

# Mapping Australia's hepatitis C healthcare service needs

## Geographical needs-based analyses can help identify areas for priority health service delivery.

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### THE ISSUE

Chronic hepatitis C infection can lead to severe liver disease, liver cancer and death. In Australia, people who inject drugs (PWID) are at the greatest risk of hepatitis C infection. Although universal access to curative treatments for hepatitis C became available in Australia in March 2016, there is concern that hepatitis C services are not equitably distributed across Australia, meaning some people may have difficulty accessing treatment.

### WHAT OUR WORK FOUND

Notifications of new hepatitis C infections in 2015 were mapped according to the 545 local government areas (LGAs) in Australia. Profiles for each LGA were built using routinely collected data. We then explored the relationship of hepatitis C infection notifications and key demographic, geographic and health service-related features of the LGAs.

Key findings were:

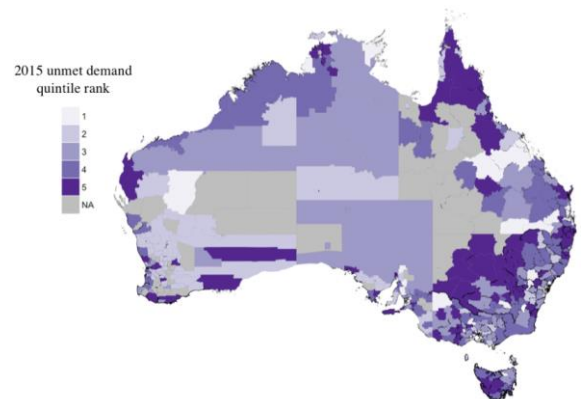
- 35% of all hepatitis C notifications occurred outside of major cities, even though only 29% of Australia's population live in these areas.
- The following LGA characteristics (adjusted for population size) were associated with higher hepatitis C notifications:
  - increased socioeconomic disadvantage
  - more needle and syringe programs
  - more alcohol and other drug services
  - presence of a prison
  - location in the states of New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia rather than Victoria.
- The greatest unmet demand for hepatitis C services occurs predominantly in non-metropolitan areas.
- The vast majority (94%) of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged LGAs are outside major cities. This suggests a relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage, geographical remoteness and hepatitis C infection.

### CONCLUSION

The greatest hepatitis C burden and lowest hepatitis C health service coverage are found in socioeconomically disadvantaged as well as non-metropolitan areas.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Geographical needs-based analyses using routinely collected data can provide important insights for service delivery and planning.
- Such analyses are relatively simple and could be undertaken regularly.
- Hepatitis C service prioritisation and planning may benefit from considering the needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged and non-metropolitan areas and ensuring health services in these areas are supported to address this need.



This map shows the unmet demand for hepatitis C services according to LGAs. The darkest shaded areas are regions with the most unmet demand.

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