



29 October 2018

MEDIA RELEASE

...good health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.

POOR DIETS FUELLING OBESITY

The National Rural Health Alliance has called for the development and roll out of a national obesity strategy, with a focus on communities living in remote rural areas, in a bid to improve Australians' diets and bring down the high levels of obesity.

The call comes following the release of an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, Nutrition Across the Life Stages, which indicates increased rates of overweight and obesity and a lack of physical activity, with the figures increasing in remote and regional communities.

Alliance CEO, Mark Diamond, said the report cannot be ignored and follows other disturbing news such as the higher rates of diabetes being encountered among communities outside major urban areas.

"These latest figures - and news that chronic conditions such as diabetes are increasing in these remote and regional areas - show the urgent need to take action and develop practical solutions to enable access to fresh, nutritious food products at affordable prices for people that live in rural and remote locations in particular", Mr Diamond said.

"The AIHW report clearly shows the links between poor diets and obesity and we are concerned it also shows that these problems increase the further away from major metropolitan centres that people live."

The AIHW report shows that quality of food and nutrient intake is generally higher in the less remote areas. Compared to major cities people in regional and remote areas consume:

- less food with grains;
- more food with added sugar;
- more saturated and trans fats;
- less fibre;
- more salt.

The report also shows fewer numbers of people 18 to 64 meeting physical activity guidelines, with higher rates of overweight and obesity as remoteness increases – from 53% in major cities, 57% in Inner regional areas and 61% in Outer regional/Remote areas.

Mr Diamond noted that diet quality among Indigenous Australians may be affected by the remoteness of the area in which they live, as a higher proportion of Indigenous Australians live outside of major cities than non-Indigenous Australians.

"Many Indigenous Australians know what foods they need to maintain health. However, supply and affordability of fresh produce appear to be limiting factors in dietary quality" he said.

“Limited stocks of fruit and vegetables have been found in remote shops near Indigenous communities, with some areas going without a delivery of fresh produce for weeks. And what is available is expensive.

“Additionally, lack of competition in these areas appears to be a factor with price.

“The recent announcement that the COAG Health Ministers’ Council will push for the development and implementation of a national obesity strategy is good news and needs to be expedited.

“But this latest data cannot be ignored in light of other reports such as the higher rates of diabetes in regional, rural and remote areas. It is time to make rural health a priority.”

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Media Enquiries: Allan Yates Director Communications and Media Relations 0421 150 229