New tool is food for thought

By BY NAOMI NEWCOMBE

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A new digital tool designed to better understand the Colac Otway food environment has received enthusiastic feedback from the community.

Members of the Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition in Deakin's Institute for Health Transformation and key partners from Colac Area Health, Colac Otway Shire and Salvation Army tested the MAP MY digital tool in locations across the shire last week to help better understand the local food environment and gather information about where and why people buy their food.

The team stopped by Apollo Bay, Gellibrand, Forrest, Lavers Hill and in Colac at the Salvation Army, Colac Area Health and the library, with more than a dozen people dropping in to provide feedback and test the tool.

GLOBE research fellow Dr Cindy Needham said the community consultation sessions had been successful, with community members providing "really helpful feedback" on the tool.

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HEALTHY PARTNERSHIP: Colac Salvos' Josiah Van Niekerk, Trinity College's Jeremy Barren, CSC's Skye Bannan, Deakin University's Dr Cindy Needham and Penny Fraser, Colac Area Health's Emily Alston, Colac Otway Shire Council's Chelsea Sharp and Lesley Hendy met last week to discuss the tool, which also underwent testing in the community including at Apollo Bay, Gellibrand, Forrest, Lavers Hill and Colac.

"Everyone in all of the communities has been really excited about the work and wanting to bring to the forefront their voice about how they access food and what we might be able to do to improve it," Dr Needham said.

Dr Needham said the next stage involved redeveloping the tool based on feedback before further stakeholder consultation in May.

"We've got some really good directions on how we're going to refine and redevelop it to come back out in September, when we're going to go live," she said.

"We plan to keep it live for three months."

In implementing the digital tool, the research team plans to visit Colac Otway community centres and services to help people use it.

"We want to ideally get a thousand people from the community to provide input," Dr Needham said.

"Anything that comes out of the work we do, we want to be able to provide in a report form so that people can use it if they want to apply for grants or it can form activities or strategies."

The research team extended a thank you to the Colac Otway community and stakeholders that had supported the project so far.

An additional supermarket study will take place later this year involving the research team visiting supermarkets and local stores to investigate differences in cost, quality and food availability needed for a healthy, nutritious and well-rounded diet.

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RESEARCH: Dr Cindy Needham said community members were extremely excited about the potential of the MAP MY tool.

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