Reviewer's report

Title: High-cost health care users in Ontario, Canada: demographic, socio-economic, and health status characteristics

Version: 2
Date: 9 July 2014

Reviewer: Claudia Sanmartin

Reviewer's report:

The study addresses an important policy issue namely, understanding the profile of higher users of health care services in Ontario. The following comments are for the authors' consideration.

Major Compulsory - NONE

Minor Essential Revisions:

1) Given the data used (i.e. CCHS), the study reflects HCU among the community dwelling population and not HCU overall. The authors might consider using the term "community dwelling HCU" when discussing the study population. This is important as discussed in the Limitations sections as there are key groups (i.e. institutionalized and homeless populations) who also have been identified as HCUs but not included in this particular study. Example - (last sentence of the Introduction - "....we aim to more fully characterize HCUs living in the community").

2) Methods (paragraph 2) - the authors include costing for "complex continuing care hospital patients" - this is confusing as hospital patients are not part of the sample. Does this include temporary stays?

3) Methods (paragraph 3) - the authors should provide additional information and/or a reference to describe the data linkage conducted to create the data set. In particular, linkage rates of CCHS to the RPDP and indication of potential bias if any.

4) Methodology (para 4): Define "medical history" from the CCHS. Do the authors mean chronic conditions and if so, which ones were included?

5) Statistics analysis (para 1): Authors should include test used for assumptions of multinominal regression.

6) Statistics analysis (para 2): The analysis is based on weights. The authors should provide additional information on the method used to combine the survey weights. The following reference might be interest (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2009001/article/10795-eng.htm)

7) Results (para 1): Authors should report the number of CCHS respondents and those who linked to the separately to provide some indications/evidence of the
success of the linkage.

8) Discussion: The authors correctly argue that this study provides additional profile information on HCU, information that can inform policy and service delivery. Some specific regarding how the findings of this study (e.g. findings related to self-reported health status) could be used to inform policy would further strengthen the argument and the paper.

9) Limitations (para 1): the authors describe those not represented in the study including those living in "private dwellings". Those living in private households are represented in the CCHS. Please define private dwellings.

9) Table 2b - The denominator for the proportions in the table is unclear. Not sure what the % represent.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

No competing interests