

## Media Release

### Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## Healthy food out of reach for many

Despite growing some of the best produce in some of the most fertile land in the world, many Tasmanians struggle to access healthy food because of where they live.

This is the paradox recent research conducted by the University of Tasmania has confirmed.

The Tasmanian Healthy Food Access Basket (HFAB) Survey examined the availability, cost and affordability of a basket of healthy food in Tasmania for different sized families living in different areas of the State.

The research is part of the Healthy Food Access Tasmania project, which is led by the Heart Foundation with funding from Tasmania Medicare Local through the Australian Government's Tasmanian Health Assistance Package.

Chief investigator Sandy Murray, a nutritionist in the Faculty of Health's School of Health Sciences, said there was considerable variability in access to the HFAB.

"We looked at availability, cost and affordability, based on a 'basket' of 44 healthy food items," Ms Murray said.

"How much of that basket was available in different types of shops and where were these different types of shops located? What did that mean for cost?"

The research broke food shops down into four categories: major supermarkets, minor supermarkets, general and convenience shops, and fruit and vegetable shops. The food basket was least expensive in major supermarkets, although the fresh fruit and vegetable component was cheaper at fruit and vegetable shops.

"In terms of cost, healthy food was least expensive for people living in the Hobart region and most expensive for those living in the West and North West region," Ms Murray said.

"While it's pleasing to see lower prices at fruit and vegetable shops, our research found that low income areas had virtually no access to fruit and vegetable shops.

“Overall, availability is poorer in regional areas where food shops are limited, places like the West Coast, Circular Head, the Tasman Peninsular, Southern Midlands and Dorset. But there can also be challenges in more urban areas as well, like parts of Devonport, Clarence, Glenorchy and Launceston.”

Ms Murray said the cost of healthy food relative to income for low income families continues to be a concern.

“Families relying on Centrelink may need to spend up to 42 per cent of their income on healthy food depending on where they live. Clearly, families can’t afford to spend this much of their budget on food.”

The research team also included Dr Kiran Ahuja, Stuart Auckland and Professor Madeleine Ball, all from the School of Health Sciences.

Head of School Professor Steve Campbell said access to healthy food was crucial to improving health outcomes and wellbeing in Tasmania.

“If we want to improve the health of our communities, we need to understand and address issues around access to affordable and healthy food,” Professor Campbell said.

“It’s an issue that requires solid evidence and a truly collaborative approach, and that is exactly what we are seeing in this continuing project.”

The Heart Foundation is working on a range of programs to improve access to healthy food in Tasmania, using the research as a key planning tool, as part of the broader project.

The Tasmanian Healthy Food Access Basket Survey final report is available on the Tasmania Medicare Local website:

<http://www.tasmedicarelocal.com.au/resources/2014-tasmanian-healthy-food-access-basket-survey-final-report>

**Information released by:**

University of Tasmania, Communications and Media Office

Phone: 61 3 6324 3218

Email: [Media.Office@utas.edu.au](mailto:Media.Office@utas.edu.au)