Diet is a leading contributor to the unacceptably high burden of disease experienced by Indigenous people in remote Australia. Interventions to improve diet quality are critically needed to break the cycle of disease and close the life expectancy gap.

Empowering remote communities to take an active approach to improving their food supply and nutrient intake is crucial. Community stores provide the primary food supply to remote Indigenous communities and have a unique and central role in determining food supply and subsequent dietary intake. The Boards of these community stores are made up of key community decision-makers who develop and implement strategies to improve the store environment.

Menzies’ evidence-based Good Food Systems has already been successfully piloted in four remote communities. It aims to empower communities to take an active role in determining their food supply with the community store whilst providing important research data concerning purchasing patterns and relating these to health outcomes.

Public Health Nutritionists, who service nearly 50 remote Indigenous communities, can support the wider application and delivery of this program through participation in Menzies’ two-day training program. The training program is complemented by in-the-field support when using skills learnt for the first time. Access to on-going support via a help-desk make the delivery of the Good Food Systems program far more cost-effective, user friendly and sustainable.

**THE NEED**

- In some remote communities, as little as 2.2 per cent of total food expenditure is on fruit and just 5.4 per cent on vegetables. Salt intake, mostly via processed foods, is double the recommended target.

- Aboriginal communities consume high levels of full sugar soft drinks. Data from one Central Desert store involved in the pilot study revealed that of the top ten most commonly purchased items, four were high sugar soft drink products.

- Kidney disease and low birth weights (a common result of poor nutrition during pregnancy) are linked. This is part of the reason why Indigenous Australians make up 10 per cent of all dialysis patients, despite being only 2.5 per cent of the population.

- The Good Food System pilot program resulted in significant shifts in community members purchasing patterns towards healthier foods. The average cost to Menzies to deliver the program is upwards of $30,000 per community making it a prohibitive cost to reach all 60 remote communities.

**PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY**

The two major store associations (ALPA and Outback Stores) and a team of Northern Territory Public Health Nutritionists (PHNs) have approached Menzies to provide training and support so they can adopt the Good Food Systems approach and utilise its associated evidence-based tools.

Employing this continuous improvement approach they will be trained to engage with store boards, management and staff to:

- Identify key priorities and targets for each community store
- Identify actions needed to shift purchasing patterns to healthier options
- Support healthy nutrition champions and drivers within the community to implement those key actions
- Provide outcomes of strategies adopted by stores and community members via the quarterly reporting tool and feedback mechanisms to enable the monitoring of progress and timely adjustment of strategies if required.

Menzies will develop and deliver a two-day training session for 10 PHNs, establish a monthly ‘community of practice’ to support the PHN’s and provide a support help-desk.

Menzies will evaluate the feasibility of the program and the impact that the PHNs program delivery has on food and dietary purchasing patterns in ten community stores.

Please note that the costs of PHN travel, accommodation, meeting time and Menzies technology/IP costs will be provided in-kind or by other sources of funding (valued at $135,000).
PARTNERSHIP IMPACT

The PHNs engagement with communities will:

- Increase the confidence and ability of members of community store Boards to put in place educational, marketing and promotional strategies that encourage the purchasing of healthy food.

- Empower remote Indigenous communities to take an active approach to improving their food supply and nutrient intake through the setting of specific targets, focusing specifically on increasing the turnover of fresh fruit and vegetable, water and wholemeal bread and decreasing the sales of confectionary and soft drinks.

- Improve the diet of consumers in the intervention communities, and more widely across remote Indigenous Australia through demonstrating feasibility and effect.

In partnering with PHNs who are already working in Indigenous remote communities, Menzies will be able to roll-out its Good Food Systems package in a much more cost-effective and sustainable manner and deliver further research evidence on the outcomes of the program.

My name is Lawurrpa Maypilama. I was born while my parents were gathering food – in 1953. In 1943 – at this place Galiwin’ku – white man came and brought their food and this was the first time many Yolngu taste this kind of food...the name for it is rations...And then in 2000 Menzies came to us and started a program for diabetes screening... Yolngu started to get involved. At this time Yolngu were open to listen to health stories...people wanted to hear what the story was...In 2010 the Good Food System project started here with us. Now people are putting the nutrition story in action – people have home gardens, young mothers are using their skills to be able to help their young children and to be able to teach and give their babies nutritious food ....we need more support to be able to go forward – hand to hand – and work together as a team to live a longer life – a stronger life for our community and our people.