

# HARVESTING ON HOMELANDS PROJECT PROPOSAL



**FOR HEALTH**

Reawakening Yolnu vitality, together.



# Descriptor

Harvesting on Homelands project is a local indigenous-led initiative that enables Yolngu people from Elcho Island, Nth East Arnhem Land to reconnect with their traditional practice of harvesting of natural foods from land and sea to enhance physical and mental health and well-being.

The project sees the delivery of a series of camping programs, conducted throughout 2021 over 4 weekends and one extended 7-day program on Elcho Island Homelands. Program elements include hunting and food gathering practices, traditional cooking methods and delivery of health education.

## Key Objectives

Harvesting on Homelands programs aims to:

- Deliver health education messages that teaches the link between achieving greater health and vitality through embracing a diet that consists of nutrient-dense whole foods and minimisation of calorie-dense processed foods, including white flour and sugar.
- Reconnect participants with traditional food gathering practice as a means to supplement diet with affordable and accessible traditional whole foods in a remote community where higher rates of food insecurity result in a higher prevalence of obesity and chronic disease
- Build community momentum for embracing healthy lifestyle choices through providing camping experiences that involve bringing together of families and community members harvesting foods and cooking in traditional ways.
- Empower Yolngu staff to take the lead, demonstrate traditional harvesting skills and teach and encourage others in this traditional practice.







## Target Participants

The target beneficiaries of the program are indigenous adult population from Elcho Island, NE Arnhem Land who are living with a diagnosed chronic disease and those adults who are at risk of chronic disease. The cohort comprise of people who are working at behavioural change through making healthy dietary choices, increased physical exercise and eliminating unhealthy habits such as smoking, to improve their health and regain vitality.

The secondary beneficiaries of the program are the children and grandchildren of participants, many of whom reside in the same household. Children and grandchildren will benefit through the provision of healthy whole food ingredients entering the household, new healthy recipes and meals prepared, and supplementing of family diet with traditional nutrient-dense foods that are available to be harvested locally.







## The need being addressed by Harvesting on Homelands Project

The Federal Government Closing the Gap Health Plan 2013-2023 identifies obesity, lack of physical activity and low intake of fruit and vegetables as 3 of the 7 key risk factors contributing to the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-indigenous Australians.

Furthermore, the report describes food insecurity in remote indigenous communities as a major issue, which is experienced by Yolngu people of the remote Nth East Arnhem Land region with limited food supply affecting the cost, variety and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables available.

The recently released Australian Government Closing the Gap report 2020 reveals that the target to close life expectancy gap by 2031 is not on track, with life expectancy between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians was 8.6years for males and 7.8years for females. For Yolngu people living in remote communities, the Gap is more significant with indigenous male's life expectancy 6.2 years lower than indigenous males living in major cities and equivalent comparison for indigenous females was 6.9 years lower. The report highlights that the gap in life expectancy is widest in remote and very remote areas.

An independent evaluation of Hope for Health retreat programs conducted by Charles Darwin University and the University of Melbourne in 2019 found that Yolngu people expressed sorrow and frustration when learning that foods introduced to Yolngu people during the Missionary era, i.e. white flour and sugar were unhealthy and to be avoided and that Yolngu had not been told this previously.



# Outcomes

## Primary Outcomes

- Participants develop greater understanding of the link between good health and consumption of nutrient-dense whole foods that informs their decision making on healthy diet and lifestyle that contributes to longer life expectancy
- The traditional practice of harvesting foods from land and sea is re-discovered and knowledge from community leaders is passed onto children and grandchildren
- Participants feel energised physically and mentally through consumption of nutritious bush foods and increase strength and cardio fitness through the physical movement required to harvest natural foods
- Supplementing diet with traditional foods that can be gathered locally assists in addressing the burden of food insecurity in remote aboriginal community
- Momentum among the Yolngu community to embrace healthy lifestyle change is strengthened

## Secondary outcomes

- Participants experience mental health respite and regain energy to cope with the multiple stresses of family and living circumstances in aboriginal community life
- Yolngu staff feel empowered and gain greater confidence to take ownership and lead the facilitation of Hope for Health programs

