

Traditional food trends in remote Northern Territory communities

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The majority of Aboriginal people living in remote Northern Territory communities are regularly using traditional foods in their diets according to research from Menzies School of Health Research published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* today.

The paper, *Traditional food availability and consumption in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory* reports that a nutritious diet including the consumption of traditional foods plays a key role in protecting against chronic disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities.

Menzies researcher and lead author Megan Ferguson said that in addition to demonstrating significant health benefits, traditional foods remained an integral part of identity, culture and country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, while also alleviating food insecurity in remote communities.

'Surveys conducted in remote Northern Territory (NT) communities revealed almost 90% of people consumed a variety of traditional foods each fortnight.

'We have long understood that native animal and plant foods are highly nutritious. There is no evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had diabetes or cardiovascular disease whilst maintaining a diet of traditional foods, and it has been shown that reverting to a traditional diet can improve health.

'In relation to food insecurity we also found that 40% of people obtained traditional food when they would otherwise go without food due to financial hardship or limited access to stores,' Ms Ferguson said.

The list of traditional food reported during the research is extensive and includes a range of native animal foods including echidna, goanna, mud mussel, long-neck turtle and witchetty grubs and native plant foods including green plum, yam and bush onion.

The 20 remote NT communities surveyed reported that traditional foods were available year round.

'There is still much to be learnt about the important contribution traditional foods makes to nutrition and health outcomes. We need to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to understand more about contemporary traditional food consumption. This is crucial to informing broader policy that affects where people live, how they are educated, employment and other livelihood opportunities,' Ms Ferguson said.

The article will be available at [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1753-6405](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1753-6405)

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Menzies School of Health Research

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