healthy eating policy'.	Some action
NT3	Monitoring and intelligence	Actively monitor prices of healthy and unhealthy foods across the Northern Territory by widening the scope of the 'Market Basket Survey'	Monitoring of unhealthy food prices was included in the 2016 and 2017 market basket surveys and will continue to be included in future surveys. The 'Market Basket Survey' includes surveying of a major supermarket and corner store in each district centre town.	Substantive action
NT4	Food retail	Expand existing work with retailers / food service outlets to improve availability of healthy foods and limit availability / sales of unhealthy foods, particularly in remote stores	This is ongoing work and core business for public health nutritionists working in remote communities. NT Health provides strategic advice to Community Stores Licensing team in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. NT Health is supporting 'Healthy Stores 2020', a research project led by Menzies School of Health Research which assesses the impact of reducing the visibility/availability of discretionary foods and drinks.	Substantive action
NT5	Food provision	Establish a whole-of-government policy on healthy food provision by applying the NT Health 'Healthy Choices Made Easy' policy across all public sector settings as well as settings under government control	The NT Department of Health (DoH) is not aware of any work to establish a whole of government policy, however other agencies have shown interest in developing a similar policy, particularly in regards to catering events and DoH is supporting this work when it arises.	Limited action
NT6	Food labelling	Implement mandatory nutrition labelling on menus at food service outlets (e.g., fast food and take-away), in line with regulations in other States / Territories	To date, no progress has been made in this area. However, in response to mandatory requirements in other jurisdictions, major fast food chains have adopted nutrition labelling across their stores nationwide, including the NT. There are no 'chains' that only operate in the NT. Accordingly, it could be argued that no further action is required.	Limited action
NT7	Governance	Implement formal health impact assessments that consider population nutrition and health impacts as part of policy development and proposal process	NT Health continues to provide commentary on major NT Government policies and projects, however there is no formal health impact assessment process.	Limited action
NT8	Food retail	Amend the planning framework to prioritise health and healthy food environments, as part of facilitating local governments to limit the placement / density of unhealthy food outlets and support healthy food outlets	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action

NT9	Food promotion	Implement policies to restrict the promotion of unhealthy food and beverages in settings controlled or managed by the Northern Territory government	NT Health contributed to a national interim guide for reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food and drink marketing. This guide is for voluntary use by governments and was endorsed by Health Ministers at the Council of Australian Governments Health Council meeting on 2 August 2018. NT Health has commenced discussion to progress implementation of the guide.	Some action
NT10	Food retail	Develop and implement programs to incentivise sports and recreation clubs to sell healthier foods and beverages whilst limiting unhealthy foods and beverages	NT Health is investigating options to progress work in this area.	Some action
NT11	Support for communities	Commit to ongoing, long-term support for social marketing campaigns promoting healthy eating (including tailored campaigns for remote communities)	NT health has continued to fund the NT Heart Foundation branch to implement <i>Live Lighter</i> social marketing campaign. Promotion includes mass media, advertising, social media, online and printed resources, advocacy and retailers. In remote communities, advertisements were produced by Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation instead of the standard <i>Live Lighter</i> sugary drinks television commercials.	Substantive action
NT12	Food provision	Roll out the newly developed 'Healthy Workplace' resources to support healthy eating policy implementation in private sector workplaces	The healthy workplace toolkit "Your Simple Guide to Workplace Health and Well Being" was published online by the NT Government in 2017. This document is a practical guide to implementing workplace health programs, available online to government and private sector workplaces. NT Health provides support to implement the toolkit to workplaces as requested.	Substantive action
NT13	Food promotion	Require all organisations that receive funding from the Northern Territory Government to restrict all promotion (including sponsorship) related to unhealthy food and beverages as a condition of funding	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action
NT14	Support for communities	Roll out the 'Childhood Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle (COPAL)' program, providing funding and support for implementation at the local government / community level	Commonwealth funding for COPAL is no longer available. However, the City of Palmerston Council who delivered the initiative, has continued to build on relationships created by COPAL, through employing a Health Programs Manager. No further funding for this initiative has been identified.	Some action
NT15	Monitoring and intelligence	Introduce regular measuring of children's height and weight at key stages of primary and secondary schools, on an 'opt-out' consent basis	No specific progress has occurred since 2016.	Limited action

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The project forms part of INFORMAS (International Network for Food and Obesity/NCD's Research, Monitoring, Action and Support), a global network of public interest organisations and researchers that seek to monitor and benchmark public and private sector actions to create healthier food environments and reduce obesity and NCD's globally.

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For more details on the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI) project go to:
www.foodpolicyindex.org.au

