

**EMBARGOED TO 1AM, THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2013**

## **Obesity and smoking hotspots revealed in new report**

The rate of obese or overweight adults is as high as four out of five in some local areas, according to a new National Health Performance Authority report.

The report, the first in Australia to break down overweight and obesity rates by local areas and compare similar communities, shows the percentages of obese or overweight adults ranged across local areas from 49% to 79% in 2011–12. National or state-level average figures camouflage how high these rates have become in many local areas.

After excluding adults who are overweight, the percentage of adults found to be obese was as high as 41% in one local area. While overweight or obesity rates increased with geographic remoteness and lower socioeconomic status, half of adults (54%) in the wealthiest urban areas were overweight or obese and two in 10 (19%) were obese. In 12 local areas the obesity rate was 35% or higher.

The results are contained in one of two reports published today by the Performance Authority. The second report, on tobacco smoking rates, shows up to 28% of adults smoked daily in one local area – more than three times higher than the local area with the lowest rate (6%).

Together these reports show overweight, obesity and smoking rates for Medicare Local catchment areas across Australia. The results are intended to assist local communities in defining their priorities for improvements in health and care. Findings further revealed:

- Obesity rates varied from 14% in Sydney North Shore and Beaches to almost three times higher (41%) in Loddon-Mallee-Murray, which spans Victoria and New South Wales
- The rate of obese or overweight adults varied from 49% in Eastern Sydney to 79% in Western New South Wales
- The highest rate of adult smokers was in Grampians (Victoria), where 28% of adults smoked daily, compared to 6% in Sydney North Shore and Beaches.

“Using our local-level analysis, clinicians and health managers can now better target and drive health system improvements specific to their local community’s needs,” Performance Authority CEO Dr Diane Watson said.

“Rates of adult obesity have been rising very rapidly over time, while smoking rates have been falling nationally. The health and economic impact of obesity and smoking can be extremely serious.”

To ensure comparisons are as fair as possible, Medicare Locals have been allocated to peer groups based on similar geographic remoteness and socioeconomic status. However, Medicare Locals even within the same peer group still have diverse populations that may explain some of the differences in smoking and overweight or obesity rates between catchments.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) asked the Performance Authority to report on overweight, obesity and smoking rates in local areas to assist clinicians and health managers to better target and drive improvements. 'Overweight' is measured as a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than or equal to 25, while 'obesity' is defined as a BMI greater than or equal to 30.

As a significant health population issue, a range of research on adult overweight, obesity and smoking rates has been produced in Australia. Research and reporting findings will vary depending on the population sample and estimation and analysis methods used.

The Performance Authority has made both new reports available on the [www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au](http://www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au) website, which was launched in June. The site has been upgraded today with the inclusion of a 'National overview' feature, which allows users to see national maps that show differences across Medicare Local catchments right across Australia for more than 40 different measures of health and care.

The Performance Authority will soon publish two reports on health system efficiencies, comprising a local-level analysis of avoidable hospitalisations and variations between hospitals in the length of time patients spent in hospital for a range of different conditions or procedures.

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