

Yuwaya Ngarra-li Walgett Food Forum

8th April 2018

FORUM REPORT

Yuwaya Ngarra-li

‘Yuwaya Ngarra-li’, which means ‘Vision’ in the Yuwaalaraay/Gamilaraay languages, is the partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) and the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

The partnership grew out of research by UNSW in which the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) and DEG were involved. In 2016, the DEG invited UNSW to partner with them around their vision for change in Walgett.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group is leading a collaboration with UNSW and other supporters to grow our individual and community strengths and assets. The Dharriwaa Elders want to restore a robust belonging to thriving families, community and country, while making our place in the nation and sharing our learning with other communities.

The purpose of Yuwaya Ngarra-li is for DEG and UNSW to work in partnership to improve the wellbeing, social, built and physical environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett through collaborating on evidence-based projects and capacity building, and to evaluate as a model of collaboration to achieve long-term change.

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li team members are Vanessa Hickey and Wendy Spencer at the Dharriwaa Elders Group, and Peta MacGillivray, Ruth McCausland and Eileen Baldry at UNSW.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li's work on Water and Nutrition

Yuwaya Ngarra-li has been working on a number of issues that the Dharriwaa Elders Group and others in the Walgett community have long been concerned about. This includes water - in particular, the health of the Barwon and Namoi rivers and the quality of Walgett's drinking water now that it comes from the Great Artesian Basin. Recently, Yuwaya Ngarra-li has:

- Arranged for UNSW engineers to measure the sodium levels in Walgett's drinking water. In November 2018, Dr Jacqui Webster of the George Institute for Global Health was invited by DEG to comment on the salt levels (at 300mg/L) and she highlighted that consuming around 2 litres of water a day would be equivalent to an extra 1.5grams of salt intake a day which is substantial, particularly when diets are already high in salt from foods. She also highlighted that if people do not consume enough water because of the salty taste, they will suffer from dehydration or choose soft drinks instead, both of which have other negative impacts on health.
- Hosted visits to Walgett for UNSW Engineering and the Global Water Institute to visit Walgett in September 2018 to scope water solutions for the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Limited (WAMS) Community Garden and the design of chilled drinking water kiosks for the township as early projects.
- Worked with NSW Health to advocate for improved communications to the community about the water as well as pushing for longer-term solutions such as desalination units.

During our community consultations and workshops when we were developing the Action Plan for Children and Young People in April and May 2018, ideas about the important role of food were raised, including:

- a new café that could serve as a community gathering place for young people in Walgett
- support for new employment opportunities (e.g. in the WAMS Community Garden)
- working closely with families and carers to support children and young people to be safe, learn, grow and work including in relation to food and nutrition.

Food and nutrition were also raised in our Community Data Gathering in December 2018, when community members talked about:

- cultural knowledge about bush foods and food preparation patterns passed on for generations that have been eroded over time; and
- the cost of living including the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables as a major concern.

The Food Forum builds on this work and Yuwaya Ngarra-li's long-term collaboration with WAMS.

The Walgett Food Forum

The Walgett Food Forum was held on 8th April 2019 to learn from and act on WAMS, DEG and broader Walgett community concerns and perspectives around food, nutrition and water. The aims of the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Food Forum were to:

- Provide data and research about what is known about food issues relevant to Aboriginal people in Walgett and impacts on long-term health and wellbeing
- Gather community members and critical services, organisations, and other stakeholders together to discuss food issues in Walgett
- Discuss positive action and strategies and evidence-based solutions to inform long-term planning.

The Food Forum was held in the Community Hub of Walgett Community College and attended by around 50 people. These included Walgett Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations members and staff including from the DEG, WAMS, Walgett Local Aboriginal Land Council (WLALC), the Walgett Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and the emerging men's group; staff from Koolyangarra Pre-School; and a number of Elders and interested community members as well as the managers of Supa IGA Walgett and Café 64; the town's three community gardeners; school principals, Aboriginal Education Assistants and canteen cooks from Walgett Community College; staff from Legal Aid NSW and NSW Family and Community Services (FACS). Professor Eileen Baldry, Academic Lead of Yuwaya Ngarra-li, facilitated the forum.

Background data and research on food issues for Aboriginal people in remote areas

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li team and researchers from the George Institute for Global Health produced community briefing materials for Forum attendees which provided background data and research on food issues for Aboriginal people in remote areas, a compilation of recent Walgett LGA health data, and results of a family food basket survey where we compared the cost of Walgett IGA staples with the same items sourced in a Sydney metropolitan area.

Aboriginal peoples experience high rates of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer. Diet-related chronic diseases account for 10% of the total burden of disease for this population.¹ Traditional diets for Aboriginal people were rich in bush foods and vegetables and lean animal protein.²

Those traditional health diets were affected by colonisation and dispossession with the introduction of rations and Westernised diets of large quantities of refined grains and processed foods containing high levels of salt, saturated fat and added sugars.³ A range of socio-economic, environmental and geographic factors have further limited the affordability and availability of healthier foods leading to worsening diets.⁴ Research demonstrates healthy food supply is often failing in remote communities.⁵

Research on nutrition and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is limited, but a recent review highlighted that diets high in fat, sugar and salt are common⁶ and that community directed and driven programs to improve food security and diet are important to reverse this trend and to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia.⁷

There is evidence that community-based programs can be effective at improving nutrition, and that the most effective programs adopt a multi-strategy approach:⁸

- improving supply of and demand for healthy foods;
- targeting the social determinants of food choice; and
- integrating genuine community involvement and Aboriginal leadership at all stages of program development and implementation.

What research in this area shows us is that without accessible and affordable healthy food, people are unable to make healthy food choices.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Catalogue No: IHW 147 Canberra.
2. Pascoe B. (2018) Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the birth of Agriculture.
3. O'Dea K. (1991) Westernisation, insulin resistance and diabetes in Australian Aborigines;155(4):258-64. 5. Lee AJ, O'Dea K, Mathews JD. (1994) Apparent dietary intake in remote Aboriginal communities. Australian Journal of Public Health;18(2):190-7.
4. Burns J and Thomson N. (2008) Review of nutrition and growth among Indigenous peoples. HealthInfoNet.
5. Lee A, Lewis M. (2018) Testing the Price of Healthy and Current Diets in Remote Aboriginal Communities to Improve Food Security: Development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healthy Diets ASAP (Australian Standardised Affordability and Pricing) Methods. Int J Environ Res Public Health;15(12).
6. Whalan S, Farnbach S, Volk L, Gwynn J, Lock M, Trieu K, et al. (2017) What do we know about the diets of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia? A systematic literature review. Aust N Z J Public Health;41(6):579-84.
7. O'Dea K. (1991) Westernisation, insulin resistance and diabetes in Australian aborigines. Med J Aust;155(4):258-64.
8. Lee A, Ride, K., (2018) Review of programs and services to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition and food security. Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet

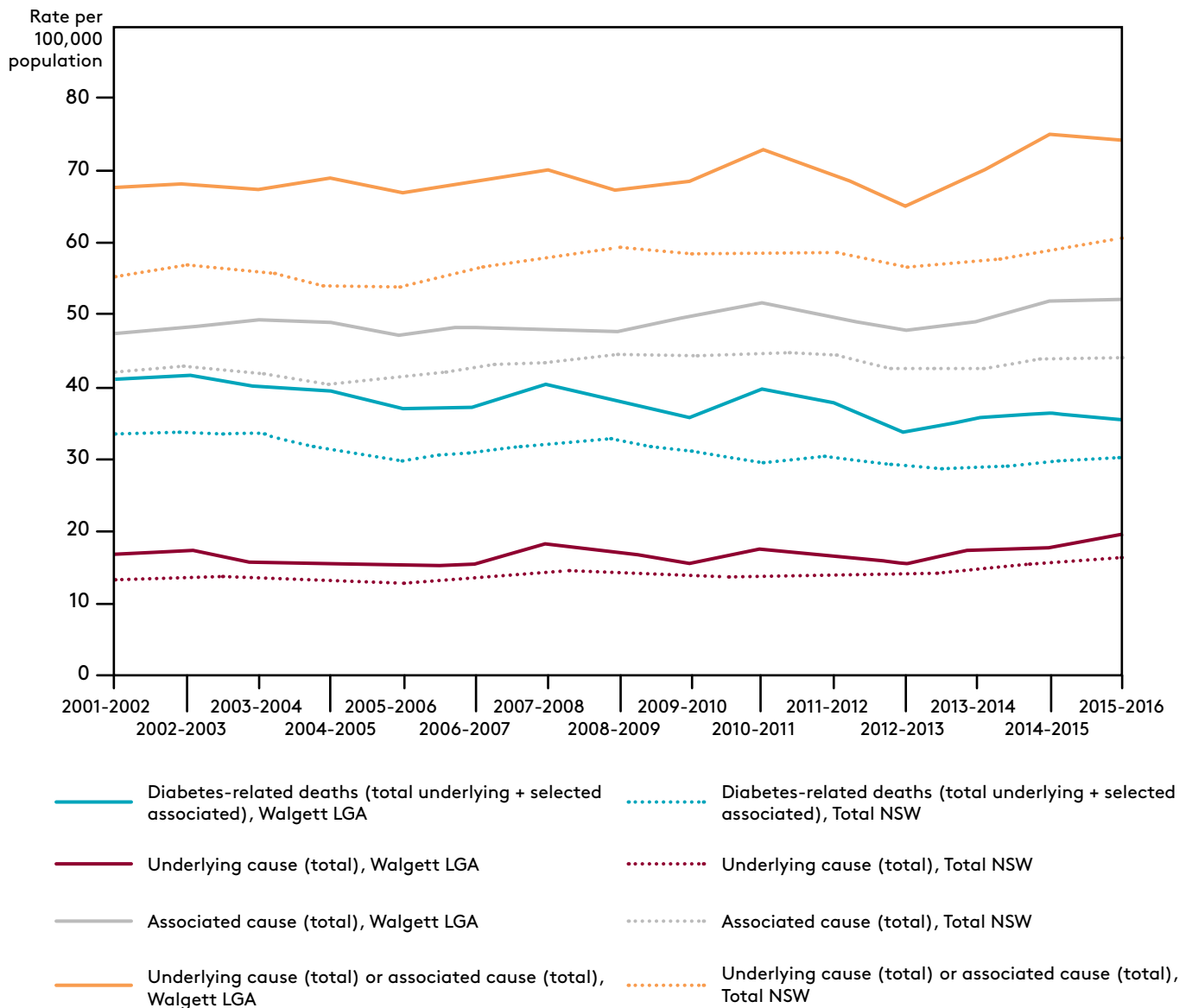
Some Walgett Shire health data

Walgett residents generally experience poorer health outcomes compared to other NSW residents.

The below figure shows four types of diabetes-related indicator data for Walgett Shire (normal lines) compared to NSW data in general (dotted lines) over time.

The orange lines illustrate the cases in which diabetes was an underlying cause of death or a contributor to death. It shows that in Walgett Shire, more people die of diabetes related causes (normal orange line) than the average of other NSW residents (dotted orange line). It is clear that for each diabetes health indicator, Walgett Shire residents are disadvantaged compared to other NSW residents.

Diabetes deaths by disease type, Walgett LGA, NSW 2001-2002 to 2015-2016



Source: Mortality estimates for years up to 2005 are based on Australian Bureau of Statistics death registration data. Data from 2006 onwards were provided by the Australian Coordinating Registry, Cause of Death Unit Record File; the data for the most 2 recent years are preliminary (SAPHaRI, Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, NSW Ministry of Health)

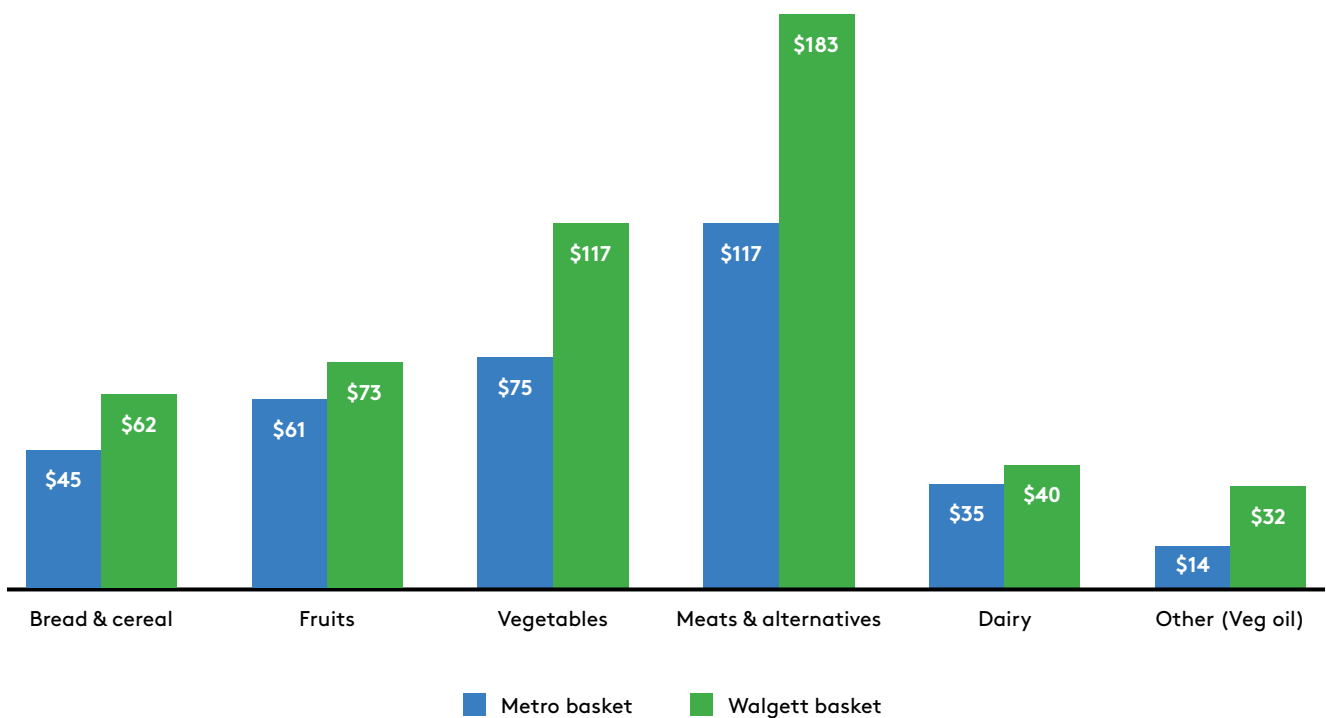
Notes: An underlying cause of death is often called a 'principal' cause and an associated cause 'contributing'. Diabetes-related deaths are those where diabetes is either the underlying cause of death or it is an associated cause of death, where the underlying cause is one of the commonly recognised complications of diabetes. Total deaths associated with diabetes include those with underlying causes not related to diabetes. Only NSW residents are included.

Food Baskets Scan

The costs for a food basket between a Sydney metro suburb and Walgett were compared.

The food basket is for fortnightly shopping for a family of six to meet nutritional needs: couple, grandmother, and three kids aged 4, 8 and 14 years. The scan indicates that the costs for the same type of foods are generally higher in Walgett.

Costs for healthy food basket



	Metro (Parramatta)	Walgett
Standard food items	Metro basket	Walgett basket
Bread & cereal	\$45	\$62
Fruits	\$61	\$73
Vegetables	\$75	\$117
Meats & alternatives	\$117	\$183
Dairy	\$35	\$40
Other (Veg oil)	\$14	\$32
	\$346.59	\$508.09

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li Walgett Food Forum

Welcome to Country

Secretary of DEG Virginia Robinson welcomed Forum guests. She set the scene for the Forum by reflecting on what she ate growing up. She spoke of how colonisation devastated nutrition for Aboriginal people and that we now realise it was a big mistake to force Aboriginal people to eat differently from the way they always had. Virginia asked that the Forum consider that Elders were brought up on rations of white flour, sugar and tea and today Aboriginal people still have the habits from those ration days, enjoying johnny cakes, damper and tea. She also reflected on the reality that Aboriginal people living locally can no longer supplement their diets with bush foods, fishing and hunting as their ancestors used to:

They had no politics, no government to guide them. They just had nature. They looked after nature, and it fed them.

Virginia raised the cultural dimensions of food as a key theme for the Forum.

Walgett Community College students Charmaine Doolan, Delta Swan and Abbey Ashby followed the Elders official Welcome, giving a detailed and considered Acknowledgement in Yuwaalaraay/Gamilaraay Language and reflecting on how Country is precious to the Walgett Aboriginal community

Our land grounds us, our flora heals us, our fauna connects us, our culture is strong.

Presentation 1: Christine Corby, CEO of the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Limited

The first presentation by Christine Corby gave context and history to the issue of food, nutrition and water in Walgett from an Aboriginal health standpoint:

“WAMS staff have first-hand experiences in the knowledge of and working with individuals and their families about the quality and quantity of the food they eat. Through general conversations with individuals, family conversation or volunteering to deliver prepared meals, the quantity of and quality of food is not always nutritionally balanced according to a person’s individual dietary requirements.

Having a kitchen that has capacity for food storage, refrigeration, preparation and cooking can be an inhibiting factor. To understand menu planning, cooking with cheap cuts and the ability to freeze leftovers is not always a manageable arrangement. WAMS applaud the schools and TAFE for offering opportunities for children and adults to enrol in and participate in cooking courses....

The devastation to our rivers, no rain, the lack of water flow, loss of fishing for traditional foods and gathering of plant food is very significant to the deterioration of the social and emotional wellbeing of our community. For some months, debate on the quality of the domestic water has divided

community opinion. The generosity of various donors with packaged water has provided an option for those who cannot consume the tap water nor afford to buy packaged water as part of the family grocery shop. WAMS are concerned that those persons who have a vulnerable health conditions or are choosing not to consume any water, could dehydrate unnecessarily (during our extreme hot weather), increase the consumption of sugary beverages, a potential increase in tooth decay.

From a business point of view, WAMS installed water filters on taps located at their professional accommodation in an attempt to reassure candidates wanting to live and work in Walgett.

WAMS appreciate the advice from the George Institute in regards to the water quality. We do not believe that NSW Health has provided clear evidence on the impact of high sodium on health - many of our residents have diabetes, kidney disease, and heart disease. We have lobbied with both local, state and federal governments, DEG and their partners, to source funding for public water drinking stations."

Presentation 2: Community panel

A 'Food in Walgett – Past, Present and Future' panel was facilitated by Wendy Spencer, DEG & Walgett Yuwaya Ngarra-li Project Manager, with Clem Dodd (DEG Speaker), Kim Sullivan (Orana Haven/Weigelli Aboriginal Hub drug and alcohol case worker and DEG Elders support worker) and community member and experienced cook Robyn Morgan. The panel began by discussing how food is influenced by history, access and affordability, with reflections on the impact of the drying up of the river on what people eat and drink.

Clem Dodd recalled what he and his family ate when he was a child:

'We ate the old johnny cakes and dry curry and what rations you'd get off the manager out at Gingie, each fortnight – flour, sugar and tea, rice. ... We used to hunt kangaroo, emu, wild pig, whatever you could get your claws into. We went fishing every day, catfish, black bream, also crayfish.'

Kim Sullivan remembered her grandmother feeding her 18 grandchildren through a combination of government provisions and eating from the river:

'We used to go fishing at least once a week - yabbing, shrimp too. We ate pigweed from along the river, from the bottom of Namoi up to the top, just flavoured with a bit of salt.'

Robyn Morgan spoke about the way her family was fed:

'I grew up on a lot of properties around town so it was easy for us – we used to go out and catch pigeons, take them home to Mum, she'd figure out what to do with them. Dad used to cut the lamb tails off the sheep and we'd throw them on the fire. ... We used to hunt those black shags that used to sit on the river, we used to eat them too.'

Robyn Morgan also talked about her approach to feeding her own four children and the many nieces and nephews that grew up with her:

'I'd cook veggies, I'd cook a soup, I'd cook bread, I'd make scones. I buy a lot of fruit – it's funny, all my kids eat fruit but I only eat oranges. They eat everything, they eat kiwis, strawberries, bananas, apples, watermelon, but I only eat orange because that's what I was brought up with.'

Discussion turned to the eating of different animals and the knowledge that previous generations had around this.

In relation to porcupine, Kim Sullivan said:

'It's been so long since I had a taste of one – Nanna used to catch them for us',

and Clem Dodd added:

'You've got to know how to clean them, you've got know how to get the spikes out of them.'

Kim Sullivan talked about her flourishing home garden that has been devastated by the recent restrictions on water use for domestic purposes:

'I used to grow all my own veges – capsicum, spinach, cabbage, cauliflower, I had the lot. But it's all dried up now. I have to buy everything now and it's very dear and not as fresh. I don't have much meat.'

Panellists discussed big gatherings that around happen around food now in the community, when family gathers for funerals, birthdays, Mother's Day and other celebrations.

Clem Dodd talked about the food that features on those occasions:

'Big feeds of meat. We shoot emu and pig. Dig a big hole and build a fire with a big tin over it, then cook the emu or the pig that you're stuffing. You put the tin over the top of it again and then you make the fire like a big oven. Leave it there for two hours, you've got to keep stoking the fire.'

However, panellists and audience members also discussed concerns around eating animals and wild fruits due to the spraying of crops today around Walgett and the potential impact on wild food sources.

Panellists then discussed how the quality of takeaway food in Walgett has declined and prices increased. People in town were perceived as eating much more takeaway than they used to, with panellists and audience members having various views about the reasons for this.

Robyn Morgan said:

'I reckon some of the parents can't afford the vegies and the meat in town because it's too expensive.'

Wendy Spencer added to this, saying:

'One theory that I've heard is that people have less money, so they can put together something for just one feed rather than go and buy a big shop for the whole week.'

Wendy Spencer then asked the Forum whether they thought there were people going hungry in Walgett today. Some shared the view that there were indeed children and adults regularly going hungry.

Robyn Morgan said:

'There are kids, if they're hungry they'll go to an aunty or an uncle or a grandparent if they're still alive, they'll go there for a feed, because they know they will get it.'

Kim Sullivan said of her work as a drug and alcohol case worker:

'I work with a lot of homeless, and a lot of homeless, they go hungry. They get abused and they get told to go away... We have organisations here that could help these people, but they don't.'

This concerned many audience members, who asked what they and others could do to ensure this didn't keep happening. People were particularly concerned about the idea that there are children in the Walgett community who are regularly going hungry.

Staff at the Walgett Community College talked about the breakfast club at the school. Deirdre Murray said that:

'No kids go hungry at the school and no kids go without.'

Wendy said that she thought there are Elders who are sometimes going hungry at times.

Clem Dodd said:

'I'll never turn my back on anybody. I'll give them whatever I've got.'

After further discussion, Wendy Spencer reflected:

'Isn't it great, we know we're in a really caring community where no-one will let anyone go hungry if they know about them. That's one of the core principles that we've found out today: that this community does not accept any member of our community going hungry. We will not accept that.'

Kim Sullivan noted:

'I'll buy my clients feed out of my money. I'll go without myself.'

Wendy Spencer responded:

'Yes, I see you doing that Kim.'

Wendy Spencer then asked Kim Sullivan as a keen home gardener about her views around the therapeutic role of gardening.

Kim said:

'My clients have told me that they'd love to get a little garden going, and I'm keen for anybody who wants to work with me on this, to help me out with this. There's about three houses and they've got a big backyard, but they haven't got nothing to start off with. If we got that garden going, none of our other clients might go hungry anymore – they might share it out with them as well as sharing the drink...'

'They'd love it, something else to do than drink. Alcohol gets you down, it's as simple as that. Gardening will help for them all to get together and own something themselves. Not something that anybody else owns, it would be theirs.'

Sophia Byers talked about her work at the community garden, and offered to share her knowledge and work with anyone in the community who is interested in growing food.

At the end of this session, discussion returned to issues with the sources of hydration and nutrition in Walgett. Along with concerns about the sodium levels in the drinking water, the high consumption of sugary drinks was identified as a problem. One audience member raised concerns about the chemicals in the sugar replacement in Diet Coke, suggesting they'd heard that it was better to drink regular Coke (this was later refuted by Tracy Hardy and Jacqui Webster). The high levels of salt that people add to their food in Walgett was also discussed as a concern, particularly given the problems with the drinking water for people with chronic health conditions.

Presentation 3: Tracy Hardy, Wattleseed Nutrition

Gamilaraay woman Tracy Hardy, PhD student and accredited nutritionist and practising dietician who founded consultancy Wattleseed Nutrition, gave a presentation on nutrition and physical, spiritual and cultural wellbeing.

"This is my first time talking on country and I'm pretty stoked to be here. Why I got into working with food - my grandfather passed away from diabetes-related illness after not accessing care, I am a survivor of renal cancer. Prior to my studies, I was a beauty therapist and I had a lot of people coming and seeing me about their skin concerns and sharing other struggles in their lives and I realised the healing capacity of food, how it can help us heal our health"

Tracy Hardy discussed the changing landscape of Aboriginal peoples' diets, from the historic diet of Aboriginal peoples through the impact of colonisation and food issues facing Aboriginal people today:

Historic diet

- Rich knowledge of local flora and fauna
- Lean game meats, fish and plant foods
- Small amounts of energy-dense dietary fat
- Absence of added sugar or salt
- Similar to Mediterranean and modern dietary guidelines

Colonisation

- Access to and use of traditional foods affected
- Traditional knowledges affected
- Diet of flour, sugar, tea, fatty, salty meats

Today

- Food insecurity
- Energy dense, nutrient poor foods
- Recommendations for intake of plant foods unmet
- Nutrition-related chronic disease
- World's longest-surviving culture
- Knowledges of traditional foods and culture prevail

Tracy Hardy also discussed the social determinants of food security, and the importance of strategies to improve food security and nutrition for Aboriginal people taking a strengths-based approach. She talked about the great potential for a community-led approach to nutrition and food security to develop in Walgett, given the following elements:

- Building on community assets and strengths
 - 'Yuwaya Ngarra-li' partnership
 - Cultural knowledges and beliefs
 - Connections to Country, family and community loyalty
- Strong local community organisations including the
 - Dharriwaa Elders Group and the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service
 - Long history of engagement in political activism, advocacy and research
- Strengthens culture and social connectedness – a determinant of community wellness
- Shifts focus from “what is wrong with people” to “what keeps people healthy”

In reflecting on what has been learnt elsewhere, Tracy Hardy summarised the following elements:

- Food supply
- Community gardens
- Traditional food procurement projects
- Community store and food outlet policies
- Food access and demand
- Meal provision – school breakfasts
- Food subsidies and food relief packages
- Culturally appropriate:
 - Group cooking workshops (Good Quick Tukka)
 - Group-based lifestyle programs (Work it Out)
- Peer education
- Budgeting advice and shopping tours
- Settings based interventions – schools, clubs, community organisations

Transport and/or food delivery services
In terms of effective development and implementation, Tracy Hardy summarised the following factors from other initiatives in this area:

- Community engagement and governance
- Culturally appropriate and tailored to community needs
- Incorporating culture into program activities (bush tucker, traditional games)
- Peer led education
- Holistic, multi-setting and multi-strategic approaches
- Build champions at every level

Presentation 4: Associate Professor Jacqui Webster, The George Institute for Global Health

Jacqui Webster is the Head of Advocacy and Policy Impact and Director of World Health Organization Collaborating Centre on Salt Reduction at The George Institute for Global Health and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Medicine, UNSW.

The key points Jacqui Webster highlighted were:

Historic diet

- Food is fundamental for life, and food culture is something to be cherished
- Poor diets are now THE MAIN cause of death and disease globally and a key contributor to the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians
- Reducing salt intake is one of the most cost effective ways to reduce premature death and disease globally
- Australians are eating almost double the daily recommended amount of salt
- Most salt comes from processed foods and meals, but we also need to consider sodium from water
- To improve diets, we need to change the food environment AND educate people about food

As Jacqui pointed out:

'Even really small changes can have a positive effect on the health of the whole community.'

Jacqui Webster discussed her focus on changing food environments as likely to have the greatest impact, and made the following points:

- Trying to get people to change behaviour is costly and challenging to maintain
- Community-wide interventions that change the food supply lead to better choices
- Improving the composition of staple foods can have significant public health impacts
- Interventions in settings such as schools, hospitals and the workplace should be promoted
- Need to tackle mis-communication and marketing

Jacqui Webster explained that high salt intake causes a rise in blood pressure, thereby increasing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Other points she emphasised were:

- Eating less salt reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke
- It is the sodium in salt that is bad for health The World Health Organisation recommends no more than 5 grams of salt a day for adults, and less for children
 - One sausage in bread = nearly half your maximum daily salt intake
 - Hamburger = 75% of adult daily salt intake
 - Meat pie = 43% of adult daily salt intake
 - Sausage/bacon and egg sandwich = 60-70% of adult daily salt intake

Jacqui Webster then restated her concerns about the sodium levels in the Walgett drinking water:

"The sodium levels in the Walgett water supplies are concerning. 300mg/Litres is much higher than the Australian Drinking Water guideline of 180mg/L – and this guideline is based on palatability, not health..."

However, the guideline does state that 'Medical practitioners treating people with severe hypertension or congestive heart failure should be aware of the sodium concentration in the patient's drinking water exceeds 20mg/L. The sodium content of the Walgett tap water is 15 times this amount.'

Jacqui Webster discussed work that has been done elsewhere around community-led solutions. She mentioned community mapping processes where communities identify opportunities and develop solutions, taking back control of their food environments. She identified key factors associated with success of community nutrition interventions, drawn from a recent review of programs and services to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition and food security:⁹

- High levels of community participation and engagement in governance
- Sustainable funding
- Multiple strategies in multiple settings
- Educate AND change the food environment
- Include policy and regulatory changes
- Link screening/health assessments with health promotion
- Use a participatory action research approach
- Incorporate process evaluation and community feedback
- Address the social determinants of health

9. Lee, A. & K. Ride (2018) 'Review of programs and services to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition and food security', Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin, Vol 18 No 4, October 2018 – December 2018 <http://healthbulletin.org.au/articles/review-of-programs-and-services-to-improve-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-nutrition-and-food-security/>

Jacqui Webster went on to give examples of successful multi-strategy programs, including the Looma Healthy Lifestyle Project in WA.

Jacqui Webster also gave examples of successful programs for improving food supply:

- Community-school gardens
 - Can increase access to fresh fruit and vegetables, provide opportunities for physical activity and social interaction
 - Important to support capacity of individuals to maintain those gardens, need funding for infrastructure including vehicles and fuel to distribute foods
- Retain/store policies
 - Policies can impact on type of advertising, price/availability of foods and availability of takeaway foods
 - Mapping of food outlets is a useful step in establishing community nutrition programs
- In workplaces and institutions
 - Introduce nutrition and healthy catering guidelines
 - Meetings, barbeques, community events, work functions
 - Also, schools and hospitals, health services, aged care facilities, government workplaces, sports facilities etc can all have guidelines

In Victoria, the 'Hungry Victory for Youth' run by Rumbalara Football/Netball club has reportedly improved the food environment and engaged Aboriginal young people in health promoting activities.

Jacqui also discussed The George Institute for Global Health's own workplace nutrition and healthy eating guidelines which it adapted from NSW Health guidelines, that any food or meals served at work functions or meetings have to adhere to the healthy eating guidelines.

Blackfit Fitness¹⁰ is an organisation that provides programs that empower children and communities to make healthy lifestyle choices and live quality healthy lives. Jacqui quoted Joshua Toole, its founder, who has said:¹¹

'Ever hear mob say, 'look here at this proper BlackFulla feed' when they're referring to devon, hot chips, sauce and a big bottle of Coke?

Over time, this so-called 'Aboriginal feed' has been accepted by Indigenous people across Australia. Not so much as a basic food source but a glorified meal.

As someone working in the fitness space, primarily in Indigenous health, my team and I feel this notion needs to be brought to light for discussion within our community.'

10. <https://blackfit.com.au/>

11. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2019/01/08/we-need-stop-devon-and-hot-chips-stereotype>

Jacqui also set out different ideas that have been raised as initiatives that Yuwaya Ngarra-li could contribute to as part of a longer-term 'Food and Water for Life' Project. These include:

- Regenerating and expanding WAMS Community Garden
- Introducing clean drinking water kiosks
- Expanding reach of food growing projects
- Working with retailers/fast food outlets to provide healthier choices
- Exploring potential partnership with Café 64
- Establishing a community café as a social and knowledge hub
- Employing an Aboriginal Community Food Coordinator

Presentation 5: Paul Champion, Executive Principal Walgett Community College (High School)

Paul Champion, new Executive Principal of Walgett Community College, spoke to the Forum about his plans to provide daily school meals to the College staff and students. He introduced school gardeners Luke Farr and Winston Westcott who spoke about their vision around school food production and other activities within the school.

Paul Champion emphasised that the school shares the community's strongly held view that no child should go hungry. He spoke about the school's breakfast program and the provision of lunch via a voucher system for any student who does not bring lunch to school. Paul reflected on how he sees eating together as an important opportunity for students and staff to bond and to communicate with one another, and is seeking to create an environment where meal time at school is a shared experience. He is currently in the planning stages of a visit to another school that has a program like this. He also discussed plans to integrate the school's agriculture plot into various school subjects that have learning outcomes around nutrition, such as Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE), Food Tech, Life Skills and Agriculture in a farm-to-table project where meals are produced on site for the students and staff to share.

Paul Champion spoke about how the school canteen is now operating under the 'Healthy Canteen' guidelines. Canteen manager Beau Johnston spoke about his plans for the canteen to offer healthy food and complete meals. He has removed all soft drinks from the canteen and is providing fresh fruit which he encourages students to take during the day. Beau said he would like to have students more involved in

the preparation of healthy food at the canteen, and both Beau and Paul reiterated how much community support would help them in encouraging students to try healthy foods on offer. Beau is currently focused on meals that he knows the students will like and making small changes to make them healthier. The school's aim is to involve students in this process and encourage them to make healthier choices.

Primary school employees made comments at this point about the healthy foods available in the primary school canteen and the fruit break that the children take together every day when a tray of cut up fruit is brought into the classroom.

A community member observed that the act of having the children sit and share food together, being mindful of sharing things out fairly and thinking of the needs of others was also an important cultural practice supported by a healthy food program.

Luke Farr spoke about student involvement with the agriculture plot, and how learning about food production and having hands-on experience of growing food was really important to the students in helping them understand the factors underpinning healthy food choices. He reiterated that by creating an environment at the school where young people see food production as something that they can be involved with, they are being equipped to grow their own food in the future.

The difficulties identified about the farm-to-table method of food production and education within the school were discussed as the water restrictions and challenges around the climate in Walgett.

Final session: Forum Discussion

The Forum finished with over an hour of discussion and input from all panellists and audience members, which was recorded by Yuwaya Ngarra-li to inform the development of an Action Plan. Discussion was focused around the following key themes:

Connection between food and water crisis

People described the massive impact of the drying up of the Barwon and Namoi rivers. This includes the town's drinking water now coming from the Great Artesian Basin and being measurably high in sodium, meaning it can exacerbate chronic health conditions. Also, as people don't like the taste of the bore water or are concerned about the health impacts, they are instead opting not to drink the water, leading to dehydration or replacing water with soft drinks. Both have a detrimental effect on community health. Water restrictions have also prevented individuals and community groups who used to grow their own nutritious foods from being able to do so and has meant that projects where free herbs and vegetables were provided to community members with chronic illness free of charge have been unable to run. People in Walgett are now only able to access store bought fruit and vegetables, which are far more expensive and less fresh.

Impact of high salt and sugar intake

People discussed the catastrophic impact on people's health of diets largely made up of processed and takeaway foods high in salt and sugar. As Kim Sullivan said: "That's everything we've heard today: it's salt and sugar... they're killing us." More education amongst community members around this was discussed as one element of what is needed, but people also raised that food manufacturers and suppliers need to

take some responsibility, and that better access to lower salt and sugar alternatives should be provided. Community members wanted to see advocacy with food suppliers on their behalf to ensure that healthy food becomes more affordable and accessible in Walgett.

Focus on strategies for engaging children and young people

Those present expressed concern about improving knowledge and availability of healthy food amongst children and young people. It was felt that a key area of focus could be healthy eating in schools, which engaged students in thinking about food choices and used a variety of strategies to encourage them to try new foods. Robyn Morgan suggested that getting students to collaborate on a cookbook would be a good project to combine all the food preparation skills they are learning, Beau talked about getting students to also learn more about purchasing food, understanding flavour and different ways of cooking foods. The discussion reflected the hope that by getting children and young people engaged in food education and production early and reinforcing their learning through school activities, they would have the skills to teach their families and future generations. Luke Farr raised the opportunity to connect food with language classes and to strengthen the links between food, culture and tradition.

Cultural dimensions of food

The cultural dimensions of food gathering, production, preparation and eating were a strong theme throughout this discussion as they had been earlier in the day. Luke Farr and Tracy Hardy discussed the concept of 'eating your ancestry', connecting historical relationships with food, country and culture to contemporary experience. Luke Farr mentioned that Bruce Pascoe is coming to Walgett in the coming months, which is an exciting opportunity for the community given his groundbreaking research around Aboriginal

agriculture. Tracy discussed different models for propagating traditional and bush foods that she is familiar with, and talked about her work around 'recipe renovation' where she incorporates bush foods into well-known recipes. One example was flavouring food with saltbush rather than salt, with saltbush being readily available around Walgett.

Whole of community initiatives

There was extensive discussion about how important it will be to involve the whole community in Yuwaya Ngarra-li's work around improving nutrition and hydration in Walgett. Some suggestions were the introduction of a community dinner initiative, where people regularly come together to cook and try different foods together. Beau suggested a fortnightly food forum where people can cook and eat together and learn about food; people could bring along recipe to try or there could be a focus on four ingredient dishes or other simple, quick, easy, cheap and nutritious meals. Robyn Morgan discussed how important such opportunities will be to bring everyone together to try new foods and learn how to cook them and learn more about what the health implications of different foods are without any shame or judgement. Kim Sullivan discussed working with her clients around food, health and healing, and emphasised the therapeutic aspect of growing, sharing and eating food together.

Working with local IGA and food suppliers

Representatives from the Walgett IGA attended the Forum for part of the day. Many people discussed how important it is to work with the local IGA and food suppliers to increase access to affordable and diverse foods in Walgett. Many were keen not to blame the IGA for the high cost of fresh produce locally, acknowledging that transportation costs are a major issue. Robyn Morgan and others also emphasised that people buying bulk groceries in nearby regional centres is also not a sustainable solution, as the loss of patronage to the local IGA might further diminish

the quality and quantity of food available locally. Some in the audience suggested that working with other suppliers and local gardeners can help with the development of solutions around many of the issues identified throughout the forum. Engaging with local businesses and potentially generating new businesses and social enterprise around food were seen as important and positive strategies. Those present from the IGA expressed their interest in being involved in ongoing discussions and contributing to solutions.

Involvement of the Shire Council

Many of those present expressed the view that the Walgett Shire Council needed to be an integral part of any initiatives around nutrition and hydration in the community. Wendy Spencer discussed her liaison with the Shire Council to date. It was agreed that it would have been really beneficial to have a representative from the Shire Council present and to have their input into plans and ideas, and strategies for improvement in the future were discussed.

Using new technologies and evidence-based solutions

Professor Greg Leslie, Director of the UNSW Global Water Institute, stated that it was unacceptable that the technologies available to improve water quality are not available here in Walgett. He noted that no mine site in Australia would tolerate the quality of the water in Walgett. Greg Leslie emphasised that using available technology, the issues with water quality could be easily and rapidly solved. He also noted that there would be a better economic return in investing in improving the water quality so that it didn't exacerbate chronic health conditions as well as tasting better, didn't hurt people's eyes when they shower in it, didn't corrode kettles and other examples. Greg Leslie raised that while a desalination plant may be forthcoming, there is still a high possibility that the river will continue to be low and ongoing water saving strategies

needed. He discussed the wicking design that he and his team of Impact Engineers from UNSW are proposing for the WAMS community garden that require low amounts of water and allow food to be grown in as little soil as possible. He also outlined strategies relating to the installation of chilled water kiosks in Walgett which are well designed, provide shade and provide the whole community with water that is salt-free and cold. Rainwater harvesting solutions were also raised as a possibility. Jacqui suggested linking with other communities undertaking similar initiatives and Tracy talked about examples in the Northern Territory that the Yuwaya Ngarra-li team could explore.

Need for national leadership on water

Panellists and audience members throughout the day raised serious and urgent concerns about the ongoing state of the Barwon and Namoi rivers, and the major social, economic, cultural and health impacts on the Walgett community. Greg Leslie reflected that while some technological solutions to current problems are straightforward, what is currently happening with regard to our river systems is more complex; while variability in river flows has been managed for millennia, what we are currently seeing is an extreme situation. Those present agreed with Greg Leslie that this is an urgent issue that needs a national conversation about how and why to value our rivers and natural environment. The critical importance of Aboriginal voices and knowledge about our rivers in that national conversation was emphasised, and the potential role of the Walgett community and Yuwaya Ngarra-li in connecting with other river communities in terms of advocacy and evidence-based solutions.

Next steps

At the conclusion of the forum, Wendy Spencer reflected:

"We have made a bit of history here together. If we can be making a small change at the community level, we can point to some of the food manufacturers about what is happening at a community level and then we can also point to what needs to change at a systemic level."

"There need to be National standards, not just for food but for drinking water, and there currently isn't one for sodium. Walgett could lead the way."

The idea of forming a Nutrition Working Group to build momentum around the ideas raised in the forum was proposed. Finding resources for a specific coordinator for a whole of community nutrition and hydration strategy was also raised as someone who could coordinate, liaise and progress the ideas that had come up in the forum. Jacqui Webster also identified the need for a community food mapping scoping study.

WAMS led the proposal for a Walgett Action Plan around food and water to be developed, similar to the Action Plan for Children and Young People that came out of the Youth Justice Forum last year.

Food Forum Follow up

At the forum, all participants were invited to meet at DEG the next morning to work with the Yuwaya Ngarra-li team to further develop the Action Plan. The aims of this meeting were to reflect on the forum, identify current community assets and initiatives, and plan next steps drawing on the expertise in the room. Panellists and key attendees from the day before met and discussed the ideas raised in the Food Forum along with various issues including scalability, coordination of young people's activities, building collaboration around key initiatives as well as participation in both the WAMS and high school community gardens. There was identification of the significant preconditions and great strengths in the Walgett community around progressing this work, and the particular contribution that Yuwaya Ngarra-li can make in building the capacity and evidence base led by the community's vision for change. There was excitement evident around the potential for collaboration around new ideas and strategies to improve the accessibility and affordability of healthy food in Walgett.

Feedback from people who attended the forum

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li team distributed a paper survey at the end of the Food Forum, asking people for their feedback, thoughts and ideas. People could provide their feedback anonymously, or add their name and contact details if they wished the Yuwaya Ngarra-li team to follow up with them and to be contacted in relation to our future work in this area.

The survey was filled out by 27 people, who identified themselves as one or more of the following:

- Aboriginal community member – 18
- Elder – 4
- Walgett resident – 21
- Namoi resident – 2
- Gingie resident – 3
- WAMS employee – 4
- Local Aboriginal Land Council - 1
- Education employee – 7
- Service provider – 6
- Parent/carer of young child – 8

In response to the statement:

'Today's forum was a useful way to bring the community, service providers and experts together to talk about food issues in Walgett'

- 52% said strongly agree
- 48% said agree

When asked why, people said:

- *'We share a common goal, we should share the pathway to solutions'*
- *'Standing together for change will be great for our community and children'*
- *'Lots of good ideas came out'*
- *'Hoping we all work together'*
- *'Lots of great minds and ideas coming together'*
- *'Bringing people from different areas with good ideas together to make change'*
- *'Solutions focused'*

In response to the statement:

'I learnt something new today from the speakers and/or participants at the forum'

- 44% said strongly agree
- 56% said agree

When asked what, people said:

- *'Salt. I had no idea of the relationship between sodium and variations in salt'*
- *'Facts regarding sodium v salt'*
- *'About salt'*
- *'Information about healthy food, water'*

In response to the statement:

The information presented was relevant and easy to understand

- 44% said strongly agree
- 56% said agree

When asked:

'Is there anyone you think should have been here today who wasn't?'

People said:

- *'Shire Council'*
- *'Walgett Shire Council – it is appropriate given their standing in the community'*
- *'Bruce Pascoe – he is a willing advocate for the progression of our people'*
- *'Shire Council, Fast food shops, Servo, Hon Doo'*
- *'Shire Council'*
- *'TAFE teacher, conservation and land management – has similar sort of ideas around using traditional foods and water ideas'*
- *'More of the shops that sell fast food'*
- *'Shire Council'*
- *'Shop owners'*

When asked to give any other feedback, thoughts or ideas about what was discussed, people said:

- *'Today's children are the consumers of tomorrow and therefore hold the answer to today's forum! They are the future inheritors of our Country'*
- *'Was a great mixture of people from different agencies all suffering from the same'*
- *'Drought can break us or make us all stronger'*
- *'Parents really need to encourage kids to eat healthily'*
- *'Standing together for our children's future and health and community'*
- *'If Walgett is owned by the Shire, why aren't they here?'*
- *'What we learnt about salt needs to be spread amongst the rest of the community'*
- *'Like seeing community coming together, to help us move forward as a healthy people and community'*

