

A SOCIAL HEALTH ATLAS OF AUSTRALIA

Second Edition

Volume 1: Australia

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 Public Health Information Development Unit

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Foreword

The publication of this second edition of **A Social Health Atlas of Australia** brings together a wide range of information about the health status of Australians by region, and the health service use by the Australian population.

By presenting the data as maps, the atlas provides a graphical image of the distribution of health status, and differences in the patterns and levels of access to and use of health services at the local level throughout the cities, towns, and rural and remote areas of Australia. The format of the atlas makes the information easy to understand and readily accessible to a broad group of users, including public health planners, providers, researchers, students and the general public.

The graphs of the newly developed Accessibility/Remoteness Index for Australia (ARIA) provide useful information for communities, as well as practitioners and managers in the health sector, to better understand the differences in the statistics that describe health status and health service use.

This data is essential for policy development and local area planning, and for monitoring and evaluating health services. It is also of major importance for resource allocation at the broadest level, and between areas, services and population groups. The maps and tabulations presented in this atlas represent a major compilation of information for these purposes.

I congratulate all those who have contributed to this important project.



Dr Michael Wooldridge
The Minister for Health and Aged Care

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Executive summary

The information in this atlas adds to a convincing body of evidence built up over a number of years in Australia on the striking disparities in health that exist between groups in the population. People of low socioeconomic status (those who are relatively socially or economically deprived) experience worse health than those of higher socioeconomic status for almost every major cause of mortality and morbidity. The challenge for policy makers, health practitioners and governments is to find ways to address these health inequities.

The primary aims of the first edition of *A Social Health Atlas of Australia* were to illustrate the spatial distribution of the socioeconomically disadvantaged population, and to compare this with patterns of distribution of major causes of illness and death and use of health services. The maps and correlation analysis highlighted associations between social and economic factors in relation to health and illness.

A number of new variables have been included in this second edition, together with new data on many of the variables from the first edition. One of the additions is the presentation of data by the new Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA).

The extent of change (between the editions) in the patterns of distribution in death rates by socioeconomic status is also highlighted.

There is clear evidence in the data of an association at the SLA level between high premature death rates (for both deaths from all causes and from most specific causes) and socioeconomic disadvantage, as measured by the IRSID. These associations are generally evident not only between the most advantaged (Quintile 1) and disadvantaged areas (Quintile 5), but also at each of the intervening levels of socioeconomic status (Quintiles 2 to 4) (**Figures 9.2 and 9.4**).

Similarly, there are associations between socioeconomic disadvantage and high rates of use of general medical practitioner services in the major urban centres, and for most of the variables for hospital admission in both the major urban centres and the non-metropolitan areas (**Figures 9.4 and 9.5**). The gradients by socioeconomic status for admissions are particularly strong in the non-metropolitan areas.

It is also clear that, despite the overall improvement in deaths rates from all causes and for a majority of the specific causes studied (**Table 9.2, Figure 9.6**), these improvements have not resulted in a reduction in the disparities evident in death rates, for all causes and for a number of specific causes, between residents of the most well off areas and those in the poorest areas (**Figure 9.6**).

Correlation analysis

There were correlations of significance at the Statistical Local Area (SLA) level between the indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage drawn from the 1996 Population Census (Chapter 3) and a number of the health status variables. Across the major urban centres (the capital cities and other major urban centres with populations of 100,000 or more), the strongest of these were generally with the variables for people reporting their health

as fair or poor (as distinct from people reporting their health as excellent, very good or good) and the Physical Component Summary (PCS); and premature deaths from lung cancer, circulatory system diseases and respiratory system diseases (**Table 8.1**). Similarly strong associations were evident in the correlation analysis with the variables for use of GP services by males and females; and of admissions to a public hospital.

There were fewer correlations of significance at the SLA level in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia than was the case in major urban centres. This is, in part, a result of the number of areas with relatively small numbers of cases (population, deaths, hospital admissions, etc.) which reduces the strength of the analysis. However, the correlation analysis revealed a reasonably strong relationship between the general health of the community, as measured by people reporting fair/poor health and the PCS, and the indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage. There were also correlations of significance with the distribution of people with a handicap.

The correlation analysis was not undertaken for specific causes of premature death in the non-metropolitan areas, other than for cancer deaths, due to low numbers of deaths. There were, however, correlations of significance between the variables for years of potential life lost (the summary measure of premature death) and the variables for single parent families, the indigenous population, dwellings without a motor vehicle, people receiving unemployment benefits and people reporting fair/poor health.

In contrast to the situation in the capital cities, there were only weak associations evident in the correlation analysis between the indicators of socioeconomic status and the variables for admissions to public acute and private hospitals, the use of GP services and immunisation levels.

Changes over time in socioeconomic status

Marked variations were recorded between 1986 and 1996 for a majority of the socioeconomic status variables mapped for Australia (**Table 9.1**). For the capital cities, the largest increases were for the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (an increase of 79.0 per cent over this ten year period); the occupational grouping of managers and administrators, and professionals (42.2 per cent); low income families (41.1 per cent); single parent families (39.5 per cent); people born overseas in predominantly non-English speaking countries (an increase of 33.1 per cent for those resident for five years or more, of 26.1 per cent for those resident for less than five years, and of 24.5 per cent for those with poor proficiency in English); and people aged 65 years and over (27.0 per cent). The largest decreases recorded over this ten year period were for the variables for unemployment among 15 to 19 year olds (down by 14.7 per cent) and early school leavers (down by 13.3 per cent).

Variations of this order were also recorded in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia. The major differences from the changes noted for the capital cities were the larger increases in single parent families and the population aged 65 years and over; smaller increases in the indigenous population, the occupations

of managers and administrators and professionals, low income families and people born overseas in predominantly non-English speaking countries who have been resident for five years or more; and decreases for the remaining two variables for people born overseas in predominantly non-English speaking countries.

Changes over this period for the other major urban centres were relatively consistent with those recorded in the capital cities, although with much larger increases recorded for the population aged from 0 to 4 years, people aged 65 years and over, single parent families and people born in predominantly non-English speaking countries who had been resident for five years or more.

Substantial variations were recorded in income support payments to residents of the capital cities for all of the payment types analysed, other than the Age Pension, for which there was a small increase (an increase of 0.6 per cent). The number of recipients for each of the other payment types increased substantially, with the number of unemployment beneficiaries more than doubling (an increase of 142.9 per cent) (**Table 9.1**). Similar, although smaller increases were recorded in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia for all of these income support payments other than the Age Pension, for which there was a larger increase (1.3 per cent). The increases in the other major urban centres were more in line with those recorded for the capital cities than with those in the non-metropolitan areas.

Changes over time in death rates

Death rates in Australia have declined over the years 1985 to 1989 and 1992 to 1995 for the majority of causes studied.

In the capital cities, the largest decreases were recorded for the infant death rate (down by 29.5 per cent); and for deaths of people aged from 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases (-37.7 per cent), respiratory system diseases (-30.9 per cent) and accidents, poisonings and violence (-22.9 per cent). All causes mortality was 22.6 per cent lower over this period, marginally more so for males than for females.

There were reductions in death rates for each of the causes studied for the other major urban centres.

There were also reductions in rates of premature death in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia for all major causes of death. However the reductions were all lower than those recorded for the capital cities, at around two thirds (65.4 per cent) for all cause mortality.

Differences in health by socioeconomic status of area of residence

Comparisons are made of differences in the health status and health service use of the population by socioeconomic status. In the absence of any direct measure of socioeconomic status in the data, the socioeconomic status of the SLA of usual residence in the health records is used. In this analysis, socioeconomic status is measured by the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD, see page 17). The SLAs in the capital cities and other major urban centres have been sorted into five groups (quintiles) based on the IRSD score, with Quintile 1 comprising the twenty per cent of SLAs with the highest IRSD scores, and Quintile 5 comprising the twenty per cent of SLAs with the lowest IRSD scores.

vi

Health status by socioeconomic status of area of residence

Although there is some variability across the quintiles, the pattern is always for the highest socioeconomic status SLAs (those in Quintile 1) to have the most advantageous (ie. in the majority of cases the lowest) rates and, generally, for the most disadvantaged SLAs (those in Quintile 5) to have the highest rates. The exception is the PCS, for which low scores indicate poorer health (**Figure 9.2**).

Years of potential life lost (YPLL) from deaths between the ages of 15 to 64 years varied from a standardised ratio (SR) of 75 in the most advantaged areas (25 per cent fewer YPLL than were expected from the Australian rates) to an SR of 121 in the most disadvantaged areas (indicating that there were 21 per cent more YPLL than were expected from the State rates). Large differentials were also evident for deaths of 15 to 64 year old males (from an SDR of 71 in Quintile 1 to 126 in Quintile 5) and deaths of 15 to 64 years olds from lung cancer (66 to 125), circulatory system diseases (63 to 121) and respiratory system diseases (53 to 127).

in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia the gradients are, overall, more marked than in the major urban centres. The only other notable difference from the gradients evident for the major urban centres is for deaths of 15 to 24 year olds from the combined causes of accidents, poisonings and violence, for which the pattern is not consistent across the quintiles, although the most disadvantaged areas do have the highest rates of death.

Health service utilisation by socioeconomic status of area of residence

Although there is some variability across the quintiles for the health service utilisation variables for SLAs in the major urban centres, the pattern is generally for the most advantaged SLAs (those in Quintile 1) to have the lowest rates of admission, and for the most disadvantaged SLAs (those in Quintile 5) to have the highest rates. The largest differentials between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 (with higher rates in Quintile 5) occur for admissions to public acute hospitals, for lung cancer, circulatory system diseases (as well as for ischaemic heart disease), respiratory system diseases (at all ages and for 0 to 4 year old children; as well as for bronchitis, emphysema and asthma). Variables with the largest differentials and lower rates in Quintile 5, are admissions to private hospitals and admissions for a myringotomy (**Figure 9.3**).

The largest differentials between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 (with higher rates in Quintile 5) in the non-metropolitan areas are for admissions to public acute hospitals; admissions of females; admissions for lung cancer; neurotic, personality and other mental disorders; and respiratory system diseases (at all ages and for 0 to 4 year old children; as well as for bronchitis, emphysema and asthma) (**Figure 9.5**).

Changes over time in health status by socioeconomic status of area of residence

As noted above, there has been an overall decrease in death rates in Australia; there are also differentials in death rates by socioeconomic status of area. It is possible to examine the extent of the change in death rates by socioeconomic status of area (**Figure 9.6**). As data were not available for non-metropolitan SLAs in the first edition of the atlas, the following comparisons have been limited to the capital cities and other major urban centres.

With the exception of the 'other' causes group (for which there was a marginal increase in death rates in Quintile 5), death rates in the major urban centres declined between 1985-89 and 1992-95 for all of the causes of death studied, both overall and in each quintile of socioeconomic status of area.

It is clear, however, that despite the overall decline, the strong gradient in death rates between the quintiles remains. In fact, the differential in death rates for male residents aged from 15 to 64 years between Quintile 1 (the most advantaged areas) and Quintile 5 (the most disadvantaged areas) increased, from 1.53 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.76 times higher in 1992-95. Similar differentials occur for other deaths variables studied.

For females, overall death rates decreased to a similar extent to those for males, and the differential in death rates for female residents aged from 15 to 64 years between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 also increased, from 1.30 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.40 times higher in 1992-95.

Infant death rates declined by around one third (**Table 9.2**) between 1985-89 and 1992-95, and the differential in rates between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 also declined, from 1.55 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.39 times higher in 1992-95.

Despite a decline in death rates of the 15 to 64 year old population for all cancers and lung cancer (with a larger decline), the differential in rates between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 increased, from 1.14 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.27 times higher in 1992-95 for cancer, and from 1.53 to 1.90 for lung cancer.

The overall decline in death rates for deaths of 15 to 64 year olds from circulatory system diseases was the highest among the causes of death studied, at over 40 per cent in the capital cities and just under one third in the non-metropolitan areas (**Table 9.2**). The differential in rates between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 increased from 1.55 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.92 times higher in 1992-95.

The gradients in deaths rates from respiratory system diseases across the quintiles of socioeconomic status of area of residence are particularly strong over both periods. In 1985-89, the differential between Quintiles 1 and 5 was 1.79; by 1992-95 this had increased (by 32.9 per cent) to 2.38. This was the largest differential in death rates in 1992-95 for any of the causes studied.

Death rates of 15 to 64 year old people from the external causes of accidents, poisonings and violence are also highest in the most disadvantaged areas of the capital cities and other major urban centres. Again, the differential in 1992-95 is higher than in 1985-89 (up from 1.42 to 1.54).

Death rates for 15 to 24 year olds from these external causes show a similar pattern across the quintiles, although the differential in 1992-95 is smaller than in 1985-89 (down by 4.9 per cent, from 1.24 to 1.18).

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Using the Social Health Atlas

The social health atlas package

This second edition of *A Social Health Atlas of Australia* comprises:

- this volume for Australia and a companion volume (Volume 1.1) comprising the data mapped (the numbers and rate/ratio/percentages on which the maps are based); and
- similar volumes for each of the States and Territories (each of these other atlases also has a companion volume comprising the data mapped).

Some of the data from the atlas are also available on the **HealthWIZ** statistics database product, which comprises comprehensive health statistics from Australia's hospital systems, cause of death registries, population censuses, cancer registries, Medicare and income support system, as well as details of aged care and child care.

This volume contains general background information to the atlas as well as maps of selected variables showing patterns of socioeconomic status, health status and health and welfare service use. Each of these maps is accompanied by a commentary.

The text and maps can also be downloaded for reading and printing from the Public Health Information Development Unit World Wide Web site at www.publichealth.gov.au. The text (including the maps and graphs) and datasets on which the maps are based are available on CD-ROM (for Windows). Further details are in Appendix 1.1, *Project Resources and Output*.

Content

The atlas has nine chapters, an appendix, a bibliography and an index. The chapters are:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Methods
- 3 Demography and socioeconomic status
- 4 Income support payments
- 5 Health status
- 6 Utilisation of health services
- 7 Availability of selected health services
- 8 Statistical analysis
- 9 Summary

Chapters 1 and 2 provide an overview of the atlas and the approach taken in analysing and mapping data. These sections contain important information on the limitations of the mapped data. The Appendix provides additional background information, and the *Glossary*, at the end of this section, defines some of the terms used.

Chapters 3 to 7 each provide an introduction to the topic(s) being mapped, as well as the maps and associated commentary.

Chapter 8 shows the results of the correlation and cluster analyses. Chapter 9 presents details of the major changes in the data between this second and the first edition, as well as some

summary measures of the health differentials calculated from the health status and health service utilisation data mapped in Chapters 5 and 6.

Using the atlas

Some people will use the atlas as a reference source, either going to particular maps (eg. of hospital surgical procedures), or using the index to find a particular topic (eg. deaths from circulatory system diseases) or variable (eg. tonsillectomy).

Others may choose to examine the correlation matrices and to then view the maps for variables for which the data are highly correlated. Or they may access the data in a spreadsheet and re-group the areas to suit their own purpose, recalculating the percentages or standardised ratios to represent the new spatial groupings.

To assist users in reading the maps, the layout of the two map types used most frequently is described below. The more detailed discussion in Chapter 2 on the way in which the data have been analysed and presented is, however, important in terms of gaining an understanding of how best to use the data and maps in this atlas. Users of the atlas are particularly encouraged to read this chapter to ensure they are aware of the deficiencies in the datasets presented, as well as in the mapping approach used.

Maps of capital cities

Area mapped

Each of the mainland capitals is mapped on the one page. The capital city area mapped is the Capital City Statistical Division, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Within the Statistical Division a smaller area, the Statistical Subdivision (SSD), is also mapped. The number of SSDs varies between the capital cities, from two in **Darwin** to 14 in both **Sydney** and **Melbourne**. As **Hobart** does not have any SSDs, it is listed with the other major urban centres (of **Newcastle**, **Wollongong**, **Geelong**, **Gold Coast-Tweed Heads** and **Townsville-Thuringowa**) below the maps. Together with the capital cities, these 'other major urban centres' comprise the urban centres with a population of 100,000 or more.

Additional details, including key maps to assist in the location and identification of particular SSDs, are in *Appendix 1.2*: a set of clear film overlays to assist in this process is included in a pocket inside the back cover of this atlas.

Data measures mapped

The map sub-title indicates the format in which the data are presented. In a majority of cases data are mapped as either a percentage or age (or age-sex) standardised ratio (the process of standardisation is described in *Appendix 1.3, Analysis and presentation of data*). The exceptions are the maps, in Chapter 7, of the location of selected health services; the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage mapped in Chapter 3; the infant death rate; and the Total Fertility Rate.

The legend shows the data ranges used to indicate the spatial distribution of the characteristic being mapped.

Footnotes on the map page draw attention to particular aspects of the mapped data and the source of data.

Description

The text associated with the maps provides background information on the variable being mapped and describes the pattern of distribution of the variable at the SSD level.

The commentary in the top section provides information about the topic being mapped, as well as a comparison between the capital cities and, where the data are available, refers to the situation reported in the first edition of the atlas. For variables where the data are age (or age-sex) standardised, these comparisons are made across Australia (with Australia as the standard for comparison).

In the lower two thirds of the page, attention is drawn to other sources of information about the variable, or characteristics of the population under discussion. The pattern of distribution shown in the map is then described.

Where the numbers of cases are relatively small (and, in particular, where these small numbers are associated with elevated rates), the absolute numbers are included in the commentary. The numbers (as well as the percentages, rates and ratios) are available in printed and electronic forms and should be used in conjunction with the information in this atlas.

Map of Australia: referred to as the 'non-metropolitan areas' of Australia

Area mapped

The spatial units mapped are again SSDs: however the capital cities and other major urban centres are each mapped as one area (ie. not by SSD) to enhance comparisons between the major urban centres and the non-metropolitan areas.

As noted above in relation to the maps for the capital cities, additional details are in *Appendix 1.2*: and a set of clear film overlays to assist in the location and identification of particular SSDs is located in a pocket inside the back cover of this atlas.

Data measures mapped

See comments above concerning the capital cities.

Description

Again, commentary in the top section provides information about the topic being mapped, as well as national comparisons, this time comparing the 'other' major urban centres (those population centres of 100,000 or larger which are not capital cities) and the areas of Australia outside of the capital cities and other major urban centres. These regional/rural/remote areas are referred to in the text as 'non-metropolitan areas'. Where the data are age (or age-sex) standardised, the standard is, again, Australia.

The lower two thirds of the page again draws attention to other sources of information about the variable, or characteristics of the population under discussion. The pattern of distribution shown in the map is then described.

The cautions in the main introduction and in the introductory notes to each chapter are particularly relevant to the non-metropolitan areas, with their geographically large SSDs and relatively small, scattered populations.

Additional information: ARIA Index

In addition to the map, the map page includes a graph showing the average measure for the variable in each of five levels of accessibility/remoteness, as determined by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index for Australia (ARIA). This Index is described in more detail in Chapter 2, under the heading *Accessibility and Remoteness*. In brief, each SLA in Australia has been allocated to one of five categories, which range from Highly Accessible, through Accessible, Moderately Accessible and Remote, to Very Remote. The average percentage, rate or ratio for each of the five categories is then calculated for each variable and presented as a graph. The graph is accompanied by a brief comment on the distribution across the categories.

Contents

Chapter	Page
Foreword	iii
Executive summary	v
Using the <i>Social Health Atlas</i>	ix
List of maps	xiv
List of tables	xviii
List of figures	xxii
Acknowledgements	xxiii
Glossary and explanatory notes	xxv
1 Introduction	1
2 Methods	7
3 Demography and socioeconomic status	15
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes	
Age distribution	
children aged 0 to 4 years	22
people aged 65 years and over	26
Families	
single parent families	30
low income families	34
Labour force	
unskilled and semi-skilled workers	38
unemployed people	40
female labour force participation	44
Educational participation and achievement	
people who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school	48
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	52
People born in predominantly non-English speaking countries	
number resident in Australia for five years or more	56
number resident in Australia for less than five years	60
proficiency in English	64
Housing	
dwellings rented from State/Territory housing authority	68
dwellings with no motor vehicle	72
SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage	76
4 Income support payments	81
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes	
Age pensioners	84
Disability support pensioners	88
Female sole parent pensioners	92
People receiving an unemployment benefit	96
Dependent children of selected pensioners and beneficiaries	100

Chapter		Page
5 Health status		105
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes		
Synthetic Predictions of selected health status measures		111
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes		
People reporting their health as fair or poor		114
Physical Component Summary, SF36		118
Handicap status		122
Deaths		127
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes		
under one year of age : infant deaths		134
15 to 64 year olds		
all causes: males		138
all causes: females		142
all cancers		146
lung cancer		150
circulatory system diseases		154
respiratory system diseases		158
accidents, poisonings and violence		163
15 to 24 year olds		
accidents, poisonings and violence		170
Years of potential life lost		174
Total Fertility Rate		179
6 Utilisation of health services		185
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes		
Hospital admissions (including for surgical procedures)		187
Introduction and explanatory notes		
public acute hospitals and private hospitals		198
public acute hospitals		202
private hospitals		206
public acute and private hospitals		
males		210
females		214
same day patients		218
infectious and parasitic diseases		222
all cancers		226
lung cancer		230
cancer of the female breast		234
psychosis		238
neurotic, personality or other mental disorders		242
all circulatory system diseases		246
ischaemic heart disease		250
all respiratory system diseases		254
0 to 4 years olds with respiratory system disease		258
bronchitis, emphysema and asthma		262
accidents, poisonings and violence		266

Chapter	Page
Hospital admissions for surgical procedures	271
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes	271
admissions for a surgical procedure	274
same day admissions for a surgical procedure	278
tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy	282
myringotomy	286
Caesarean section	290
hysterectomy	294
hip replacement	298
lens insertion	302
endoscopy	306
General medical practitioner (GP) services	311
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes	311
GP services	
males	314
females	318
Immunisation status of one year old children	322
7 Availability of selected health services	327
Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes	327
Population per GP	330
Hospital beds	
public acute hospitals	334
private hospitals	338
Residential care places	
Nursing home places	342
Hostel places	346
8 Statistical analysis	351
Introduction and explanatory notes	351
Correlation analysis	
Cluster analysis	357
9 Summary of findings	359
Introduction	
Changes in data rates between editions	359
Summary of findings by socioeconomic status of area of residence	360
Appendix 1: Supporting documentation	371
1.1 Project resources and output	373
1.2 Geographic areas mapped	375
1.3 Analysis and presentation of data	385
1.4 Classification of deaths, admissions and procedures	387
1.5 Synthetic estimates for small area	389
Bibliography	393
Index	401

List of maps

Chapter & Map	Page
2 Methods	
2.1 Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA), 1996	9
3 Demography and socioeconomic status	
3.1 Children aged 0 to 4 years, major urban centres, 1996	23
3.2 Children aged 0 to 4 years, Australia, 1996	25
3.3 People aged 65 years and over, major urban centres, 1996	27
3.4 People aged 65 years and over, Australia, 1996	29
3.5 Single parent families, major urban centres, 1996	31
3.6 Single parent families, Australia, 1996	33
3.7 Low income families, major urban centres, 1996	35
3.8 Low income families, Australia, 1996	37
3.9 Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, major urban centres, 1996	39
3.10 Unemployed people, major urban centres, 1996	41
3.11 Unemployed people, Australia, 1996	43
3.12 Female labour force participation, major urban centres, 1996	45
3.13 Female labour force participation, Australia, 1996	47
3.14 People who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school, major urban centres, 1996	49
3.15 People who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school, Australia, 1996	51
3.16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, major urban centres, 1996	53
3.17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Australia, 1996	55
3.18 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for five years or more, major urban centres, 1996	57
3.19 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for five years or more, Australia, 1996	59
3.20 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident for less than five years, major urban centres, 1996	61
3.21 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident for less than five years, Australia, 1996	63
3.22 Poor proficiency in English of people aged five years and over and born in predominately non-English speaking countries, major urban centres, 1996	65
3.23 Poor proficiency in English of people aged five years and over and born in predominately non-English speaking countries, Australia, 1996	67
3.24 Dwellings rented from the State housing authority, major urban centres, 1996	69
3.25 Dwellings rented from the State housing authority, Australia, 1996	71
3.26 Dwellings with no motor vehicles, major urban centres, 1996	73
3.27 Dwellings with no motor vehicles, Australia, 1996	75
3.28 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, major urban centres, 1996	77
3.29 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, Australia, 1996	79
4 Income support payments	
4.1 Age pensioners, major urban centres, 30 June 1996	85
4.2 Age pensioners, Australia, 30 June 1996	87
4.3 Disability support pensioners, major urban centres, 30 June 1996	89
4.4 Disability support pensioners, Australia, 30 June 1996	91
4.5 Female sole parent pensioners, major urban centres, 30 June 1996	93
4.6 Female sole parent pensioners, Australia, 30 June 1996	95
4.7 People receiving an unemployment benefit, major urban centres, 30 June 1996	97
4.8 People receiving an unemployment benefit, Australia, 30 June 1996	99
4.9 Dependent children of selected pensioners and beneficiaries, major urban centres, 30 June 1996	101
4.10 Dependent children of selected pensioners and beneficiaries, Australia, 30 June 1996	103

Chapter & Map		Page
5	Health status	
5.1	People reporting their health as fair or poor, major urban centres, 1995	115
5.2	People reporting their health as fair or poor, Australia, 1995	117
5.3	Physical Component Summary, SF-36, major urban centres, 1995	119
5.4	Physical Component Summary, SF-36, Australia, 1995	121
5.5	Estimated number of people with a handicap, major urban centres, 1993	123
5.6	Estimated number of people with a handicap, Australia, 1993	125
5.7	Infant deaths, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	135
5.8	Infant deaths, Australia, 1992 to 1995	137
5.9	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	139
5.10	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, Australia, 1992 to 1995	141
5.11	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	143
5.12	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, Australia, 1992 to 1995	145
5.13	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	147
5.14	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, Australia, 1992 to 1995	149
5.15	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from lung cancer, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	151
5.16	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from lung cancer, Australia 1992 to 1995	153
5.17	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	155
5.18	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, Australia, 1992 to 1995	157
5.19	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995.	159
5.20	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases, Australia, 1992 to 1995	161
5.21	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	167
5.22	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, Australia, 1992 to 1995	169
5.23	Deaths of people aged 15 to 24 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	171
5.24	Deaths of people aged 15 to 24 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, Australia, 1992 to 1995	173
5.25	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years; years of potential life lost, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	175
5.26	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years; years of potential life lost, Australia, 1992 to 1995	177
5.27	Total Fertility Rate, major urban centres, 1992 to 1995	181
5.28	Total Fertility Rate, Australia, 1992 to 1995	183
6	Utilisation of health services	
6.1	Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, major urban centres, 1995/96	199
6.2	Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, Australia, 1995/96	201
6.3	Admissions to public acute hospitals, major urban centres, 1995/96	203
6.4	Admissions to public acute hospitals, Australia, 1995/96	205
6.5	Admissions to private hospitals, major urban centres, 1995/96	207
6.6	Admissions to private hospitals, Australia, 1995/96	209
6.7	Admissions of males, major urban centres, 1995/96	211
6.8	Admissions of males, Australia, 1995/96	213
6.9	Admissions of females, major urban centres, 1995/96	215
6.10	Admissions of females, Australia, 1995/96	217
6.11	Same day admissions, major urban centres, 1995/96	219
6.12	Same day admissions, Australia, 1995/96	221
6.13	Admissions for infectious and parasitic diseases, major urban centres, 1995/96	223
6.14	Admissions for infectious and parasitic diseases, Australia, 1995/96	225
6.15	Admissions for cancer, major urban centres, 1995/96	227
6.16	Admissions for cancer, Australia, 1995/96	229
6.17	Admissions for lung cancer, major urban centres, 1995/96	231
6.18	Admissions for lung cancer, Australia, 1995/96	233
6.19	Admissions of females aged 40 years and over for breast cancer, major urban centres, 1995/96	235
6.20	Admissions of females aged 40 years and over for breast cancer, Australia, 1995/96	237
6.21	Admissions for psychosis, major urban centres, 1995/96	239
6.22	Admissions for psychosis, Australia, 1995/96	241
6.23	Admissions for neurotic, personality or other mental disorders, major urban centres, 1995/96	243
6.24	Admissions for neurotic, personality or other mental disorders, Australia, 1995/96	245
6.25	Admissions for circulatory system diseases, major urban centres, 1995/96	247
6.26	Admissions for circulatory system diseases, Australia, 1995/96	249

Chapter & Map **Page**

6.27	Admissions for ischaemic heart disease, major urban centres, 1995/96	251
6.28	Admissions for ischaemic heart disease, Australia, 1995/96	253
6.29	Admissions for respiratory system disease, major urban centres, 1995/96	255
6.30	Admissions for respiratory system diseases, Australia, 1995/96	257
6.31	Admissions of children aged 0 to 4 years for respiratory system diseases, major urban centres, 1995/96	259
6.32	Admissions of children aged 0 to 4 years for respiratory system diseases, Australia, 1995/96	261
6.33	Admissions for bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, major urban centres, 1995/96	263
6.34	Admissions for bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, Australia, 1995/96	265
6.35	Admissions from accidents, poisonings and violence, major urban centres, 1995/96	267
6.36	Admissions from accidents, poisonings and violence, Australia, 1995/96	269
6.37	Admissions for a surgical procedure, major urban centres, 1995/96	275
6.38	Admissions for a surgical procedure, Australia, 1995/96	277
6.39	Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, major urban centres, 1995/96	279
6.40	Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, Australia, 1995/96	281
6.41	Admissions for tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, major urban centres, 1995/96	283
6.42	Admissions for tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, Australia, 1995/96	285
6.43	Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years for a myringotomy, major urban centres, 1995/96	287
6.44	Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years for a myringotomy, Australia, 1995/96	289
6.45	Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years for Caesarean section, major urban centres, 1995/96	291
6.46	Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years for Caesarean section, Australia, 1995/96	293
6.47	Admissions of females aged 30 years and over for hysterectomy, major urban centres, 1995/96	295
6.48	Admissions of females aged 30 years and over for hysterectomy, Australia, 1995/96	297
6.49	Admissions for hip replacement, major urban centres, 1995/96	299
6.50	Admissions for hip replacement, Australia, 1995/96	301
6.51	Admissions for lens insertion, major urban centres, 1995/96	303
6.52	Admissions for lens insertion, Australia, 1995/96	305
6.53	Admissions for endoscopies, major urban centres, 1995/96	307
6.54	Admissions for endoscopies, Australia, 1995/96	309
6.55	General medical practitioner services to males, major urban centres, 1996	315
6.56	General medical practitioner services to males, Australia, 1996	317
6.57	General medical practitioner services to females, major urban centres, 1996	319
6.58	General medical practitioner services to females, Australia, 1996	321
6.59	Immunisation status of children at 12 months of age, major urban centres, 1998	323
6.60	Immunisation status of children at 12 months of age, Australia, 1998	325

7 Availability of selected health services

7.1	Population per general medical practitioner, major urban centres, 1996/97	331
7.2	Population per general medical practitioner, Australia, 1996/97	333
7.3	Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, major urban centres, 1995/96	335
7.4	Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, Australia, 1995/96	337
7.5	Private hospital beds per 1,000 population, major urban centres, 30 June 1997	339
7.6	Private hospital beds per 1,000 population, Australia, 30 June 1997	341
7.7	Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, major urban centres, 30 June 1997	343
7.8	Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, Australia, 30 June 1997	345
7.9	Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, major urban centres, 30 June 1997	347
7.10	Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, Australia, 30 June 1997	349

Appendix 1

A1	Key to areas mapped for the capital cities, 1996	376
A2	Key to areas mapped for the capital cities, 1994	378
A3	Key to areas mapped for Australia, 1996	380
A4	Key to areas mapped for Australia, 1994	382

List of tables

Chapter & Table	Page
1 Introduction	
1.1 Correlation coefficients for small areas in the	2
1.2 Small area data of relevance to the National Health Priority Areas	4
2 Methods	
2.1 Conversion of 1996 deaths data to SLA using the ABS Census-based postcode converter: deaths by age group for selected SLAs, South Australia, 1996	11
2.2 Area names used	13
3 Demography and socioeconomic status	
3.1 State and Territory populations, 1947 to 1996	15
3.2 Proportion of the State and Northern Territory populations resident in the capital city, 1947 to 1996	16
3.3 Population in capital cities, 1996	16
3.4 Projected population, Australia, 1996 to 2016	17
3.5 Population of indigenous Australians, 1986 to 1996	18
3.6 Details of demographic and socioeconomic variables mapped	20
3.7 Proportion of population aged 0 to 4 years, capital cities	22
3.8 Proportion of population aged 0 to 4 years, State/Territory	24
3.9 Proportion of population aged 65 years and over, capital cities	26
3.10 Proportion of population aged 65 years and over, State/Territory	28
3.11 Single parent families, capital cities	30
3.12 Single parent families, State/Territory	32
3.13 Low income families, capital cities	34
3.14 Low income families, State/Territory	36
3.15 Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, capital cities	38
3.16 Unemployed people, capital cities	40
3.17 Unemployed people, State/Territory	42
3.18 Female labour force participation, capital cities	44
3.19 Female labour force participation, State/Territory	46
3.20 People who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school, capital cities	48
3.21 People who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school, State/Territory	50
3.22 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, capital cities	52
3.23 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, State/Territory	54
3.24 People born in predominantly non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for 5 years or more, capital cities	56
3.25 People born in predominantly non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for 5 years or more, State/Territory	58
3.26 People born in predominantly non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for less than 5 years, capital cities	60
3.27 People born in predominantly non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for less than 5 years, State/Territory	62
3.28 Poor proficiency in English of people aged 5 years and over and born in predominantly non-English speaking countries, capital cities	64
3.29 Poor proficiency in English of people aged 5 years and over and born in predominantly non-English speaking countries, State/Territory	66
3.30 Dwellings rented from the State housing authority, capital cities	68
3.31 Dwellings rented from the State housing authority, State/Territory	70
3.32 Dwellings with no motor vehicle, capital cities	72
3.33 Dwellings with no motor vehicle, State/Territory	74
3.34 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, capital cities	76
3.35 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, State/Territory	78

4	Income support payments	
4.1	Income support payments mapped, 30 June 1996	81
4.2	Age pensioners, capital cities	84
4.3	Age pensioners, State/Territory	86
4.4	Disability support pensioners, capital cities	88
4.5	Disability support pensioners, State/Territory	90
4.6	Female sole parent pensioners, capital cities	92
4.7	Female sole parent pensioners, State/Territory	94
4.8	People receiving an unemployment benefit, capital cities	96
4.9	People receiving an unemployment benefit, State/Territory	98
4.10	Dependent children of selected pensioners and beneficiaries, capital cities	100
4.11	Dependent children of selected pensioners and beneficiaries, State/Territory	102
5	Health Status	
5.1	Health status indicators by socioeconomic disadvantage of area and sex, Australia, late 1980s	105
5.2	Rate ratio of mortality inequality by socioeconomic disadvantage of area, 1985-87 and 1995-97	106
5.3	People reporting their health as fair or poor, capital cities	114
5.4	People reporting their health as fair or poor, State/Territory	116
5.5	Physical Component Summary, capital cities, 1995	118
5.6	Physical Component Summary, State/Territory, 1995	120
5.7	Estimated number of people with a handicap, capital cities	122
5.8	Estimated number of people with a handicap, State/Territory	124
5.9	Deaths by cause and age, Australia, 1992 to 1995	129
5.10	Deaths by selected cause and area, Australia, 1992 to 1995	129
5.11	Infant deaths, capital cities	134
5.12	Infant deaths, State/Territory	136
5.13	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, capital cities	138
5.14	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, State/Territory	140
5.15	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, capital cities	142
5.16	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, State/Territory	144
5.17	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, capital cities	146
5.18	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, State/Territory	148
5.19	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from lung cancer, capital cities	150
5.20	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from lung cancer, State/Territory	152
5.21	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, capital cities	154
5.22	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, State/Territory	156
5.23	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases, capital cities	158
5.24	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases, State/Territory	160
5.25	Deaths from accidents, poisonings & violence, by cause, Australia, 1992 to 1995	163
5.26	Deaths from accidents, poisonings and violence, by area of residence, Australia, 1992 to 1995	163
5.27	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, capital cities	166
5.28	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, State/Territory	168
5.29	Deaths of people aged 15 to 24 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, capital cities	170
5.30	Deaths of people aged 15 to 24 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, State/Territory	172
5.31	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years: years of potential life lost, capital cities, 1992 to 1995	174
5.32	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years; years of potential life lost, State/Territory, 1992 to 1995	176
5.33	Total Fertility Rate, capital cities, 1992 to 1995	180
5.34	Total Fertility Rate, State/Territory, 1992 to 1995	182

6 Utilisation of health services	
6.1 Health service use by socioeconomic disadvantage of area and sex, Australia, late 1980s	185
6.2 Admissions of indigenous Australians to public acute and private hospitals, by cause, Australia, 1996/97	188
6.3 Public acute and private hospital admissions included in the analysis, Australia, 1995/96	194
6.4 Public acute and private hospital admissions, by type of admission: Comparison between editions	196
6.5 Admissions by State/Territory of residence of patient and State/Territory of location of hospital, 1995/96	196
6.6 Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, capital cities	198
6.7 Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, State/Territory	200
6.8 Admissions to public acute hospitals, capital cities, 1995/96	202
6.9 Admissions to public acute hospitals, State/Territory, 1995/96	204
6.10 Admissions to private hospitals, capital cities, 1995/96	206
6.11 Admissions to private hospitals, State/Territory, 1995/96	208
6.12 Admissions of males, capital cities	210
6.13 Admissions of males, State/Territory	212
6.14 Admissions of females, capital cities	214
6.15 Admissions of females, State/Territory	216
6.16 Same day admissions, capital cities, 1995/96	218
6.17 Same day admissions, State/Territory, 1995/96	220
6.18 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of infectious and parasitic diseases, capital cities	222
6.19 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of infectious and parasitic diseases, State/Territory	224
6.20 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of cancer, capital cities	226
6.21 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of cancer, State/Territory	228
6.22 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of lung cancer, capital cities	230
6.23 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of lung cancer, State/Territory	232
6.24 Admissions of females aged 40 years and over with a principal diagnosis of breast cancer, capital cities	234
6.25 Admissions of females aged 40 years and over with a principal diagnosis of breast cancer, State/Territory	236
6.26 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of psychosis, capital cities, 1995/96	238
6.27 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of psychosis, State/Territory, 1995/96	240
6.28 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of neurotic, personality or other mental disorders, capital cities, 1995/96	242
6.29 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of neurotic, personality or other mental disorders, State/Territory, 1995/96	244
6.30 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of circulatory system diseases, capital cities	246
6.31 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of circulatory system diseases, State/Territory	248
6.32 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of ischaemic heart disease, capital cities	250
6.33 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of ischaemic heart disease, State/Territory	252
6.34 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, capital cities	254
6.35 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, State/Territory	256
6.36 Admissions of 0 to 4 year olds with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, capital cities	258
6.37 Admissions of 0 to 4 year olds with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, State/Territory	260
6.38 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, capital cities	262
6.39 Admissions with a principal diagnosis of bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, State/Territory	264
6.40 Admissions with an external cause of accidents, poisonings and violence, capital cities	266
6.41 Admissions with an external cause of accidents, poisonings and violence, State/Territory	268
6.42 Admission rates for selected sentinel procedures, public and private hospitals, 1996/1997	271
6.43 Standardised admission ratios for selected surgical procedures, public and private hospitals	272
6.44 Admissions for a surgical procedure, capital cities, 1995/96	274
6.45 Admissions for a surgical procedure, State/Territory, 1995/96	276
6.46 Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, capital cities, 1995/96	278
6.47 Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, State/Territory, 1995/96	280
6.48 Admissions with a principal procedure of tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, capital cities, 1995/96	282
6.49 Admissions with a principal procedure of tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, State/Territory, 1995/96	284
6.50 Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years with a principal procedure of myringotomy, capital cities, 1995/96	286
6.51 Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years with a principal procedure of myringotomy, State/Territory, 1995/96	288
6.52 Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years with a principal procedure of Caesarean section, capital cities, 1995/96	290
6.53 Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years with a principal procedure of Caesarean section, State/Territory, 1995/96	292
6.54 Admissions of females aged 30 years and over with a principal procedure of hysterectomy, capital cities, 1995/96	294
6.55 Admissions of females aged 30 years and over with a principal procedure of hysterectomy, State/Territory, 1995/96	296

Chapter & Table**Page**

6.56	Admissions with a principal procedure of hip replacement, capital cities, 1995/96	298
6.57	Admissions with a principal procedure of hip replacement, State/Territory, 1995/96	300
6.58	Admissions for lens insertion, capital cities, 1995/96	302
6.59	Admissions for lens insertion, State/Territory, 1995/96	304
6.60	Admissions with a principal procedure of endoscopy, capital cities, 1995/96	306
6.61	Admissions with a principal procedure of endoscopy, State/Territory, 1995/96	308
6.62	Location of Royal Flying Doctor Service bases and number of services, 1997	312
6.63	General medical practitioner services to males, capital cities	314
6.64	General medical practitioner services to males, State/Territory	316
6.65	General medical practitioner services to females, capital cities	318
6.66	General medical practitioner services to females, State/Territory	320
6.67	Proportion of children who were fully immunised at 12 months of age, capital cities, 1998	322
6.68	Proportion of children who were fully immunised at 12 months of age, capital cities, 1998	324

7 Availability of selected health services

7.1	Patient days for nursing home type patients in public acute hospitals, by area, States and Territories, 1997/98	328
7.2	Nursing home and hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, 1997	328
7.3	Population per general medical practitioner, capital cities	330
7.4	Population per general medical practitioner, State/Territory	332
7.5	Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, capital cities	334
7.6	Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, State/Territory	336
7.7	Private hospitals beds per 1,000 population, capital cities	338
7.8	Private hospital beds per 1,000 population, State/Territory	340
7.9	Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, capital cities	342
7.10	Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, State/Territory	344
7.11	Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, capital cities	346
7.12	Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, State/Territory	348

8 Statistical analysis

8.1	Correlation matrix for SLAs in the capital cities and other major urban centres	353
8.2	Correlation matrix for SLAs in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia	355

9 Summary of findings

9.1	Changes in demographic and socioeconomic status variables, by Section of Australia	359
9.2	Changes in selected health status variables, by Section of Australia	360

Appendix

A1	Key to Statistical Subdivisions in the capital cities, 1996	377
A2	Key to Statistical Subdivisions in the capital cities, 1994	379
A3	Key to Statistical Subdivisions in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia, 1996	381
A4	Key to Statistical Subdivisions in the non-metropolitan areas of Australia, 1994	383
A5	Data sources	386
A6	ICD-9 Codes for causes of death mapped in Chapter 5	387
A7	ICD-9 Codes for diagnoses/external causes mapped in Chapter 6	387
A8	ICPM Codes for surgical procedures mapped in Chapter 6	387

List of figures

Chapter & Figure	Page
3 Demography and socioeconomic status	
3.1 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, capital cities	19
3.2 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, Rest of State/Territory	19
4 Income support payments	
4.1 Age pensioners, Australia, 1996	82
4.2 Disability support pensioners, Australia, 1996	82
4.3 Female sole parent pensioners, Australia, 1996	83
4.4 Unemployment beneficiaries, Australia, 1996	83
5 Health Status	
5.1 Death rates by age group, Australia	128
5.2 Death rates of people aged from 15 to 64 years, by cause, Australia	128
5.3 Deaths from all causes, by age and sex, Australia, 1992 to 1995	130
5.4 Deaths from cancer, by age and sex, Australia, 1992 to 1995	130
5.5 Deaths from circulatory system diseases, by age and sex, Australia, 1992 to 1995	130
5.6 Deaths from respiratory system diseases, by age and sex, Australia, 1992 to 1995	131
5.7 Deaths from accidents, poisonings and violence, by age and sex, Australia, 1992 to 1995	131
5.8 Suicide rates of people aged from 25 to 64 years: Capital cities and Rest of Australia	132
5.9 Suicide rates of people aged from 15 to 24 years, Capital cities and Rest of Australia	133
5.10 Total Fertility Rate, Capital cities and Rest of Australia, 1992 to 1995	179
6 Utilisation of health services	
6.1 Admissions to public acute and private hospitals, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	188
6.2 Admissions to public acute hospitals, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	189
6.3 Admissions to private hospitals, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	189
6.4 Same day admissions, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	190
6.5 Admissions for circulatory system diseases, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	190
6.6 Admissions for respiratory system diseases, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	191
6.7 Admissions from accidents, poisonings and violence, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	191
6.8 Admissions for a surgical procedure, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	192
6.9 Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, by age and sex, Australia, 1995/96	192
6.10 General medical practitioner services, by age and sex, Australia, 1996-97	312
9 Summary of findings	
9.1 Differentials in IRSD scores for SSDs in the major urban centres	361
9.2 Health status differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, major urban centres	362
9.3 Health service utilisation differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, major urban centres	363
9.4 Health status differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, non-metropolitan Australia	365
9.5 Health service utilisation differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, non-metropolitan Australia	366
9.6 Change in health status by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, capital cities and other major urban centres	369

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The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) provided the majority of the hospital inpatient data included in Chapter 6. They also provided other material for this chapter, in addition to the data mapped. The main individuals who assisted were Jenny Hargreaves, Janis Shaw and Paul Halliday. The State and Territory health agencies all provided additional details of hospital admissions not available from the AIHW (of admissions of residents of one State or Territory occurring in another); Mark Dickson of the New South Wales Department of Health also provided other background information used in Chapter 6.

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All of the data in Chapter 3, as well as a range of other data used throughout the atlas, were purchased from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The staff of the Adelaide office of the ABS handled these requests and were thorough and helpful in assisting us to define the data so that it was comparable with that published in the first edition of the atlas.

The cluster analysis was a major exercise and was undertaken in a highly professional manner by Graeme Tucker. The ARIA graphs and the graphs in Chapter 9 were exported from a module produced by Andrew McAlindon. This module streamlined the calculation of the many rates, percentages etc. used in these sections of the atlas, as well as the production of the final graphs.

Diana Hetzel and Jeanette Pope provided invaluable support in strengthening the discussion of the socioeconomic determinants of health in Chapter 1. Diana contributed in a number of other ways, in particular by providing much of the referenced background material in the topic introductions throughout the atlas; she also read the final drafts. Tony Woollacott and Fearnley Szuster read a number of the earlier drafts and Fearnley also provided many useful comments on the later drafts. Thanks are also due to Julie Johinke who produced the cover design, and to Paul Doherty for the photographic image used.

The final responsibility for the content and comment remains with me.

John Glover
Project Manager
December 1999

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Glossary and Explanatory notes

Cause of death

Causes of death are classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to the Ninth (1975) Revision of the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9) which was adopted for world-wide use from 1979.

The cause of death particulars in this publication relate to the underlying cause of death, which the World Health Organisation has defined as the disease or injury which initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death. Accidental and violent deaths are classified to the circumstances of the accident or violence which produced the fatal injury. Deaths of infants aged less than one month are classified according to the main condition in the infant which contributed to the death.

Details of the ICD-9 codes applicable to the variables mapped in Chapter 5 are shown in Appendix 1.5.

Coding of hospital admissions

Diagnoses and procedures are classified according to the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM October 1988 Revision). External causes are classified according to ICD-9-CM Supplementary Classification of External Causes of Injury and Poisoning ('E' codes) classification codes.

Details of the codes applicable to the variables mapped in Chapter 6 are shown in Appendix 1.4.

Admissions

The technical term describing a completed hospital episode (ie. the discharge, death or transfer of a patient) is a 'separation'.

At the time of admission, the age, sex, address of usual residence and other personal details of the patient are recorded. At the end of the episode, at the time of separation from hospital, details of the episode itself are recorded, including the principal diagnosis (and other diagnoses), principal procedure (and other procedures), and the date, time and method (discharge, transfer or death) of separation. Consequently, hospital inpatient data collections are based on separations. In this atlas the more commonly used term of 'admission' has been used. In an analysis such as this, which excludes long stay patients (other than the few long stay acute patients), there is little difference between the number of admissions and the number of separations in a year. Also, 'admission' is a much more familiar term to many people who will use this atlas.

Standardised ratios

Data on which many of the variables have been mapped has been adjusted to remove differences in the data between areas mapped where those differences result from differences in the age and/or sex profiles of the populations being examined. This standardisation process is described in Appendix 1.3, *Analysis and presentation of data*.

Statistical Subdivisions

The Statistical Subdivision (SSD) is a standard geographic area established by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to cover the whole of Australia, for the purposes of geographically coding data. In Australia there were 194 SSDs at 1 July 1996 (ABS 1996).

Symbols used

- n.a. not available
- .. not applicable
- nil, or less than half the final digit shown

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