The Market Basket Survey (MBS) is a survey of the costs, availability and quality of basic food items in remote stores in the Northern Territory (NT). The 2017 survey is the eighteenth annual survey in the NT. Results presented here are from the 2017 survey and some trend data from previous years.
What’s in the survey?

The MBS includes two food baskets.

**Healthy Food Basket** - based on the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

**Current Diet Basket** - based on the latest survey data of the dietary patterns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

Both baskets will feed a family of 6 for a fortnight.

The baskets are costed in remote stores, and a major supermarket and corner store (small supermarket) in each district centre.

In remote stores information is also collected on:
- variety and quality of fresh fruit and vegetables
- availability of healthy foods
- store information such as store management type and Aboriginal employment.

### Cost of Food Baskets in 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Healthy Food Basket</th>
<th>Current Diet Basket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NT supermarkets</td>
<td>Remote stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread and cereals</td>
<td>$68</td>
<td>$111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>$87</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>$139</td>
<td>$179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat and alternatives</td>
<td>$123</td>
<td>$221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>$103</td>
<td>$175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takeaway*</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other foods*</td>
<td>$9</td>
<td>$15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total basket cost</strong></td>
<td><strong>$535</strong></td>
<td><strong>$854</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Takeaway* includes hot foods (pie and chips) and cold drinks (cola and bottled water), if these items are not available from within the supermarket, the price is collected from a food outlet within the same complex.

Other foods* includes margarine, sugar, oil, biscuits and cordial base.

### A healthy diet costs less!

Compared to a Healthy Food Basket, the Current Diet Basket costs

- **23%** more in district centre supermarkets ($658 compared to $535)
- **4%** more in district corner stores ($729 compared to $699)
- **8%** more in remote stores ($920 compared to $854)
Remote store characteristics

Who owns the store?

- 4% Ownership not known
- 24% Privately owned/leased
- 41% Owned or managed by store group
- 31% Owned by community

68% of stores had a store committee

54% of stores had a nutrition policy

62% of employees were Aboriginal. The proportion of Aboriginal employees was highest in stores that were either owned (88%) or managed (76%) by a store group (e.g. ALPA and Outback Stores).

Fruit and vegetables

Average number of varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables, remote stores, 2000-2017

- 81% of fresh fruit were rated to be of good quality in the 2017 survey.
- 80% of fresh vegetables were rated to be of good quality in the 2017 survey.
The 2017 MBS is the seventeenth annual survey of remote community stores in the Northern Territory. Results from the 2017 survey showed that the average cost of the Current Diet Basket was more expensive than the Healthy Food Basket in all districts and all store types. The average cost of the Healthy Food Basket in remote stores was 60% higher than in the average of district centre supermarkets.

Compared to 2016, the average cost of the Healthy Food Basket increased by 3% in remote stores and decreased by 5% in district centre supermarkets.

Positive trends are emerging from the MBS results, particularly regarding the availability and variety of some healthy foods. For example, the number of varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables has increased from the first survey in 2000 (see graph on previous page).

Some limitations to the survey include:
- Store managers were given prior notice of the survey period, which may have influenced store prices and availability during the survey period.
- The food baskets contain only a relatively small number of items (41). Significant changes in the price of 1 or 2 items may have an unduly inflated effect on the total cost of the basket.
- The survey is conducted over a 3 month period. During this time frame there is the potential for large variations in the prices of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- The same brand and pack size for each item is not always available in each store. When that is the case, similar items of a different brand or pack size may have to priced.
- The survey does not necessarily include the same stores each year.