

...healthy and sustainable rural, regional and remote communities.

Why food security matters for rural health

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Food security in rural, regional and remote Australia has been in the spotlight this week with the National Rural Health Alliance hosting a [virtual conversation](#) on Monday as well as highlighting the issue in the latest issue of the [Australian Journal of Rural Health](#).

CEO Dr Gabrielle O’Kane said that access to sufficient, affordable and nutritious food was incredibly important for the health of rural communities.

“While Australia is a food secure nation as a whole, there are many parts of the community who do not have reliable access to high quality food,” she said.

“This can be because of low food literacy, a lack of time or social isolation.

“But one of the biggest factors is poverty and the fact that many people in rural Australia simply can’t afford good quality fresh food – especially considering the fact that healthy food becomes more expensive the further away you get from the cities.”

The [Queensland Healthy Food Access Basket Survey](#) highlights the increasing cost of food as remoteness increases.

The survey showed that fruit cost up to 45% more in remote areas than in major cities, vegetables and legumes up to 14% more, and grains up to 30% more.

“While the cost of getting food to remote areas is a factor, this is only part of the story. Freight subsidies are important but need to be passed on to the consumer and do not in themselves solve the problem.

“There needs to be collaboration between government, retailers, producers and transport companies to ensure that remote retailers have the buying power to stock affordable healthy produce in the first place.

“Of course price is not the only issue. We need to ensure that if we do make healthy food cheaper or boost people’s incomes then that is not simply offset by an increase in the purchase of unhealthy food. That’s where other issues like merchandising and promotion come into play.”

The virtual conversation on food security is available to watch [here](#) and features Professor Danielle Gallegos, Ms Ronni Kahn AO, Dr Josie Douglas and Ms Khia de Silva.

The Alliance’s piece, “COVID-19 puts the spotlight on food insecurity in rural and remote Australia”, is freely available [here](#) in the June issue of the *Australian Journal of Rural Health*.

Media enquiries: Tim Hurd 0447 427 292 | tim@ruralhealth.org.au

The National Rural Health Alliance is Australia’s peak non-government organisation for rural and remote health.