



# Inquiry into fresh food pricing

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The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 6400 members, and branches in each state and territory. DAA supports members, advocates for the profession and for building healthier communities. DAA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Inquiry into fresh food pricing* by the Legislative Council of New South Wales.

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## **DAA interest in this consultation**

As the peak body for nutrition professionals, the Dietitians Association of Australia is concerned about building healthier communities in Australia. All Australians need access to healthy affordable food and governments at all levels have a role to play in developing and implementing policy to ensure national and household food security for a strong and productive nation.

Accredited Practising Dietitians working in government, non-government organisations, the private sector and research can contribute to initiatives which deliver an affordable food supply. They also have a role to lead programs which increase the capacity of individuals and communities to adopt healthy dietary behaviours.

## **Introduction**

The price of fresh food is important as access to affordable healthy food is a basic human right described in Articles 11.1 and 11.2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>1</sup> and in Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>2</sup>. Fresh foods form the basis of a diet consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating<sup>3</sup> to sustain growth and development, and to maintain physical and mental health<sup>4</sup>. Adequate food also enables individuals and communities to be productive and to spend less on treating diet related illnesses.

### **d. Prevalence of food insecurity**

#### *Monitoring*

Measures are needed to monitor food security to inform planning and evaluating government and NGO programs in New South Wales, and for national comparisons. Until recently, a number of states used different Healthy Food Basket methodologies to monitor the cost of food within jurisdictions and trends in food costs over time. A further limitation of the baskets was the lack of alignment with the latest Australian Dietary Guidelines. A new tool, the Healthy Diets Australian Standardised Affordability and Price method, has now been developed and tested for comparing the relative cost and affordability of healthy compared to unhealthy diets<sup>5,6</sup>.

#### *Consistent income*

We make the point that a consistent and adequate income is needed to cover all essential household costs, including housing, otherwise there may not be enough money to purchase food. Food cost is the leading factor influencing household food buying decisions<sup>7,8</sup>. A recent paper by Landrigan on food affordability in Western Australia is relevant as it describes population groups experiencing food stress due to income inadequacy which also exist in New South Wales i.e. single-

parent families where food represents 24 – 42% of income, welfare dependent two-parent families, low income earners, and people residing in very remote areas<sup>9</sup>.

#### *Healthy diets are affordable*

The affordability of healthy diets has been controversial with some studies saying that it is more expensive to eat healthily. However, evidence has now been provided to that healthy diets can be more affordable than current (unhealthy) diets in Australia<sup>10</sup>. DAA would like to see greater investment by local and state governments into programs to build the capacity of people to adopt healthy dietary behaviours.

### **e. the identification of ‘food deserts’ and any efforts to address them**

#### *Urban planning*

Governments have a role in urban planning policy to ensure residents access retailers offering affordable food. This includes planning for public transport facilities to travel between home and small or large retails. Accessible transport is essential for people with disability, older people and people who do not have independent transport options.

### **f. the impact on fresh food prices in New South Wales of**

#### **(iii) climate change**

Climate change is acknowledged as having the potential to impact on health through indirect impacts on food security. Food security is driven by human systems, and as temperatures rise, crop yields may decrease, and governments, communities and organisations will adapt activities that might include breeding programmes, switching crops, changing irrigation practices etc. Climate change will also affect marine harvesting<sup>11,12</sup>.

DAA recommends that the NSW Government and other state governments work together to monitor the impact of climate change on food production systems and engage with stakeholders to ensure national and household food security are maintained.

#### **(iv) new retail operators**

A recent review found that supermarkets hold a powerful position in the Australian food system, and that they act as gatekeepers between food producers and consumers by use of contracts and specifications<sup>13</sup> but more research is needed.

g. any other related matter

#### *Pricing policy to promote healthy behaviours*

Governments may apply price policies in the form of taxes on certain groups of discretionary foods (i.e. on energy dense, nutrient poor foods such as sugar sweetened beverages) to discourage consumption as part of a range of strategies to promote healthy behaviours. Additional taxes of this type may be felt more by low-income consumers but this would be offset by the greater health benefits.

The revenue gained from such taxes could be applied by governments to implement food and nutrition programs based on the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating to build the skills of people and their capacity to eat healthily<sup>14</sup>.

Other price policy interventions by governments are possible, for example subsidies on fruit and vegetables have been shown to increase consumption and reduce body weight<sup>15</sup>. While food subsidies may not be able to be applied across all of the population, it may be feasible to do so in vulnerable groups e.g. people living in remote regions where the cost of fruit and vegetables is much greater than the cost in major cities<sup>16</sup>.

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