

# ***A SOCIAL HEALTH ATLAS OF AUSTRALIA***

***Second Edition***

## **Volume 3: Victoria**

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**December 1999**

 **Public Health Information Development Unit**

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## Related publications and software products

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A Social Health Atlas of Australia, 1992, Vols 1 & 2

HealthWIZ: details available at [www.prometheus.com.au](http://www.prometheus.com.au)

Social health atlas World Wide Web site: [www.publichealth.gov.au](http://www.publichealth.gov.au)

## Foreword

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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). Also included is a cluster analysis, providing profiles at the Statistical Local Area (SLA) level of the socioeconomic status, health status and health service utilisation of the population.

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 IRSD. 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 high rates of use of general medical practitioner (GP) services and socioeconomic disadvantage. At the SLA level in **Melbourne**, unlike the situation in other large cities (eg. **Sydney** and **Brisbane**), there were no consistent gradients between admission rates and socioeconomic disadvantage, as measured by the IRSD. There were, however, strong gradients evident with most of the variables for hospital admission by socioeconomic disadvantage of area in the non-metropolitan SLAs (**Figure 9.5**).

It is also clear that, despite the overall improvement in death 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 in death rates evident 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 SLA level between the indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage drawn from the 1996 Population Census and a number of the health status variables. In **Melbourne**, the strongest of these were generally

with the variables for people reporting their health as fair or poor (as opposed to those reporting their health as being excellent, very good, or good); the Physical Component Summary (PCS, a measure of physical health); years of potential life lost; and premature death from, in particular, circulatory system diseases. (**Table 8.1**). Similarly, strong associations were also evident in the correlation analysis with the health service use variables of GP services to males and females; and of admissions for neurotic, personality and other mental disorders and ischaemic heart disease; and admissions to a public acute hospital.

There were fewer correlations of significance at the SLA level in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria than was the case in **Melbourne**. 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 a number of variables are highly correlated with each other; these are the variables for low income families, unemployed people, single parent families, dwellings rented from the State housing authority and dwellings without a motor vehicle.

Various sub-sets of these are correlated with measures of health status and use of health services. The strongest correlations with the measures of socioeconomic disadvantage were with the variables for people reporting their health as fair or poor, and the PCS. There was a consistent, although weaker, pattern in the correlations between socioeconomic disadvantage and the variables for premature deaths of males and females, from respiratory and circulatory system diseases and years of potential life lost.

### Changes over time in socioeconomic status

Marked variations were recorded between 1986 and 1996 for a majority of the socioeconomic status variables mapped for Victoria (**Table 9.1**). For **Melbourne**, the largest increases were for the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (an increase of 73.7 per cent over this ten year period); unemployed people (58.0 per cent); low income families (52.8 per cent); single parent families (44.2 per cent); the occupational grouping of managers and administrators, and professionals (33.1 per cent); people aged 65 years and over (25.6 per cent) and people born overseas in predominantly non-English speaking countries: an increase of 24.5 per cent for those resident for five years or more, and of 21.0 per cent for those resident for less than five years. The largest decreases recorded over this ten year period were for the variables for unskilled and semi-skilled workers (down by 17.6 per cent) and early school leavers (down by 17.4 per cent).

Variations of this order were also recorded in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria. The major differences from the changes noted for **Melbourne** were the larger increases in the number of single parent families; smaller increases for the population of Indigenous people, unemployed people, low income families, the occupations of managers and administrators and professionals, and the population of people aged 65 years and over; and decreases for the two variables for

people born overseas in predominantly non-English speaking countries.

Changes over this period for **Geelong** were relatively consistent with those recorded for **Melbourne**, with the exception of the population aged from 0 to 4 years, female labour force participation, the Indigenous population, unemployment (all ages), people born overseas in predominantly non-English speaking countries resident in Australia for more than five years, people with poor proficiency in English and housing authority rented dwellings.

Substantial increases were recorded in income support payments to residents of **Melbourne** for all of the payment types analysed, other than the Age Pension, for which there was only a small increase (5.0 per cent). Of the other payment types, the number of unemployment beneficiaries more than doubled (an increase of 269.7 per cent), with a similar increase occurring for dependent children in families receiving an income support payment (104.2 per cent) (**Table 9.1**). Similar, although smaller, increases were recorded in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria for all of these income support payments other than the Age Pension (showing little change, down by 0.4 per cent). The increases in **Geelong** fall between those recorded for the non-metropolitan areas of the State and **Melbourne**.

### Changes over time in death rates

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

In **Melbourne**, the largest decreases were recorded for the infant death rate (down by 36.6 per cent); and for deaths of people aged from 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases (down by 41.8 per cent), circulatory system diseases (down by 41.1 per cent), lung cancer (down by 26.5 per cent) and accidents, poisonings and violence (down by 28.1 per cent). All causes mortality was 25.8 per cent lower over this period, marginally more so for males than for females. There were reductions for every category in **Table 9.2** for **Geelong**.

There were also reductions in rates of premature death in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria for all major causes of deaths. However the reductions were all lower than those recorded for **Melbourne**, with the exception of deaths from accidents, poisonings and violence (which recorded a slightly larger reduction). All cause mortality in non-metropolitan Victoria was just over three quarters (76.7 per cent) that in **Melbourne**.

### 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 health status data, the socioeconomic status of the SLA of usual residence in the health status records is used. In this analysis socioeconomic status is measured by the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD, see page 19). The SLAs in the major urban centres of **Melbourne** and **Geelong** have been grouped 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. This

exercise was repeated for SLAs in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria.

### Health status by socioeconomic status of area of residence

Although there is some variability across the quintiles, the pattern is generally 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 major exception is the Physical Component Summary (PCS), for which low scores indicate poorer health (**Figure 9.4**). Despite the narrow range of these mean values, there is a clear gradient evident across the quintiles of socioeconomic disadvantage of area. The Total Fertility Rate is the same in both Quintiles 1 and 5, with higher rates in the intervening quintiles.

Years of potential life lost (YPLL) from deaths between the ages of 15 to 64 years varied from a standardised ratio (SR) in the most advantaged areas of 79 (21 per cent fewer YPLL than were expected from the Victorian State rates) to an SR of 123 in the most disadvantaged areas (indicating that there were 23 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 75 in Quintile 1 to 133 in Quintile 5) and deaths of 15 to 64 years olds from lung cancer (73 to 129), circulatory system diseases (69 to 127) and respiratory system diseases (61 to 133).

The most notable differences from the gradients evident for **Melbourne** and **Geelong** are higher overall SDRs for most variables and the higher overall Total Fertility Rates (**Figure 9.4**).

### Health service utilisation by socioeconomic status of area of residence

Although there is some variability across the quintiles, the pattern evident for a number of variables is 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 exceptions include the graphs for admissions to a private hospital; admissions for neurotic, personality and other mental disorders; same day admissions for a surgical procedure and admissions for the surgical procedures of myringotomy, hip replacement, lens insertion and endoscopy. Others, including the graph for total admissions (including same day admissions and surgical admissions), admissions of males and of females and for all cancers reveal a less consistent pattern. There are also strong gradients evident for the use of GP services, although there is little variation by socioeconomic status of area of residence for immunisation status at 12 months of age (**Figure 9.3**).

The main differences in the non-metropolitan areas from the data for **Melbourne** and **Geelong** are the higher overall standardised ratios and the weakening or reversal of the gradients for admissions for psychosis and for neurotic, personality and other mental disorders; for the surgical procedures of myringotomy, hip replacement, lens insertion and endoscopy; and the use of GP services. The graphs for immunisation again show little variation by socioeconomic status of area of residence (**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 Victoria; 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. As data was not available for non-metropolitan SLAs in the first edition of the atlas, the following comparisons have been limited to **Melbourne** and **Geelong**.

With the exception of the 'other' causes group (for which there was an increase in death rates in Quintile 5), death rates in **Melbourne** and **Geelong** 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 1.27 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.78 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 1.16 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.37 times higher in 1992-95.

Infant death rates declined by around one third (36.6 per cent) in **Melbourne** and by around half (47.7 per cent) in **Geelong** respectively between 1985-89 and 1992-95, however the differential in rates between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 increased, from 1.32 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.37 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 1.09 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.34 times higher in 1992-95 for all cancers, and from 1.25 to 1.76 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 **Melbourne** and one third in **Geelong**. The differential in rates between Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 increased, however, from 1.25 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas in 1985-89 to 1.83 times higher in 1992-95.

The gradients in death rates from respiratory system diseases across the quintiles of socioeconomic status of area of residence in **Melbourne** and **Geelong** are particularly strong over both periods. In 1985-89, the differential between Quintiles 1 and 5 was 1.45; by 1992-95 this had increased by 47.8 per cent a substantial differential of 2.14.

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 **Melbourne** and **Geelong**. Again, the differential in 1992-95 is higher than in 1985-89 (up from 1.21 to 1.54). This is a result of the larger declines in death rates in the first three Quintiles.

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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 Victoria and a companion volume (Volume 3.1) containing the data mapped (the numbers and rate/ratio/percentages on which the maps are based); and
- similar volumes for each of the other States and Territories and a separate atlas for Australia as a whole (each of these atlases also has a companion volume containing 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 at a small area level. 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](http://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 SLAs 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.

## Map of Melbourne and Geelong

### Area mapped

The area mapped is the Statistical Division of **Melbourne** (generally known as the capital city area) and the Statistical Subdivision of **Geelong**. **Geelong** is referred to as 'other major urban centre': together with **Melbourne**, they comprise the two major urban centres (urban centres with a population of 100,000 or more) in Victoria. The spatial unit mapped is the Statistical Local Area (SLA).

Additional details, including key maps to assist in the location and identification of particular SLAs, 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 SLA 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 is 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, and associations evident in the correlation analysis with other variables are noted. Users should note that in these descriptions, where data has been standardised, it has been re-calculated to a new standard – in this atlas, to the Victorian State rates (rather than the Australian rates). This allows comparisons to be made between the rates for the SLAs within **Melbourne** and **Geelong**, and the Victorian rates – ie. in effect the State average. This differs from the commentary on the top of the page, for which comparisons are made with the Australian rates.

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 Victoria: referred to as the 'non-metropolitan areas' of Victoria

##### Area mapped

The spatial units mapped are again SLAs: however **Melbourne** and **Geelong** are each mapped as one area (ie. not by SLA) to enhance comparisons between these major urban centres and the non-metropolitan areas.

Towns with a population of 7,500 or more (but less than the urban centre cut-off of 100,000) are represented on the maps as circles. Unfortunately, data for many towns is not available for the datasets in the atlas (other than the Census data).

As noted above in relation to the map of **Melbourne**, additional details are in *Appendix 1.2*: a set of clear film overlays to assist in the location and identification of particular SLAs is included in a pocket inside the back cover of this atlas.

#### Data measures mapped

See comments above concerning **Melbourne**.

#### 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, and associations evident in the correlation analysis with other variables are noted. Users should note that in these descriptions, where data has been standardised, it has been re-calculated to a new standard – in this atlas, to the Victorian State rates (rather than the Australian rates). This allows comparisons to be made between the rates for the SLAs within the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria and the State rates – ie. in effect the State average.

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 SLAs 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 Victoria 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
<b>Foreword</b>	iii
<b>Executive summary</b>	v
<b>Using the <i>Social Health Atlas</i></b>	ix
<b>List of maps</b>	xiv
<b>List of tables</b>	xviii
<b>List of figures</b>	xxii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	xxiii
<b>Glossary and explanatory notes</b>	xxv
<b>1 Introduction</b>	1
<b>2 Methods</b>	7
<b>3 Demography and socioeconomic status</b>	17
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
<b>Age distribution</b>	
children aged 0 to 4 years	22
people aged 65 years and over	26
<b>Families</b>	
single parent families	30
low income families	34
<b>Labour force</b>	
unskilled and semi-skilled workers	38
unemployed people	40
female labour force participation	44
<b>Educational participation and achievement</b>	
people who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school	48
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</b>	52
<b>People born in predominantly non-English speaking countries</b>	
number resident in Australia for five years or more	56
number resident in Australia for less than five years	60
proficiency in English	64
<b>Housing</b>	
dwellings rented from State/Territory housing authority	68
dwellings with no motor vehicle	72
<b>SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage</b>	76
<b>4 Income support payments</b>	81
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
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

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>5 Health status</b>	105
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
<b>Synthetic Predictions of selected health status measures</b>	111
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
<b>People reporting their health as fair or poor</b>	114
<b>Physical Component Summary, SF36</b>	118
<b>Handicap status</b>	122
<b>Deaths</b>	127
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
under one year of age : infant deaths	134
15 to 64 year olds	
all causes: males	136
all causes: females	140
all cancers	144
lung cancer	148
circulatory system diseases	150
respiratory system diseases	154
accidents, poisonings and violence	157
15 to 24 year olds	
accidents, poisonings and violence	164
<b>Years of potential life lost</b>	166
<b>Total Fertility Rate</b>	175
<b>6 Utilisation of health services</b>	181
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
<b>Hospital admissions (including for surgical procedures)</b>	183
<b>Introduction and explanatory notes</b>	
public acute hospitals and private hospitals	194
public acute hospitals	198
private hospitals	202
public acute and private hospitals	
males	206
females	210
same day patients	214
infectious and parasitic diseases	218
all cancers	222
lung cancer	226
cancer of the female breast	230
psychosis	234
neurotic, personality and other disorder	238
all circulatory system diseases	242
ischaemic heart disease	246
all respiratory system diseases	250
0 to 4 years olds with respiratory system disease	254
bronchitis, emphysema and asthma	258
accidents, poisonings and violence	262

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Hospital admissions for surgical procedures</b>	267
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
admissions for a surgical procedure	270
same day admissions for a surgical procedure	274
tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy	278
myringotomy	282
Caesarean section	286
hysterectomy	290
hip replacement	294
lens insertion	298
endoscopy	302
<b>General medical practitioner (GP) services</b>	307
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
GP services	
males	310
females	314
<b>Immunisation status of one year old children</b>	318
<b>7 Availability of selected health services</b>	323
<b>Introduction, data sources and explanatory notes</b>	
Population per GP	326
Hospital beds	
public acute hospitals	330
private hospitals	334
Residential care places	
Nursing home places	338
Hostel places	342
<b>8 Statistical analysis</b>	347
<b>Introduction and explanatory notes</b>	
<b>Correlation analysis</b>	347
<b>Cluster analysis</b>	357
<b>9 Summary of findings</b>	377
<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>Changes in data rates between editions</b>	377
<b>Summary of findings by socioeconomic status of area of residence</b>	378
<b>Appendix 1: Supporting documentation</b>	389
1.1 Project resources and output	391
1.2 Geographic areas mapped	393
1.3 Analysis and presentation of data	403
1.4 Classification of deaths, admissions and procedures	405
1.5 Synthetic estimates for small areas	407
1.6 Additional details of cluster analysis	411
<b>Bibliography</b>	415
<b>Index</b>	425

# List of maps

<b>Chapter &amp; Map</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>2 Methods</b>	
2.1 Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA), 1996	9
2.2 Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA), for SLAs in Victoria, 1996	10
<b>3 Demography and socioeconomic status</b>	
3.1 Children aged 0 to 4 years, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	23
3.2 Children aged 0 to 4 years, Victoria, 1996	25
3.3 People aged 65 years and over, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	27
3.4 People aged 65 years and over, Victoria, 1996	29
3.5 Single parent families, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	31
3.6 Single parent families, Victoria, 1996	33
3.7 Low income families, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	35
3.8 Low income families, Victoria, 1996	37
3.9 Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	39
3.10 Unemployed people, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	41
3.11 Unemployed people, Victoria, 1996	43
3.12 Female labour force participation, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	45
3.13 Female labour force participation, Victoria, 1996	47
3.14 People who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	49
3.15 People who left school at age 15 years or less, or did not go to school, Victoria, 1996	51
3.16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	53
3.17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Victoria, 1996	55
3.18 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for five years or more, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	57
3.19 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident in Australia for five years or more, Victoria, 1996	59
3.20 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident for less than five years, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	61
3.21 People born in predominately non-English speaking countries and resident for less than five years, Victoria, 1996	63
3.22 Poor proficiency in English of people aged five years and over and born in predominately non-English speaking countries, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	65
3.23 Poor proficiency in English of people aged five years and over and born in predominately non-English speaking countries, Victoria, 1996	67
3.24 Dwellings rented from the State housing authority, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	69
3.25 Dwellings rented from the State housing authority, Victoria, 1996	71
3.26 Dwellings with no motor vehicles, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	73
3.27 Dwellings with no motor vehicles, Victoria, 1996	75
3.28 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	77
3.29 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, Victoria, 1996	79
<b>4 Income support payments</b>	
4.1 Age pensioners, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1996	85
4.2 Age pensioners, Victoria, 30 June 1996	87
4.3 Disability support pensioners, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1996	89
4.4 Disability support pensioners, Victoria, 30 June 1996	91
4.5 Female sole parent pensioners, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1996	93
4.6 Female sole parent pensioners, Victoria, 30 June 1996	95
4.7 People receiving an unemployment benefit, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1996	97
4.8 People receiving an unemployment benefit, Victoria, 30 June 1996	99
4.9 Dependent children of selected pensioners and beneficiaries, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1996	101
4.10 Dependent children of selected pensioners and beneficiaries, Victoria, 30 June 1996	103

**5 Health status**

5.1	People reporting their health as fair or poor, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995	115
5.2	People reporting their health as fair or poor, Victoria, 1995	117
5.3	Physical Component Summary, SF-36, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995	119
5.4	Physical Component Summary, SF-36, Victoria, 1995	121
5.5	Estimated number of people with a handicap, Melbourne and Geelong, 1993	123
5.6	Estimated number of people with a handicap, Victoria, 1993	125
5.7	Infant deaths, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	135
5.8	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	137
5.9	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	139
5.10	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	141
5.11	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	143
5.12	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	145
5.13	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	147
5.14	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from lung cancer, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	149
5.15	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	151
5.16	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	153
5.17	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995.	155
5.18	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	161
5.19	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	163
5.20	Deaths of people aged 15 to 24 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	165
5.21	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years; years of potential life lost, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	167
5.22	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years; years of potential life lost, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	169
5.23	Total Fertility Rate, Melbourne and Geelong, 1992 to 1995	177
5.24	Total Fertility Rate, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	179

**6 Utilisation of health services**

6.1	Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	195
6.2	Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, Victoria, 1995/96	197
6.3	Admissions to public acute hospitals, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	199
6.4	Admissions to public acute hospitals, Victoria, 1995/96	201
6.5	Admissions to private hospitals, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	203
6.6	Admissions to private hospitals, Victoria, 1995/96	205
6.7	Admissions of males, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	207
6.8	Admissions of males, Victoria, 1995/96	209
6.9	Admissions of females, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	211
6.10	Admissions of females, Victoria, 1995/96	213
6.11	Same day admissions, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	215
6.12	Same day admissions, Victoria, 1995/96	217
6.13	Admissions for infectious and parasitic diseases, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	219
6.14	Admissions for infectious and parasitic diseases, Victoria, 1995/96	221

<b>Chapter &amp; Map</b>	<b>Page</b>
6.15 Admissions for cancer, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	223
6.16 Admissions for cancer, Victoria, 1995/96	225
6.17 Admissions for lung cancer, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	227
6.18 Admissions for lung cancer, Victoria, 1995/96	229
6.19 Admissions of females aged 40 years and over for breast cancer, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	231
6.20 Admissions of females aged 40 years and over for breast cancer, Victoria, 1995/96	233
6.21 Admissions for psychosis, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	235
6.22 Admissions for psychosis, Victoria, 1995/96	237
6.23 Admissions for neurotic, personality and other mental disorders, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	239
6.24 Admissions for neurotic, personality and other mental disorders, Victoria, 1995/96	241
6.25 Admissions for circulatory system diseases, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	243
6.26 Admissions for circulatory system diseases, Victoria, 1995/96	245
6.27 Admissions for ischaemic heart disease, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	247
6.28 Admissions for ischaemic heart disease, Victoria, 1995/96	249
6.29 Admissions for respiratory system disease, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	251
6.30 Admissions for respiratory system diseases, Victoria, 1995/96	253
6.31 Admissions of children aged 0 to 4 years for respiratory system diseases, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	255
6.32 Admissions of children aged 0 to 4 years for respiratory system diseases, Victoria, 1995/96	257
6.33 Admissions for bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	259
6.34 Admissions for bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, Victoria, 1995/96	261
6.35 Admissions from accidents, poisonings and violence, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	263
6.36 Admissions from accidents, poisonings and violence, Victoria, 1995/96	265
6.37 Admissions for a surgical procedure, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	271
6.38 Admissions for a surgical procedure, Victoria, 1995/96	273
6.39 Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	275
6.40 Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, Victoria, 1995/96	277
6.41 Admissions for tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	279
6.42 Admissions for tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, Victoria, 1995/96	281
6.43 Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years for a myringotomy, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	283
6.44 Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years for a myringotomy, Victoria, 1995/96	285
6.45 Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years for a Caesarean section, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	287
6.46 Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years for a Caesarean section, Victoria, 1995/96	289
6.47 Admissions of females aged 30 years and over for an hysterectomy, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	291
6.48 Admissions of females aged 30 years and over for an hysterectomy, Victoria, 1995/96	293
6.49 Admissions for an hip replacement, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	295
6.50 Admissions for an hip replacement, Victoria, 1995/96	297
6.51 Admissions for a lens insertion, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	299
6.52 Admissions for a lens insertion, Victoria, 1995/96	301
6.53 Admissions for an endoscopy, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	303
6.54 Admissions for an endoscopy, Victoria, 1995/96	305
6.55 General medical practitioner services to males, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	311
6.56 General medical practitioner services to males, Victoria, 1996	313
6.57 General medical practitioner services to females, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	315
6.58 General medical practitioner services to females, Victoria, 1996	317
6.59 Immunisation status of children at 12 months of age, Melbourne and Geelong, 1998	319
6.60 Immunisation status of children at 12 months of age, Victoria, 1998	321



<b>Chapter &amp; Map</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>7 Availability of selected health services</b>	
7.1 Population per general medical practitioner, Melbourne and Geelong, 1996/97	327
7.2 Population per general medical practitioner, Victoria, 1996/97	329
7.3 Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, Melbourne and Geelong, 1995/96	331
7.4 Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, Victoria, 1995/96	333
7.5 Private hospital beds per 1,000 population, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1997	335
7.6 Private hospital beds per 1,000 population, Victoria, 30 June 1997	337
7.7 Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1997	339
7.8 Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, Victoria, 30 June 1997	341
7.9 Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, Melbourne and Geelong, 30 June 1997	343
7.10 Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, Victoria, 30 June 1997	345
<b>8 Statistical analysis</b>	
8.1 Socioeconomic clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong	362
8.2 Health status clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong	363
8.3 Health service utilisation clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong	364
8.4 Social health clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong	365
8.5 Socioeconomic clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Victoria	370
8.6 Health status clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Victoria	371
8.7 Health service utilisation clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Victoria	372
8.8 Social health clusters based on Statistical Local Areas in Victoria	373
<b>Appendix 1</b>	
A1 Key map for Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	395
A2 Key map for Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong, 1991-94	397
A3 Key map for Statistical Local Areas in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria, 1996	399
A4 Key map for Statistical Local Areas in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria, 1991-94	401

# List of tables

Chapter & Table	Page
<b>1 Introduction</b>	
1.1 Correlation coefficients for small areas in Melbourne	2
1.2 Small area data of relevance to the National Health Priority Areas	4
<b>2 Methods</b>	
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	12
2.2 Area name used	14
<b>3 Demography and socioeconomic status</b>	
3.1 Population and area, Victoria, 1996	17
3.2 Population of indigenous Australians, 1986 to 1996	18
3.3 Details of demographic and socioeconomic variables mapped	20
3.4 Proportion of population aged 0 to 4 years, capital cities	22
3.5 Proportion of population aged 0 to 4 years, State/Territory	24
3.6 Proportion of population aged 65 years and over, capital cities	26
3.7 Proportion of population aged 65 years and over, State/Territory	28
3.8 Structure of population aged 65 years and over, Victoria, 1986 and 1996	28
3.9 Single parent families, capital cities	30
3.10 Housing tenure by family type, Melbourne, 1996	30
3.11 Single parent families, State/Territory	32
3.12 Low income families, capital cities	34
3.13 Low income families, State/Territory	36
3.14 Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, capital cities	38
3.15 Unemployed people, capital cities	40
3.16 Unemployed people, State/Territory	42
3.17 Unemployment rates by age, sex and area, Victoria, 1996	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	Generic names for merged Statistical Local Areas	109
5.4	People reporting their health as fair or poor, capital cities	114
5.5	People reporting their health as fair or poor, State/Territory	116
5.6	Physical Component Summary, capital cities, 1995	118
5.7	Physical Component Summary, State/Territory, 1995	120
5.8	Estimated number of people with a handicap, capital cities	122
5.9	Estimated number of people with a handicap, State/Territory	124
5.10	Deaths by cause and age, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	129
5.11	Deaths by selected cause and area, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	130
5.12	Infant deaths, capital cities	134
5.13	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, capital cities	136
5.14	Deaths of males aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, State/Territory	138
5.15	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, capital cities	140
5.16	Deaths of females aged 15 to 64 years from all causes, State/Territory	142
5.17	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, capital cities	144
5.18	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from cancer, State/Territory	146
5.19	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from lung cancer, capital cities	148
5.20	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, capital cities	150
5.21	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from circulatory system diseases, State/Territory	152
5.22	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases, capital cities	154
5.23	Deaths from accidents, poisonings & violence, by cause, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	157
5.24	Deaths from accidents, poisonings and violence, by area of residence, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	157
5.25	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, capital cities	160
5.26	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, State/Territory	162
5.27	Deaths of people aged 15 to 24 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, capital cities	164
5.28	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years: years of potential life lost, capital cities, 1992 to 1995	166
5.29	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years: years of potential life lost, State/Territory, 1992 to 1995	168
5.30	Infant deaths, State/Territory	171
5.31	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from lung cancer, State/Territory	172
5.32	Deaths of people aged 15 to 64 years from respiratory system diseases, State/Territory	173
5.33	Deaths of people aged 15 to 24 years from accidents, poisonings and violence, State/Territory	174
5.34	Total Fertility Rate, capital cities, 1992 to 1995	176
5.35	Total Fertility Rate, State/Territory, 1992 to 1995	178

<b>6</b>	<b>Utilisation of health services</b>	
6.1	Health service use by socioeconomic disadvantage of area and sex, Australia, late 1980s	181
6.2	Admissions of indigenous Australians to public acute and private hospitals, by cause, Australia, 1996/97	184
6.3	Public acute and private hospital admissions included in the analysis, Victoria, 1995/96	190
6.4	Public acute and private hospital admissions, by type of admission: Comparison between editions	192
6.5	Admissions of residents of Victoria by State/Territory of location of hospital, 1995/96	192
6.6	Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, capital cities	194
6.7	Admissions to public acute hospitals and private hospitals, State/Territory	196
6.8	Admissions to public acute hospitals, capital cities, 1995/96	198
6.9	Admissions to public acute hospitals, State/Territory, 1995/96	200
6.10	Admissions to private hospitals, capital cities, 1995/96	202
6.11	Admissions to private hospitals, State/Territory, 1995/96	204
6.12	Admissions of males, capital cities	206
6.13	Admissions of males, State/Territory	208
6.14	Admissions of females, capital cities	210
6.15	Admissions of females, State/Territory	212
6.16	Same day admissions, capital cities, 1995/96	214
6.17	Same day admissions, State/Territory, 1995/96	216
6.18	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of infectious and parasitic diseases, capital cities	218
6.19	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of infectious and parasitic diseases, State/Territory	220
6.20	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of cancer, capital cities	222
6.21	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of cancer, State/Territory	224
6.22	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of lung cancer, capital cities	226
6.23	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of lung cancer, State/Territory	228
6.24	Admissions of females aged 40 years and over with a principal diagnosis of breast cancer, capital cities	230
6.25	Admissions of females aged 40 years and over with a principal diagnosis of breast cancer, State/Territory	232
6.26	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of psychosis, capital cities, 1995/96	234
6.27	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of psychosis, State/Territory, 1995/96	236
6.28	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of neurotic, personality or other mental disorders, capital cities, 1995/96	238
6.29	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of neurotic, personality or other mental disorders, State/Territory, 1995/96	240
6.30	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of circulatory system diseases, capital cities	242
6.31	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of circulatory system diseases, State/Territory	244
6.32	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of ischaemic heart disease, capital cities	246
6.33	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of ischaemic heart disease, State/Territory	248
6.34	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, capital cities	250
6.35	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, State/Territory	252
6.36	Admissions of 0 to 4 year olds with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, capital cities	254
6.37	Admissions of 0 to 4 year olds with a principal diagnosis of respiratory system diseases, State/Territory	256
6.38	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, capital cities	258
6.39	Admissions with a principal diagnosis of bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, State/Territory	260
6.40	Admissions with an external cause of accidents, poisonings and violence, capital cities	262
6.41	Admissions with an external cause of accidents, poisonings and violence, State/Territory	264
6.42	Admission rates for selected sentinel procedures, public and private hospitals, 1996/1997	267
6.43	Standardised admission ratios for selected surgical procedures, Victoria	267
6.44	Admissions for a surgical procedure, capital cities, 1995/96	270
6.45	Admissions for a surgical procedure, State/Territory, 1995/96	272
6.46	Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, capital cities, 1995/96	274
6.47	Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, State/Territory, 1995/96	276
6.48	Admissions with a principal procedure of tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, capital cities, 1995/96	278
6.49	Admissions with a principal procedure of tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy, State/Territory, 1995/96	280
6.50	Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years with a principal procedure of myringotomy, capital cities, 1995/96	282
6.51	Admissions of children aged 0 to 9 years with a principal procedure of myringotomy, State/Territory, 1995/96	284
6.52	Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years with a principal procedure of Caesarean section, capital cities, 1995/96	286
6.53	Admissions of females aged 15 to 44 years with a principal procedure of Caesarean section, State/Territory, 1995/96	288
6.54	Admissions of females aged 30 years and over with a principal procedure of hysterectomy, capital cities, 1995/96	290
6.55	Admissions of females aged 30 years and over with a principal procedure of hysterectomy, State/Territory, 1995/96	292

<b>Chapter &amp; Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
6.56 Admissions with a principal procedure of hip replacement, capital cities, 1995/96	294
6.57 Admissions with a principal procedure of hip replacement, State/Territory, 1995/96	296
6.58 Admissions for lens insertion, capital cities, 1995/96	298
6.59 Admissions for lens insertion, State/Territory, 1995/96	300
6.60 Admissions with a principal procedure of endoscopy, capital cities, 1995/96	302
6.61 Admissions with a principal procedure of endoscopy, State/Territory, 1995/96	304
6.62 Location of Royal Flying Doctor Service bases and number of services, 1997	308
6.63 General medical practitioner services to males, capital cities	310
6.64 General medical practitioner services to males, State/Territory	312
6.65 General medical practitioner services to females, capital cities	314
6.66 General medical practitioner services to females, State/Territory	316
6.67 Proportion of children who were fully immunised at 12 months of age, capital cities, 1998	318
6.68 Proportion of children who were fully immunised at 12 months of age, capital cities, 1998	320
<b>7 Availability of selected health services</b>	
7.1 Patient days for nursing home type patients in public acute hospitals, by area, States and Territories, 1997/98	324
7.2 Nursing home and hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, 1997	324
7.3 Population per general medical practitioner, capital cities	326
7.4 Population per general medical practitioner, State/Territory	328
7.5 Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, capital cities	330
7.6 Public acute hospital beds per 1,000 population, State/Territory	332
7.7 Private hospitals beds per 1,000 population, capital cities	334
7.8 Private hospital beds per 1,000 population, State/Territory	336
7.9 Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, capital cities	338
7.10 Nursing home places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, State/Territory	340
7.11 Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, capital cities	342
7.12 Hostel places per 1,000 population aged 70 years and over, State/Territory	344
<b>8 Statistical analysis</b>	
8.1 Correlation matrix for SLAs in Melbourne, 1996 boundaries	349
8.2 Correlation matrix for SLAs in Melbourne, 1991 boundaries	350
8.3 Correlation matrix for SLAs in Melbourne, 1994 boundaries	351
8.4 Correlation matrix for SLAs in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria, 1996 boundaries	353
8.5 Correlation matrix for SLAs in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria, 1994 boundaries	355
8.6 Variables used in cluster analysis	357
8.7 Composition of SLA clusters in Melbourne	358
8.8 Composition of SLA clusters in Geelong	361
8.9 Composition of SLA clusters in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria	367
8.10 Composition of town clusters in Australia	375
<b>9 Summary of findings</b>	
9.1 Changes in demographic and socioeconomic status variables, by Section of State, Victoria	377
9.2 Changes in health status variables, by Section of State, Victoria	378
<b>Appendix</b>	
A1 SLAs not mapped: Population less than 100	393
A2 Urban centres in Victoria	393
A3 Names used for towns comprised of multiple Statistical Local Areas	394
A4 Key to Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong, 1996	394
A5 Key to Statistical Local Areas in Melbourne and Geelong, 1991-94	396
A6 Key to Statistical Local Areas in non-metropolitan areas of Victoria, 1996	398
A7 Key to Statistical Local Areas in non-metropolitan areas of Victoria, 1991-94	400
A8 Name/boundary changes	402
A9 Data sources	404
A10 ICD-9 Codes for causes of death mapped in Chapter 5	405
A11 ICD-9 Codes for diagnoses/external causes mapped in Chapter 6	405
A12 ICPM Codes for surgical procedures mapped in Chapter 6	405

# List of figures

<b>Chapter &amp; Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>3 Demography and socioeconomic status</b>	
3.1 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, capital cities	76
3.2 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, Rest of State/Territory	78
<b>4 Income support payments</b>	
4.1 Age pensioners, Victoria, 1996	82
4.2 Disability support pensioners, Victoria, 1996	82
4.3 Female sole parent pensioners, Victoria, 1996	83
4.4 Unemployment beneficiaries, Victoria, 1996	83
<b>5 Health Status</b>	
5.1 Death rates of people aged from 15 to 64 years, by cause, Australia	128
5.2 Death rates of people aged from 15 to 64 years, by cause, Victoria	128
5.3 Deaths from all causes, by age and sex, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	130
5.4 Deaths from cancer, by age and sex, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	131
5.5 Deaths from circulatory system diseases, by age and sex, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	131
5.6 Deaths from respiratory system diseases, by age and sex, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	131
5.7 Deaths from accidents, poisonings and violence, by age and sex, Victoria, 1992 to 1995	132
5.8 Suicide rates of people aged from 25 to 64 years: Melbourne and Rest of State	133
5.9 Suicide rates of people aged from 15 to 24 years, Melbourne and Rest of State	133
5.10 Total Fertility Rate, Melbourne and Rest of State, 1992 to 1995	175
<b>6 Utilisation of health services</b>	
6.1 Admissions to public acute and private hospitals, by age, Victoria and Australia, 1995/96	184
6.2 Admissions to public acute and private hospitals, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	185
6.3 Admissions to public acute hospitals, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	185
6.4 Admissions to private hospitals, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	186
6.5 Same day admissions, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	186
6.6 Admissions for circulatory system diseases, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	187
6.7 Admissions for respiratory system diseases, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	187
6.8 Admissions from accidents, poisonings and violence, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	188
6.9 Admissions for a surgical procedure, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	188
6.10 Same day admissions for a surgical procedure, by age and sex, Victoria, 1995/96	188
6.11 General medical practitioner services, by age and sex, Victoria, 1996	308
<b>9 Summary of findings</b>	
9.1 Differentials in IRSD scores for SLAs in Melbourne	379
9.2 Health status differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, Melbourne and Geelong	380
9.3 Health service utilisation differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, Melbourne and Geelong	381
9.4 Health status differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, Rest of State	383
9.5 Health service utilisation differentials by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, Rest of State	384
9.6 Change in health status by quintile of socioeconomic disadvantage of area, Melbourne and Geelong	387

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Outside the Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU), Prometheus Information Pty Ltd was the major contributor to the project. Prometheus is contracted by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care to develop HealthWIZ, the software which was used to produce the maps in this atlas and the data tables (on which the maps are based) in Volume 1.1. Some of the information was already held by Prometheus, and other information needed to be obtained from various Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies and added to the HealthWIZ database in a way that ensured comparability. This was no small task. Although the HealthWIZ software included a mapping facility, the particular approach to publishing the atlas required that special arrangements be made to output the maps in a suitable format. For example, the maps were exported from HealthWIZ and pasted into frames in a MS Word document. Each of these documents was then inserted into the appropriate page in the atlas. Much of the work was highly complex and technical, and required attention to detail and knowledge of the datasets (in particular in identifying potential problems in the data and following these up to confirm or correct them) and statistical geography over a number of years. The quality of the final result, evident in the published product, is testimony to their efforts. George Preston, a Director of the company, was always willing to assist. His knowledge of health statistics and his statistical expertise were frequently of value in making decisions about alternative approaches to the analysis and interpretation of data. Daryel Akerlind and Alain Remont designed the software enhancements to provide the pullouts and town overlays for the maps. Other major contributors at Prometheus were Jane Gorrie and Jennifer Chorley, Zlatan Dzumhur, Jane Lindsay, Jennie Widdowson, Ayse Idehen and (in the earlier stages of the project) Swandi Candra.

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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

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## 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 1.4*.

## 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 Local Area

The Statistical Local Area (SLA) 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. It is, in a majority of cases, equivalent to a legal local government area (LGA). SLAs comprise whole LGAs; part LGAs (where the LGA has been split for planning, administrative or statistical purposes); or are unincorporated areas. In Victoria there were 78 LGAs and 200 SLAs at 1 July 1996 (ABS 1996).

## Symbols used

- n.a. not available
- .. not applicable
- nil, or less than half the final digit shown
- B Borough
- C City
- RC Rural City
- S Shire

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