The Australian Dietary Guidelines tell us how eating healthy food can support good health. People have food security when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life.

This study set out to find out how easy it was to buy healthy food and a basic healthy diet from May-July 2014. 183 (92%) of the grocery stores and 19 (73%) of the fruit and vegetable stores across an area of Western New South Wales (NSW) were surveyed. This area included Murrumbidgee, Western NSW, Far West Local Health Districts (LHD) and the New England portion of Hunter New England LHD. The research was supported by NSW Ministry of Health Population Health, Local Health Districts, Medicare Locals and Charles Sturt University with other local partners.

**WESTERN NSW LHD SURVEY AREA**

**58 (86%) GROCERY STORES**   
from the area in the survey

**2 (29%) FRUIT AND VEGETABLE STORES**   
from the area in the survey

**AVERAGE OPEN DAYS**

OPEN 6.8 days

(Range 5 - 7 days)

THIS WAS THE SAME ACROSS WESTERN NSW 6.8 DAYS

**37% STORES HAD ALL 44 ITEMS IN VICTORIAN HEALTHY FOOD BASKET**

3.5/44

(Range 0 – 22)

THIS WAS LOWER THAN THE AVERAGE ACROSS WESTERN NSW 43%

**MISSING ITEMS**

THIS WAS HIGHER THAN THE AVERAGE ACROSS WESTERN NSW 2.4

**TOP 10 Selling Fruit Varieties in Australia**

27.4 (0 – 54) loose and bagged choices for sale

This was lower than the average across western NSW surveyed 29.1 choices

**TOP 10 Selling Vegetable Varieties in Australia**

48.6 (6 – 93) loose and bagged choices for sale

This was lower than the average across western NSW surveyed 50.9 choices

FOOD AFFORDABILITY
AVERAGE COST OF THE VICTORIAN HEALTHY FOOD (VHF) BASKET\(^3\) FOR 2 WEEKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Average Cost</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 person family</td>
<td>$473.21</td>
<td>34% (30 - 42.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent family</td>
<td>$323.39</td>
<td>30.6% (26.5 - 38.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Male</td>
<td>$149.92</td>
<td>29.4% (25.6 - 35.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Female Pensioner</td>
<td>$113.59</td>
<td>14.8% (12.9 - 18.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^3\) These are about the same as the averages across Western NSW stores surveyed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Average Cost</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 person family</td>
<td>$466.79</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent family</td>
<td>$316.93</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Male</td>
<td>$147.87</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Female Pensioner</td>
<td>$112.26</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE RESULTS SUGGEST:

A healthy diet for a family of four is likely to cost more in stores:
- that are further from Sydney
- in communities with higher Aboriginal populations

There is a long way to go to achieve the target recommended by the Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality\(^6\) “By 2018 ... at least 90% of Indigenous families have access to a standard healthy food Basket (or supply) at the cost of less than 25% of their available income”. Many households on income support were unable to achieve this target.

Low income households may be at risk of “food stress”\(^7\) where they might choose to buy cheaper foods and have a less healthy diet.

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The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the NSW Ministry of Health, Charles Sturt University or the local Primary Health Network.

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