Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Need-based resource allocation: Different need indicators, different results?

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 3 October 2008

**Reviewer:** John Eyles

**Reviewer’s report:**

This paper on the allocation of health services to different provinces in Canada based on age and sex only, demographics and need is worth publishing. However some changes are required. The authors need to be clearer on why this is an important research and policy question. They might be helped in this regard if they took their review of resource allocation experience in Canada back to its origins in the late 1980s and early 1990s and reviewed why it was deemed important. See Soc Sci Med 1990. There was a debate certainly between those at McMaster and those in Manitoba on the relevance of utilization for a needs-based approach to health services allocation. We need furthermore a clear statement of why this remains an important policy topic in Canada today. While if written a few years ago it would be possible to see provinces using need-based approaches, is the same true today? Health care delivery is a provincial matter in Canada so why are provincial comparisons important?

With respect to method, the authors carry out a fine job. It would be good to see more explicit commentary on the challenges of using some of the important variables at the scale of analysis used? What is the impact on SMRs of analysis at the provincial level? What can be said about differences within provinces given the nature of funding and policy construction at this level?

With respect to conclusions, I am disappointed more was not said about the relevance of between province differences. What is said on health outcome is fine but much of the analysis is provincial. This seems under reported in the policy conclusions. This could be an important contribution, given the role of provinces in funding. Furthermore what do the differences mean in terms of the principles of the Canada Health Act especially with respect to universality and portability? And do these differences matter?

There are a few typos – morality as opposed to mortality.

These changes are in my mind required.

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published