



AMSANT

FRESH

FOOD

SUMMIT

Interim report

May 2010



Together for our Health



In May 2010, for the first time in any jurisdiction in Australia, the Aboriginal Comprehensive Primary Health Care sector—through the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory [AMSANT]—came together to discuss the vital issue of food security.

The Fresh Food Summit, held in Tennant Creek, brought more than 300 people together from across the Northern Territory, and included Aboriginal Health Workers and other clinicians, board members of community-controlled health services, along with nutrition workers. As well, key public servants attended to Summit.

It is the first AMSANT Summit in a number of years, and showed the value of these events in defining key issues that face the comprehensive primary health care sector.

The Summit tackled a number of issues, including family, community and market gardening; larger scale horticulture projects on Aboriginal land; the future of stores on our communities; the costs to our health of poor food supplies, and the issue of fresh food subsidies. Many thanks to all those who contributed to the many successful sessions.

The enthusiasm of those who attended is matched by a strong desire to keep the

ball rolling on food security for our people. Within the next couple of months, an extended report, in written and DVD format, will be made to our members, as well as others involved in food security.

We hope the learnings from the Fresh Food Summit will also be able to be used beyond the Northern Territory in years to come.

I would particularly like to thank our sponsors and supporters of the Fresh Food Summit, along with the Minister for Indigenous health, who kindly opened the event.

Our thanks in particular must go to the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the Department of Health and Ageing, whose support will go beyond the Summit in promulgating the Summit's learnings.

Thanks also to the Department of Health and Families; the Department of Housing Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Special support was afforded through one of our partners, the Fred Hollows Foundation—which this year marks a decade of commitment to Aboriginal food security programs.

Anyinginyi Health—one of our oldest members—hosted our stay in Tennant Creek, and contributed through the Strong families program and Anyinginyi Rural and Remote. We also received support from the Barkly regionalisation Unit, Julalikari CDEP, the Council of Elders and Respected Persons; the Papulu Apparr-Kari Language Centre and the JimmyLittle Foundation.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to Barkly Regional Arts and the Winanjikarri Music Centre who coordinated the cultural component of the Summit—along with the nuts and bolts of its organisation.

**John Paterson
CEO, AMSANT**



The change must come from us: Aboriginal people

Linda Turner, Chairperson, Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation

Opening Fresh Food Summit, 5 May 2010, Tennant Creek Showground

As Chairperson of Anyinginyi Health, may I acknowledge the Waramungu Traditional Owners and Elders.

May I also welcome to Tennant Creek all the AMSANT representatives who have travelled here from all over the Northern Territory, dignitaries and all the Wumpurani people who are attending from across our region and beyond.

Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation is proud to be the Aboriginal Health Service hosting this important AMSANT Summit. Although it is 10 years since we have had a Summit here in Tennant Creek, it makes us happy that AMSANT is committed to holding these meetings in the regions—all over the Territory.

Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation has been operating since 1984 as a Tennant Creek based primary health care service. Not long ago we changed our charter so we now supply services to the Barkly Region. Our Board of Directors representation is drawn from a number of language groups who sit at the governance table as equal partners in making decisions to improve the health situation for Aboriginal people in the Barkly.

Like everyone here, AHAC's Vision is to work towards a future where Aboriginal people can enjoy equity in health status the same as other Australians.

This change must come from us—Aboriginal people—and from our families and our communities.

And that's what this Summit is about. AMSANT and its members are standing strong together to talk about Fresh Food for our people—a foundation for good primary health care. This Summit has come from Aboriginal people, working for Aboriginal people.



Not just food for thought— but for action

Stephanie Bell, Chairperson, AMSANT

*Opening of AMSANT Fresh Food Summit, Tennant
Creek 5-6 May 2010*

Welcome—everyone—to the AMSANT
Fresh Food Summit 2010.

AMSANT summits have always been an
important avenue for the comprehensive
Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector to
develop and exchange ideas. It's the way
we—as a collective—can clarify where we
are heading, and how to get there.

The Northern Territory Emergency
Response interrupted that process—
let's face it—it interrupted a lot of things!
Nevertheless, the Intervention has focused
our efforts—as never before—on the need
to base our endeavours on what really
works.

In other words—we must do our best to
focus our efforts on the knowledge which
is available to us and—where the evidence
does not exist—conduct appropriate
research to build our evidence base.

That's what this Summit is about.

Like many good ideas, the genesis of the
AMSANT Fresh Food Summit happened
over breakfast.

I guess it's pretty pathetic—and indicates
we really do need a life—but we were
discussing the social determinants of health
over a cup of tea.

It was sparked by a comment from a health
professional out bush who claimed that—in
a very real sense—the largest part of her
clinical practice involved dealing with the
consequences of malnutrition amongst
Aboriginal people—from the nutrition of
mothers-to-be and their babies, through
childhood to adulthood.

It was a stark example of the enormous
challenges we face. No matter how good
our health services are, the challenges we
face are far more profound than that which
can be delivered in our clinics, no matter
how well resourced they might be.

It is for that reason the World Health
Organisation has identified the availability
of affordable, healthy food as being an
absolutely critical social determinant in
achieving good health.

Related to this is the notion of “food
security”, which is built on three main ideas:

One: sufficient quantities of food available
on a consistent basis;

Two: access, or having sufficient resources
to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious
diet; and

Three: appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care.

For Aboriginal people food security is a vital public health issue. Health experts say that access to good, affordable food makes more difference to what people eat than health education.

In other words, it is not just a matter of educating people to eat good food—the food must be available and affordable in the first place. Food poverty can exist side by side with food plenty—and Australia is a good example of that. When people cannot access good food, the consequences in terms of chronic disease are dramatic.

It's arguably one of the core explanations for why our men can expect to live 17 years less than their white brothers; our women 13.2 years less than their white sisters.

In this, I am not telling anyone here anything particularly new—it's a no brainer.

It's been the subject of many research studies and pilot projects and—last year—a parliamentary inquiry.

But—on the surface—we seem no closer to resolving the issue: how do we guarantee fresh, affordable food for our people?

The AMSANT Fresh Food Summit is the first jurisdiction-wide gathering of Aboriginal people in Australia to talk about the issues surrounding the supply of fresh affordable food to our people. But—if you will forgive the pun—this Summit is not just “food for thought”—it is for action.

Over the next two days we will be looking at action for the future—whether it be reviving and sustaining the use of bush tucker and bush medicine, growing our own on our communities, or growing food as part of economic sustainability.

We will be looking at community stores—and how they can work for our health rather than adding to our problems.

We will be looking at the need for food subsidies to our remote communities—as well as sustainable food security throughout the Territory.

We will be looking at the idea of Aboriginal food labeling as a way of promoting—in a positive way—the consumption of good food by our people.

We'll be looking—through practical demonstrations—at preparing good food for our families.

In all of this, we will be talking about things we can do now—and things we must do in the future.

Some of those things may be what governments can do—from local shire councils to the mob in Canberra.

Some of the things may be what communities can do at a local level—from remote outstations to the so-called growth towns.

But central to all of this will be the role of the Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector here in the Northern Territory—as well as in other jurisdictions in the nation.

The role of the “health system” in tackling issues of food security in Australia is practically non-existent. For the most part—sadly—the issue of food usually comes up when it's too late: when a doctor, nurse or Aboriginal Health Worker starts talking special diets to cope with chronic disease or their precursors such as obesity. The “health system” is almost at a complete disconnect from the production and supply of food to our people.

This must change—and that is where we, as representatives of the Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector—must take a leading role.

We must engage with food production.

At a local level, market and community gardens are about far more than getting fresh food: they can be major contributors to broader measures of health and well being programs. At a larger level, agricultural production can employ our people—as well as supply fresh food grown on Aboriginal land.

We must engage with food marketing.

Despite store licensing—there is still no formal connection between community stores and the Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector; nothing obliging stores to base their sales policies on the best health evidence available to us. There is no oversight of stores to see how well they serve the health of our people.

And there is no culturally sensible approach to marketing healthy food to our people. The Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector must engage with this vital area of promoting good food over bad.

The challenges are enormous—but they are ones we must meet.

No one else will do them for us. Let the ASMANT Fresh Food Summit be the beginning of the long road to food security for our people.

Thank you.

AMSANT FRESH FOOD SUMMIT RESOLUTIONS

- 1 That AMSANT, representing Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector, supports the work of Remote Indigenous Gardens Network, and promotes its extension into the Northern Territory.**
- 2 That, given the important role of family, community and market gardens in
 - a) supplying fresh food to families and communities;**
 - b) promoting health and well being for participants; and**
 - c) job creation**the Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector be encouraged to work with existing and potential family, community and market gardens, including in supporting their growth, expansion and sustainability.**
- 3 That the Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector supports the further evaluation of family, community and market gardens with an emphasis on the health and social benefits to individuals, families and communities.**
- 4 That AMSANT, representing Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector, supports urgent action in investigating the development of food labelling mechanisms that will inform, educate and promote the consumption of healthy foods, using effective cultural social marketing.**
- 5 That AMSANT, representing Comprehensive Aboriginal Primary Health Care sector, supports the initiatives of Centrefarm in creating viable Aboriginal remote area food production enterprises. AMSANT notes that it provides considerable opportunities to stay on our land, to work our land in supplying our community with fresh foods and to develop a sustainable horticultural industry that works closely with the Aboriginal health services and provide a positive step in closing the gap and an alternative to the welfare economy.**
- 6 That AMSANT works with Centrefarm to develop an overarching body to monitor utilisation of underground waters; sustain all forms of family, community, market gardens and agribusinesses and evaluate benefits to our health.**
- 7 That AMSANT supports the Centrefarm MOU with TKG, and looks to working with the joint venture to further promote the health of our people.**
- 8 That AMSANT supports urgent research to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of subsidising the cost of fruit and vegetables with**

equivalent of, say, 1% of annual cost of running clinics, that is, say \$10,000 per \$1M

- 9 That AMSANT promotes research into freight, logistics and packaging and *good* food subsidies into remote communities to build an evidence base towards achieving food security (ie availability of good food)
- 10 AMSANT encourages Outback, ALPA and other stores to work together to source competitively priced fresh food through joint purchasing
- 11 That AMSANT encourages Outback, ALPA and other stores support the development of community and market gardens through strategic purchasing to allow such gardens to compete against external sources of fresh food
- 12 AMSANT calls on all governments to improve transport networks and infrastructure in remote areas both as a long term mechanism to reduce freight costs, as well as allow capacity to build large scale horticultural projects such as that proposed by Centrefarm.
- 13 That core service standards are developed for all stores, and that these core services form the basis for store licensing
- 14 That there be a mandated relationship between stores and the primary health care sector, using the store licensing system such that there are consequences on stores and their management that don't meet requirements of the PHC sector in ensuring food security
- 15 That this Summit believes the NT Market basket survey is too restricted and should extend to monitoring prices and availability across a wider range of fruit and vegetables, carried out independently by the primary health care sector represented by AMSANT
- 16 That AMSANT supports rec 3 of the Parliamentary inquiry into community stores and immediately appoint a nutritionist to its Board¹

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Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require that membership of the Outback Stores board include a nutritionist.

AMSANT FRESH FOOD SUMMIT: SUMMARY OF DAY 1

Traditional Warumungu Owner Mr Jones welcomed everybody to country, followed by Anyinginyi Chairperson, Linda Turner, who thanked AMSANT and members for setting up the summit. Minister for Indigenous Health, Warren Snowdon, opened the summit and highlighted the importance of food security to Aboriginal health and provided examples of a successful community store in the APY lands which had reduced sales of unhealthy high-sugar foods and drinks.

Alex Debono from the West Arnhem Shire outlined their community market gardens project where the Shire has worked with communities to establish market gardens in three communities. The gardens are funded through CDEP but it is intended that the gardens should become sustainable businesses over time. There are gardens at Gunbalanya and Warruwi and one will start up soon at Minjilang.

Each of the gardens has a coordinator and three or four workers. They grow various crops using organic principles and sell their produce through the local ALPA stores. People feel good that they are buying locally grown produce, produced by local people. The project also works with local ranger programs to obtain bush foods and propagate bush tucker in the gardens as well as in people's yards.

Some challenges for the program are set around sustainability of the project and training and support for supervisors.

Then we heard from Rachel Green, who outlined her research on remote Aboriginal community gardens—*From Little Things, Big Things Grow*—and the Remote Indigenous Gardens or RIG Network that she has developed with others committed to supporting community gardens.

Rachel reminded us of some the benefits and challenges of community market gardens. For example, the reliance on CDEP funding that produces a skewed view of benefits and success—one that over-values economic aspects but under-values non-economic benefits, such as access to and promotion of healthy



foods; the transfer of skills and knowledge; development of good relationships with community stores and aged care; the provision of good role models and self-esteem; and the creation of important social spaces.

Challenges include having enough time to ensure there is proper transfer of knowledge and skills, the sharing of knowledge and experience, establishing proper relationships and organising effective distribution of produce.

The Remote Indigenous Gardens Network provides an ongoing forum supporting Aboriginal community gardens which our communities and anyone with an interest in the issue can engage with.

John Little from Congress told us about another way of getting good food into communities.

One of the central problems is that we have been taught to eat bad food through a colonisation history that goes back to the ration depots time.

We are now up against big business—the junk food industry—that has marketing tools that targets advertising to encourage kids to humbug their parents.

We have to counter with advertising of our own, through examples such as Cuz Congress—a superhero fighting for good health and the Aboriginal way. We need to associate Cuz Congress with good foods and food brands.

But it's got to start with community, with family groups and with valuing the roles of men's and women's groups—they are ones who should be making the key decisions. Community control is essential.

We have to use Aboriginal media, tv, radio, sponsorship, and promote bush foods growing around our communities. We have to ensure our community stores sell good foods. We have to use word of mouth, use our kids to spread the word through projects at school.

Tracker Tillmouth and Vin Lange from CentreFarm provided us with a stimulating presentation about the potential of viable Aboriginal remote area food enterprises based on a joint venture model between Aboriginal land owners and private horticultural companies.

This potential relies on the identification of significant underground water reserves on Aboriginal land and using these to provide value for Aboriginal land trusts from an Aboriginal perspective but also from a non-Indigenous economic perspective.

There is the potential for five to 10,000 hectares of irrigated land supporting 3000 direct jobs and 5-6000 indirect jobs.

The model is based on producing fresh foods for local communities and also for southern markets, where the profits are shared between traditional owners and the joint-venture companies. It is also proposed that there be an over-arching body to monitor utilisation of underground waters and issues such as benefits to the community.

It provides an opportunity to stay on our land, to work our land in supplying our community with fresh foods and to develop a sustainable horticultural industry that works closely with the Aboriginal health services. It can provide a positive step in closing the gap and an alternative to the welfare economy.

Tracker and Vin requested support from this summit on an MOU they are developing with a joint-venture partner - TKG Co Pty Ltd.

There have been other highlights of the day. These included the performance by the Ali Curung Dancers, and the great food provided by Kungas Can Cook.

We also had a rich variety of presentations. Allan Baldock from Anyinginyi Regional Remote provided us with demonstrations of wok stir fry recipes using healthy fresh foods. The evening meal was topped off with a demonstration of cooking by Roy Price, Congress Remote's nutritionist. Over 40 people joined the "Bush Wok King" in cooking the evening meal.

AMSANT FRESH FOOD SUMMIT: SUMMARY OF DAY 2

The day began with the signing of an MOU between CentreFarm and TKG Co Pty Ltd to have joint ventures to develop Aboriginal land, sales, marketing, agronomy and logistics systems to ensure that produce from Aboriginal-owned land is distributed throughout the NT footprint and interstate markets.

We again had a diverse range of presentations. Presentations from the Arnhem Land Progress Association or ALPA, and Outback Stores, outlined two different models of community store development and management.

ALPA is an independent, Aboriginal-controlled benevolent organisation that operates 5 community stores and 12 consultancy stores in the NT. ALPA is one of the largest retailers in the NT as well as a large employer and trainer of Aboriginal people in the NT.

Outback Stores is a retail management provider that provides management services to community-owned stores, currently to 27 stores. It has an IBA-appointed Board.

Although different models, both ALPA and Outback Stores confront similar issues: the high cost of running remote stores, high freight costs, lack of buying power etc., as well as the need to inform and involve communities in making decisions. Both have similar aims in ensuring the affordability and availability of fresh and nutritious foods, providing employment and training for communities, and in returning profits to the communities to use for their benefit. Both employ similar innovations, such as stocking minimum ranges of fruit and veges and providing scales in stores so that customers can buy the amount they need.

Clare Brown highlighted ALPA's health and nutrition strategy, its subsidisation of freight and preferential pricing policy, and improvements in such areas as providing healthy take-away options and community education on nutrition and health. Megan Ferguson pointed to Outback Stores policy of reducing tobacco sales. Both emphasised the importance of community partnerships as well as external partnerships with health services, government, industry (such as CentreFarm) as well as research institutions.

Roy Price from Congress gave us a reality check on the broader implications of the cost of fresh foods and illness. The statistics



are sobering but also should be a cause for changed priorities towards subsidising the cost of food.

Ideal spending patterns for healthy outcomes would be about 60% on fruit, veges & meat, 30% on milk, cheese and eggs, and 10% on junk foods. Actual spending patterns are often the reverse, with about 60% spent on junk or take away foods.

Costs of fruit and veges are high. The average family would need to spend \$150 to \$200 per week on fruit and veges but with an annual income of just over \$9,000 per year for families with up to 6 dependents, this is not realistically achievable.

Roy posed a challenge to current priorities based on an assessment of the high cost of illness. For example, 10% of the cost of running health clinics goes on chronic disease medicines which are 100% subsidised by government.

Yet we know that improved access to affordable fresh fruit and vegetables would significantly improve health and reduce the incidence of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and renal disease.

Roy proposes that we do a cost-benefit analysis of subsidising the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables to the tune of 1% of the cost of running clinics.

The point is that if we looked at the evidence of the bigger picture of the links between food and

health then we should be looking at subsidising fresh foods as a cost-effective public health measure.

Alison and Gloria from Fred Hollows Foundation outlined the work of the Foundation and in particular its Gudwan Daga or “Really Cooking Good Food” program.

Fred Hollows sees itself as focusing on the social determinants of health, working with communities to identify what social and economic barriers they face and how to address them.

Working with Jawoyn people in the Katherine region, and in particular the Women’s Centre at Wugularr, the Gudwan Daga program involved the production of a practical cooking book designed to empower women in an informed way.

Red Cross gave a presentation pointing to their diverse programs working in a number of Aboriginal communities in the NT and nationally.

This includes their Good Start breakfast provided in 46 locations; working with partner organisations such as ALPA and Outback Stores, working with nutritionists in the Barkly region; community garden projects in a number of communities; working with other service providers to provide training; and their nutritional budgeting program, Foodcents, in a number of communities across the NT.

Significantly, both Fred Hollows Foundation and Red Cross work with a community development

focus, with the aim of increasing community capacity and empowerment.

Carmel from the Darwin Fish Market and the NT Seafood Council gave us a presentation about getting more fish and seafood into communities. The NT Seafood Council represents 222 businesses and covers a broad range of issues. The point was made that there is 50 tons of seafood coming into Darwin each week but there is limited availability of locally-caught fish.

Fish, of course, is a very healthy food, high in protein, minerals and Omega-3 fatty acids and helps decrease cholesterol. The Darwin Fish Market is working to increase sales across the NT and is currently working with ALPA and Outback Stores to try to get fresh seafood into remote communities.

We have to thank the Darwin Fish Market and NT Seafood Council for the delicious and nutritious sea food lunch that we enjoyed on that day.

This afternoon's forum on whether there should be food subsidy to the bush generated a really useful debate and ideas for action.

Sixteen resolutions flowed from the Summit at the final session which will form the basis of future action from the week in Tennant Creek.

One of the highlights of the day was the performance from the kids from Tennant Creek Primary School that was created with the assistance of Shellie Morris from the Jimmy Little Foundation.

Other highlights included the You are what you eat cooking demonstrations from Allan Baldock from Anyinginyi Regional Remote.

