



# Healthy Communities: Overweight and obesity rates across Australia, 2014–15

Published 8 December 2016

This report presents, for the first time, overweight and obesity rates in adults by Primary Health Network (PHN) areas across Australia.

Being overweight or obese can have serious negative health consequences, and the effects of overweight and obesity are a leading health concern in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Carrying extra weight can lead to cardiovascular disease (mainly heart disease and stroke), type 2 diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders like osteoarthritis, and some cancers. These conditions cause premature death and substantial disability.<sup>1</sup>

Overweight and obesity rates in Australia are some of the highest in the world.<sup>2</sup> In 2014–15, 11.2 million Australian adults were overweight or obese, equivalent to a national rate of 63.4%.<sup>3</sup>

National rates of overweight and obesity have increased in recent decades, up from 56.3% in 1995.<sup>4</sup> This has been driven by an increase in obese adults, with the percentage of adults who were overweight but not obese remaining similar in that time (Figure 1).

At the local level in 2014–15, the percentage of overweight or obese adults varied across the PHN areas that could be measured, ranging from 53.4% in Northern Sydney to 73.3% in Country SA. Overall, adults in regional PHN areas were more likely to be overweight or obese than their city counterparts.

Obesity by itself showed wider variation across PHN areas, ranging from 16.0% in Central and Eastern Sydney to 38.1% in Country SA. Overall, regional PHN areas also had higher obesity rates than metropolitan PHN areas.



Overweight and obesity rates varied across Primary Health Network areas, ranging from:

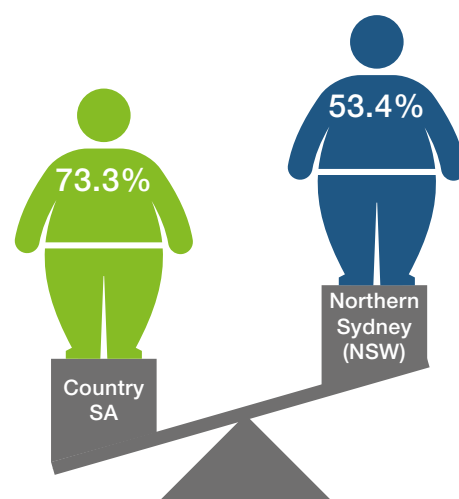
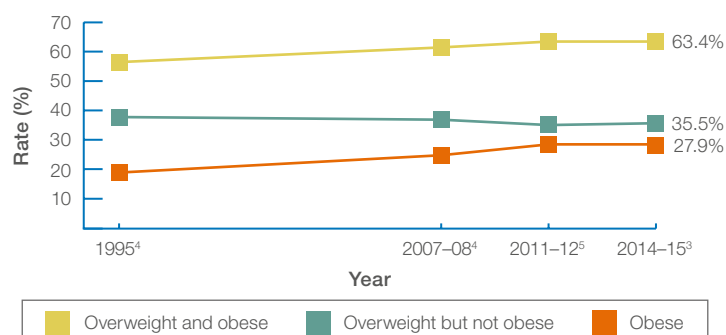


Figure 1: National adult overweight and obesity rates



## What is a Primary Health Network?

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) are organisations that connect health services over local geographic areas. There are 31 PHNs in Australia. See the back page for more information.

Visit [www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au](http://www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au) for more detailed results

Sources and references can be found in the Technical Note at [www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au/publications](http://www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au/publications)

# Key findings

## Australian adults who are overweight or obese

In 2014–15, an estimated 11.2 million (63.4%) Australian adults were overweight or obese — 6.3 million (35.5%) were overweight but not obese and 4.9 million (27.9%) were obese.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, a higher percentage of men (70.8%) were overweight or obese than women (56.3%).<sup>3</sup>

The percentage of adults who were overweight or obese generally increased with age. Rates were highest for those aged 55–64 years (74.7%), followed by the 65 years and over (72.2%) age group. The lowest rates were for adults aged 18–24 years (38.9%).

## Variation across Australia

In 2014–15 across PHN areas in Australia that could be measured, Country SA PHN area had the highest percentage of overweight or obese adults (73.3%, almost three in four people). This was compared with Northern Sydney PHN area with the lowest rate of overweight or obese adults at 53.4%, or just over half (**Figure 2, page 3**).

Four PHN areas had overweight or obesity rates of 70% or more, indicating an opportunity for targeted efforts to reduce rates in these areas.

**Figure 2 (page 3)** maps the percentage of adults who were overweight or obese by PHN areas in Australia in 2014–15.

In this report, 95% confidence intervals have been used in the presentation of data to show the range in which the rate of overweight or obese adults is likely to occur in a PHN area. Many of the confidence intervals for PHN areas overlap and this should be taken into consideration when interpreting the ranking of the PHN areas. Where the 95% confidence intervals overlap it is not possible to say with certainty that there are differences between the areas being compared.

There are a number of factors that influence whether someone is overweight or obese, such as age, gender and socioeconomic status. These factors may explain some of the variation seen across PHN areas in Australia. It is important the information in this report is interpreted in the local context, taking into account knowledge of the local population and its needs.

## Variation across metropolitan and regional areas

There are differences in the percentage of adults who were overweight or obese between PHN areas in metropolitan and regional locations.

In 2014–15, regional PHN areas generally had higher rates of adult overweight and obesity than metropolitan PHN areas. Overall, 68.5% of adults were overweight or obese in regional PHN areas, compared with 60.7% of adults in metropolitan PHN areas (**Figure 2, page 3**).

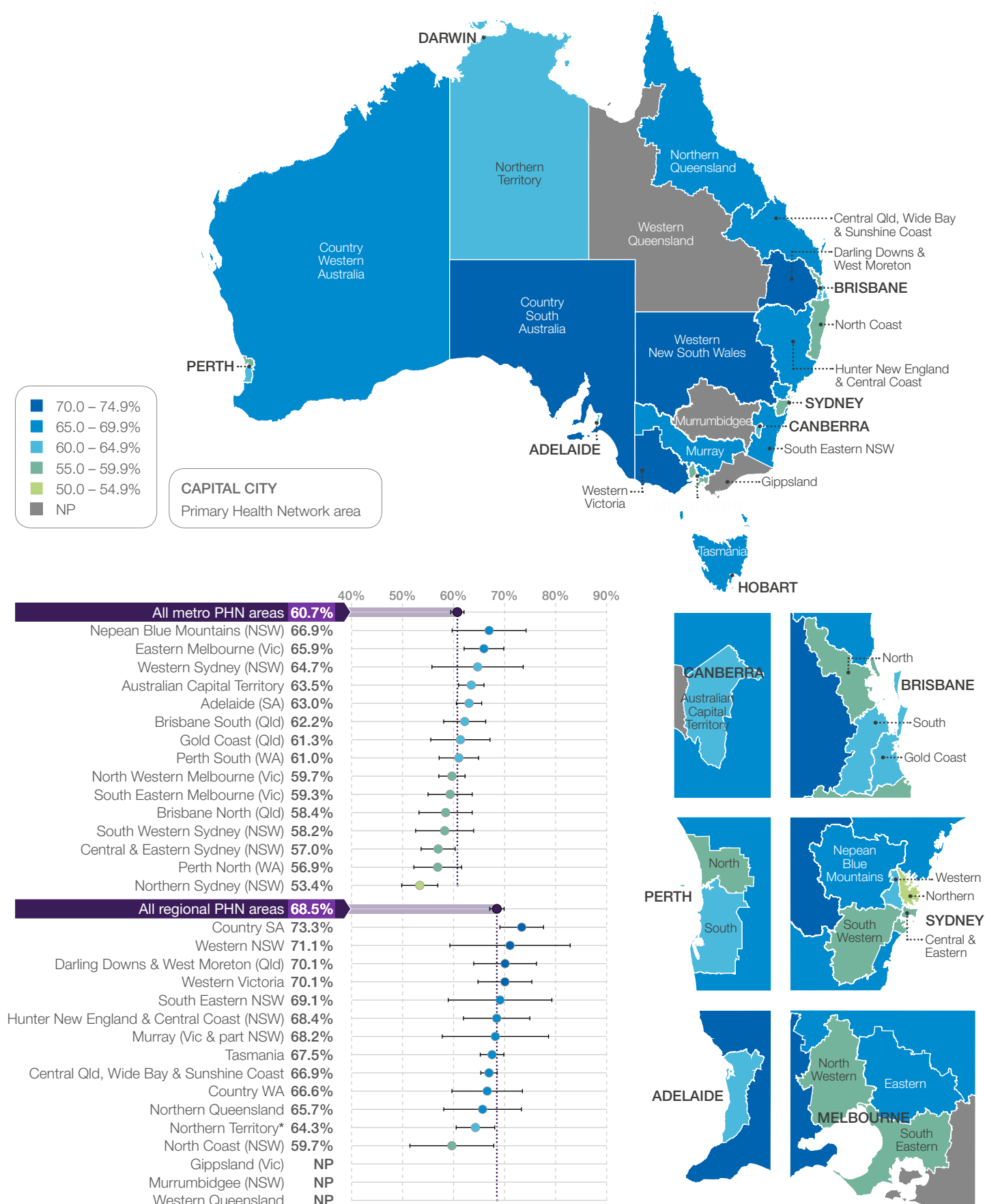
The five PHN areas with the highest rates of overweight or obese adults were all recorded in regional locations, while the five lowest rates were all in metropolitan PHN areas (**Figure 2, page 3**).

### National performance benchmark

The Council of Australian Governments set a national performance benchmark for 2018, to increase by five percentage points the proportion of Australians at a healthy body weight, over the 2009 baseline (36.9%).<sup>6</sup>

Australia is not currently on track to meet this 2018 performance benchmark of 41.9%.<sup>6</sup> In 2014–15, 35.0% of adults nationally were found to be in the healthy weight range.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2: Estimated adult overweight and obesity rates across *Primary Health Network (PHN)* areas, 2014–15**



— 95% confidence interval. **NP** Not available for publication but included in totals where applicable.  
 \* Interpret with caution: >25% of the population live in very remote areas and discrete Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities, and are excluded from the survey.  
**Notes** Survey excludes adults living in non-private dwellings, very remote areas, and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.  
 'Metro PHN areas' have ≥85% of the population in 'major cities', as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. All others are classified as 'regional PHN areas'.  
**Source** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey 2014–15.

## Australian adults who are obese

In 2014–15, an estimated 4.9 million (27.9%) adults were obese.<sup>3</sup> With more than one in four obese adults in the population, Australia ranks fifth highest for obesity rates amongst countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, men (28.4%) and women (27.4%) had similar obesity rates. The percentage of adults who were obese generally increased with age. The highest rates were for people aged 55–64 years (35.9%) and 45–54 years (33.0%), around twice as high as those aged 18–24 years (17.1%) with the lowest obesity rates.

## Variation across Australia

Obesity by itself showed wider variation than rates of overweight and obesity (combined) across PHN areas in Australia. In 2014–15, Country SA PHN area also had the highest obesity rate (38.1%) of the PHN areas that could be measured. This was more than twice the rate of Central and Eastern Sydney PHN area (16.0%) (Figure 3, page 5).

In 18 PHN areas across the country at least one in four adults (25%) were obese. Of these, five PHN areas had obesity rates of more than 34% in 2014–15 (Figure 3, page 5). The high rate of obesity in all PHN areas presents an opportunity for all areas to reduce obesity rates.

## Variation across metropolitan and regional areas


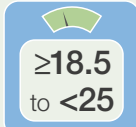
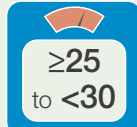

The variation in the percentage of adults who were obese across metropolitan and regional PHN areas in 2014–15 was similar to that for adults who were overweight or obese.

Overall, 34.7% of adults in regional PHN areas were obese. This was compared with 24.3% of adults in metropolitan PHN areas.

Again, the five PHN areas with the highest obesity rates were all in regional locations while the five lowest rates were all recorded in metropolitan PHN areas (Figure 3, page 5).

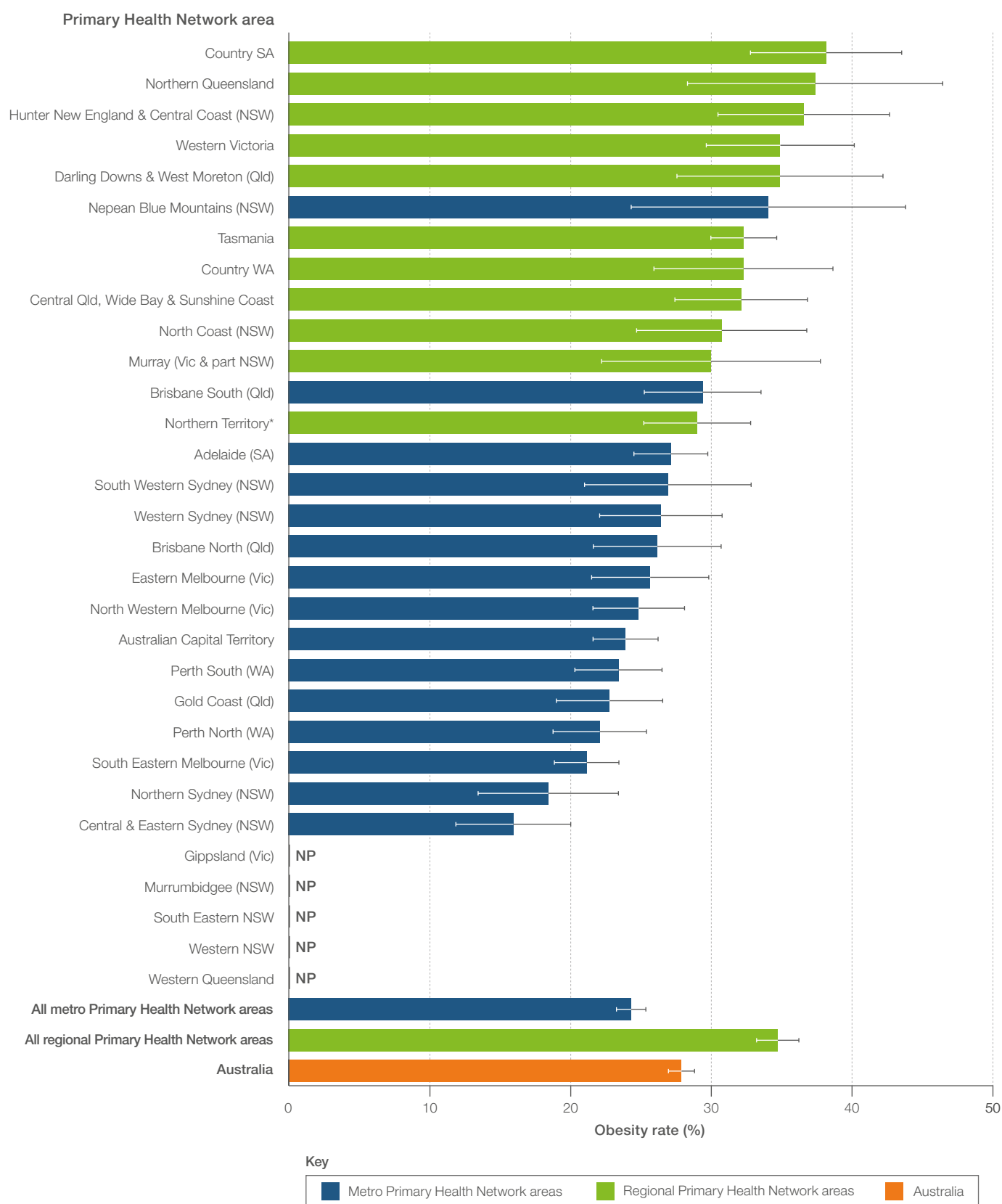
## How is body weight classified?

Overweight and obesity are commonly classified according to body mass index (BMI). This is used at the population level to assess the percentage of overweight and obese people aged 18 years and over. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by the square of their height in metres (kg/m<sup>2</sup>). The international classification<sup>7</sup> based on BMI is outlined below.

$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight in KG}}{\text{height in M}^2}$	Underweight	Healthy weight	Overweight	Obese
	 <18.5	 ≥18.5 to <25	 ≥25 to <30	 ≥30

The classification of overweight and obesity in this report uses the measured height and weight of adult respondents in the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey 2014–15, excluding pregnant women.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 3: Estimated adult obesity rates across *Primary Health Network (PHN)* areas, 2014–15**



— 95% confidence interval.  
 \* Interpret with caution: >25% of the population live in very remote areas and discrete Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities, and are excluded from the survey.  
 NP Not available for publication but included in totals where applicable.  
 Notes 'Metro PHN areas' have ≥85% of the population in 'major cities', as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. All others are classified as 'regional PHN areas'. Survey excludes adults living in non-private dwellings, very remote areas, and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.  
 Source Australian Institute of Health and Welfare analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey 2014–15.

# About the data

The data were sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) National Health Survey 2014–15. Consenting participants were measured using digital scales for their weight and a stadiometer for their height. Body mass index (BMI) results were calculated as weight (kg) divided by height in metres, squared (m<sup>2</sup>). Participants with a BMI equal to or greater than 25 and less than 30 were classified as overweight. Those with a BMI equal to or greater than 30 were classified as obese.

For more information refer to the Technical Note at [www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au/publications](http://www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au/publications)

## What is a Primary Health Network?

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) are local organisations that connect health services across a specific geographic area, with the boundaries defined by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Thirty-one PHNs commenced operations on 1 July 2015, replacing Medicare Locals. They have the key objectives of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for patients, particularly those at risk of poor health outcomes, and improving coordination of care to ensure patients receive the right care in the right place at the right time.

In this report, a PHN area refers to the population that lives in the geographic area covered by a particular PHN. Due to the availability of robust and representative data at PHN area-level from the ABS National Health Survey, results for 28 of the 31 PHN areas have been published.

The results in this report relate to the period before PHNs were established; therefore, the findings do not reflect the performance of PHNs.

For more information, see <http://www.aihw.gov.au/primary-health-care/phn/>



All results in this report can be explored further at [www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au](http://www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au)

Information on overweight and obesity rates by Primary Health Network area for 2011–12 is also available.

The interactive website allows you to compare results for more than 130 health measures including:

- Adults who smoke tobacco daily
- Hospital admissions for mental health conditions and intentional self-harm
- GP attendances
- After-hours GP attendances
- Potentially avoidable deaths
- Life expectancy
- Child immunisation rates
- Use of emergency departments.



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare

[www.myhospitals.gov.au](http://www.myhospitals.gov.au)

[www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au](http://www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au)

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016



The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare licenses use of this report under Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives Licence 3.0, Australia and the terms of this notice.

You are permitted to make fair use of the report consistent with the terms of the licence. You must not make use of the report in a misleading or deceptive manner or in a manner that is inconsistent with the context of the report.

Permissions beyond the scope of the licence may be available by contacting [info@aihw.gov.au](mailto:info@aihw.gov.au)

### Disclaimer

This report is produced for health research, health care and health advocacy purposes. This report is not intended to provide guidance on particular health care choices. You should contact your medical advisors on particular health care choices.

ISSN: 2202-9184

ISBN: 978-1-76054-037-1

Suggested citation: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016. *Healthy Communities: Overweight and obesity rates across Australia, 2014–15 (In Focus)*. Cat. no. HPF 2. Canberra: AIHW.

Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of this document.