

## FOODcent, FOODcents and Food Sensations: A brief overview

In 1992 FOODcent\$ began as a small pilot project in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia. It ran in various forms until 2022.

The Food Cent\$ pilot project aimed to show low income earners a new way to allocate their food budget to obtain value for money and balance their diet. It also created an infrastructure for program delivery. Strategies included a recommended spending model, resources that addressed barriers to healthy eating, together with group activities to enhance knowledge and skills. Community volunteers, known as Food Cent\$ Advisers, were trained to deliver the project by conducting budget and cooking sessions for people in their social networks. Evaluation of the 1992 pilot showed it successfully reached its target group of low income earners who were identified as those holding Health Care Cards. Health Care Cards were held by 37% of the 150 trained advisers and 52% of the 373 people who attended the budget and cooking sessions. Evaluation results demonstrated positive changes in self-reported dietary, cooking and shopping behaviours.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007 the Chronic Disease Prevention Directorate of the WA Department of Health included services to deliver a state-wide nutrition literacy program (Foodcent\$) based on the results of the pilot project in a request for tender for nutrition health promotion programs. The tender request also included a healthy eating campaign (Go for 2&5) and a child nutrition program (Parental Guidance Recommend - PGR).

Cancer Council WA was successful in winning this tender, and created the FOODcents program, which ran for eight years until 2015. The aim of this state-wide program was to provide Western Australian families and adults, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a practical, hands-on program to improve their knowledge and skills around healthy eating. This included how to budget, choose, purchase, store and prepare nutritious food. Key components of the program included interactive nutrition education, supermarket tours, label reading skills and cooking classes. The classes were run as individual sessions or multi-session comprehensive programs.

Cancer Council was uniquely placed to deliver the project in regional areas of WA due to the network of seven Regional Education Officers (REOs), funded by the CCWA to deliver cancer prevention and education programs in regional WA. Cancer Council also “trained the trainer”, upskilling our own REOs, plus health, community and peer educators to deliver FOODcents.

In the later years Cancer Council coordinated Red Cross and Food Bank WA to deliver FOODcents to their clients. As well as education sessions, FOODcents maintained a website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and provided printed resources to community members and organisations.

Cancer Council WA’s evaluation partner WA Cancer Prevention and Research Unit led by Professor Simon Pettigrew developed an evaluation plan to measure the impact of

FOODcents at a state level. During this time a number of papers were published (see below). Most notably was a longitudinal study. The results suggest that adult nutrition education can be effective in encouraging individuals to alter their food shopping processes and modify their diets. The tendency for some behavioural outcomes to be worse at follow-up than at baseline indicates that marketplace factors such as food promotion and availability may be influencing these specific dietary behaviours. This rare longitudinal study of the effects of adult nutrition education shows that this form of intervention has the potential to produce lasting improvements in attitudes and behaviours. However, such programs cannot be expected to produce large and lasting effects without support from population-level nutrition policies and programs that address macro-environmental factors that influence dietary behaviours.<sup>6</sup>

In 2015 an open tender by the WA Department of Health saw FOODcents rebranded as Food Sensations and delivered entirely by Foodbank for 7 years until it was defunded in 2022. Food Sensations was a free four-week nutrition and cooking program targeted at low-to-middle income Western Australians who would like to improve their food literacy.<sup>7</sup> The program found increased disadvantage experienced by people residing outside of major cities highlighted the need for additional government support in addressing regional specific barriers, such as higher food costs.<sup>8</sup>

A long-term commitment to fund and deliver a nutrition literacy program such as FoodCent\$, FOODcents and Food Sensations for priority populations (eg lower SES and regional geography), can produce lasting improvements in attitudes and behaviours. Such a program could be considered as part of comprehensive education and policy reform program where all levels of government have a role to play to create a healthy eating environment.

#### Articles in the peer-reviewed literature

1. [Food cent \\$—Implementing and evaluating a nutrition education project focusing on value for money](#) 1998
2. [A comparison of the effectiveness of an adult nutrition education program for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians](#) 2015
3. [The demonstrated value of adult nutrition education programs](#) 2016
4. [Evaluation outcomes of a long-running adult nutrition education programme](#) 2016
5. [Whetting disadvantaged adults' appetite for nutrition education](#) 2017
6. [Results of a long-term follow-up evaluation of an Australian adult nutrition education program](#) 2018
7. [Effectiveness of an Adult Food Literacy Program](#) 2019
8. [Effectiveness of Foodbank Western Australia's \*Food Sensations\*<sup>®</sup> for Adults Food Literacy Program in Regional Australia](#) 2021

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28 September 2023