



People aged to 18 years per metropolitan and rural GP

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Children and adolescents aged up to 18 years are an important section of our community. This is the age range managed by South Australian paediatric health services. Provision and planning of health care services for this age group requires current population data and general practitioner workforce numbers.

Methods

We obtained age related data from the 1996¹ and 2001² census in South Australia from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It defines the Adelaide statistical division as metropolitan, and all others as nonmetropolitan or rural and remote, which we grouped as 'rural'. Population data for the total and the 0–18 year age groups were analysed by metropolitan and rural areas. Numbers of registered GPs for the same periods were obtained from the Medical Board of South Australia.

Results

Between the 1996 and 2001, the total population in South Australia increased by 2.8%, while the population aged 0–18 years decreased by 1.2%. Metropolitan 0–18 year olds comprised 23.8% (1996) and 22.9% (2001) of the total, while in rural areas they comprised 27.3% and 26.1% respectively. The total number of registered GPs increased by 115 (4.1%) from 2839 in 1996 to 2954 in 2001. This was more marked in the metropolitan area, but like the population, actually fell by five (1.3%) in rural areas.

We calculated the number of people 0–18

Table 1. People aged • 18 per GP between 1996 and 2001

	1996	2001
Rural	278	275
Metropolitan	101	95
All South Australia	124	118
Ratio rural:metropolitan	2.8	2.9

years of age per GP. Over the 5 years, the number per GP decreased overall by about 5% state wide and in metropolitan areas, but remained steady in rural areas. The numbers per GP were 2.8 greater in rural areas than in metropolitan areas in 1996 and 2.9 times greater in 2001 (*Table 1*).

Discussion

These data show a greater disparity in the distribution of GPs than reported in an Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee report, which found that 21% of primary care practitioners were practising in rural and remote areas of Australia.³

Implications of this study for general practice

- The 0–18 years age group is 25% of the population.
- The 0–18 year population ratio per rural GP in South Australia is nearly three times greater than for metropolitan GPs.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Census population and housing data, 1996. Available at: www.abs.gov.au.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Census population and housing data, 2001. Available at: www.abs.gov.au.
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