

Lack of retail grocery competition impacts Australians' health

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Limited competition in the grocery sector could be having a serious effect on public health, according to a University of Queensland study published today in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health.

Leader researcher Jon Wardle, of UQ's School of [Population Health](#), said the study highlighted the health consequences of a lack of competition on the affordability, access and choice of healthy foods, as well as the need for regulation changes.

“Anything that negatively affects availability or access to healthy foods is going to have a serious impact on consumption of those foods,” Mr Wardle said.

“The current situation has meant that prices are higher, choice is lower and it is harder to get to places that sell healthful foods. People generally want to eat healthier foods, but the current situation makes it harder for them to do so.”

He said Queensland Health data showed poor [nutrition](#), particularly low intake of fresh foods, may be implicated in up to 56 percent of all deaths in Queensland and may be responsible for 14 percent of the state's hospital budget. The World Health Organisation had suggested that one third of all cancers were related to poor diet.

“Most people look at the issue of competition in the grocery retail sector

as an economic issue only, but in reality it also has enormous broader health and social consequences,” he said.

Mr Wardle said until upstream factors caused by lack of competition were resolved, efforts to increase healthy [food](#) consumption may be in vain.

“We need to look at not just what people are eating, but how it's getting to them in the first place. If we make it harder to access or afford good foods then obviously it's going to be harder to get people to eat well,” he said.

“This situation is not the fault of the large retailers who are simply working within the current environment.

"However, this research shows that there would be significant health benefits from changes to competition and planning legislation.

“If Australia is really serious about preventive health and becoming the healthiest nation in the world we have to look at not just developing good [health](#) policy, but making all types of policy healthy.”

Provided by University of Queensland ([news](#) : [web](#))

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