



## RESEARCHER PROFILE

# Dr Cate Burns

2006–11

“This research will help identify the impact of income and poverty on food purchasing and the importance of social and cultural norms in influencing food choices”

### Contact

Dr Cate Burns

Email: [cate.burns@deakin.edu.au](mailto:cate.burns@deakin.edu.au)

Telephone: 03 9251 7273

### Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

Ground Floor, 15-31 Pelham St  
Carlton, VIC 3053

Phone: 03 9667 1333

Fax: 03 9667 1375

Email: [vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au)

Website: [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au)

### Dr Cate Burns is identifying the social, economic and cultural determinants of obesity in Australia.

The focus of Cate’s research is understanding the strong overlap between poverty and obesity in the Australian population. This research will identify the social, economic and cultural determinants of obesity in populations living on low income, in poverty and at risk of food insecurity.

In her research, Cate is using food cost and household expenditure data to explore the hypothesis that, as income drops and money for food becomes tight, those with less financial resources fill up on cheaper but more fattening foods in preference to healthy foods which may be more expensive. Cate is also using interviews to explore the cultural and social norms about food and the experience of food insecurity across the social spectrum. This work will test the hypothesis that different cultural values about fattening foods and the lived experience of poverty for those on low income affects food choice. This will help explain why poor people may not always adhere to the guidelines of a healthy diet.

Cate is a senior lecturer based at the WHO Collaborating Centre for Prevention of Obesity in the Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences at Deakin University. The Centre is a leading international institute, building the evidence base and training programs needed to prevent obesity – especially in children and adolescents – in developed and developing countries.

Obesity has reached epidemic proportions, and neither it nor its related diseases have proven easy to treat or prevent. This research will help identify the impact of income and poverty on food purchasing and the importance of social and cultural norms in influencing food choices. This knowledge will improve public health interventions to tackle poor eating and obesity in Australia.

Cate believes VicHealth serves a unique and important role in public health in Victoria. Its vision and energy supports and inspires health promoters and researchers alike, enabling them to explore new and exciting frontiers in promoting the health of Victorians. Her public health Research Fellowship has given her the funds, time and space to develop and progress her research on poverty and obesity. This is a unique opportunity that will benefit Victorians and other Australians in the effort to prevent obesity – particularly in vulnerable low-income families.