Leaders and experts talk healthy habits
By HANNAH TOOHEY

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and Chelsea Sharp.

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Colac has played host to health experts and researchers this week for a meeting around improving nutrition-related health outcomes in the community.

Members of the Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition in Deakin's Institute for Health Transformation joined researchers and key partners from Colac Area Health, Colac Otway Shire and Salvation Army at COPACC yesterday.

It marked the first step of a long-term project aimed at better understanding the local food environment, and how good food choices can be made easier for people.

Colac Area Health director of research Dr Laura Alston said she was excited that the Colac local government area had been selected as a pilot site for this work.

"This opportunity provided by Dr Cindy Needham will help us progress the research and make a big impact on the health of our community into the future, we can't wait to get started," Dr Alston said.

"It's also a fantastic opportunity for our Colac Area Health research unit to get involved in such world-class research, it means our community has access to this world-class, up-to-date, scientific evidence that will help to hopefully improve our food environment.

"Our dedicated local working group has been developing a number of projects over the years to help improve health outcomes for our district."

GLOBE research fellow Dr Cindy Needham said bringing together some of the best minds in research and preventative health would help design a genuinely helpful community model.

"It's just about engaging with a community that's starting to build the work which is already being done by Colac Area Health, we're connecting with them and understanding the food retail environment and trying to improve it," Dr Needham said.

"This week is all about getting to know the communities of Colac and surrounding districts, and understanding the unique challenges they face achieving a healthy diet.

"One of the key drivers in helping people live healthy lives is improving access to healthy food, especially affordable and good quality fruit and vegetables.

"We know that in large rural towns, shopping for fresh and healthy produce can sometimes be difficult due to the long distances required to travel and more limited retail choices," she said.

"This is multiplied for the people who live in smaller or more isolated towns.

"This can lead to a reliance on foods that keep for longer on the shelf, which may not be as healthy as their fresh counterparts."

The research project has received $750,000 from the Australian Government's Medical Research Future Fund to develop and test an online tool that will help the team understand the different ways people access and buy food, and how this influences the health of their diet.

Developed with the assistance of Deakin's Institute for Intelligent Systems Research and Innovation, the digital tool will be used to gather the information needed for the team to work with the community to find ways to improve the access and affordability of healthy food.

"Our dedicated local working group has been developing a number of projects over the years to help improve health outcomes for our district"

COLAC AREA HEALTH DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH DR LAURA ALSTON

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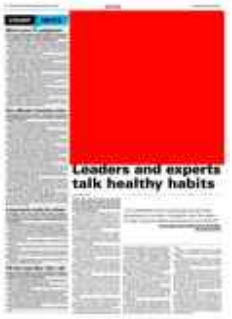
FOOD SOLUTIONS: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FOOD SOLUTIONS: Deakin University preventative health experts and key partners from Colac Area Health, Colac Otway Shire and Salvation Army are seeking to understand the district's food environment and how to improve food choices for people. Pictured from left are Jared Woff, Laura Alston, Cindy Needham, Emily Alston, Penny Fraser, Josiah Van Niekerk and Chelsea Sharp.

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