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Improving the Measurement of Health System Performance across the Rural-Urban Continuum

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Introduction

We report on key performance indicators to highlight quality and variation in health care. Given Ontario's diverse geography, we have prioritized improving measurement across the rural-urban continuum. This will improve our ability to discern the impact of geography on health care and health status to inform planning and decision making.

Objectives and Approach

Building on previous work to advance measurement of equity in health care, we struck a technical working group of experts to review methods for stratifying health system performance data by geographic location in the Ontario context. These methods were applied to a set of key performance indicators. The working group's review of the results of this analysis will lead to recommendations for the best method to refine and standardize how geographic location is measured and stratified. This will improve our ability to discern the impact of geography on health system performance and health status for our suite of public-reporting products.

Results

The technical working group identified three methodologies for consideration that used linked postal code data: Population Centre (POPCTR), Statistical Area Classification (SAC) and a hybrid POPCTR/SAC methodology. These methods were tested against a set of key performance indicators across dimensions of quality including timeliness, effectiveness, population health and health outcomes. The results show that, in the health system performance dimensions of effectiveness and timeliness, as well as for a subset of health outcomes, there is variation in performance across the urban-rural continuum, though not always in a linear way. This may reflect differences in health care access, health risk factors, sociodemographic or socioeconomic characteristics across the urban-rural continuum. More definitive conclusions and recommendations will

be available when the working group meets to review the results.

Conclusion/Implications

Identifying a robust methodology for measuring performance across geographic locations will improve our ability to discern the impact of geography on health care including where geography may impact access and effectiveness of services as well as health outcomes. This information will enable better health system planning and decision-making.