

# Stand Up and Be Counted

By Claire Barber, MD, FRCPC; on behalf of Lauren Jewett, BSc; Dianne P. Mosher, MD, FRCPC; Cory Baillie, MD, FRCPC; Vandana Ahluwalia, MD, FRCPC; Carter Thorne, MD, FRCPC, FACP; Michel Zimmer, MD, FRCPC; Alfred Cividino, MD, FRCPC, FACR; Henry L. Aaverns, MBChB, FRCP(UK), FRCPC; and Deborah Marshall, PhD

**H**ow many rheumatologists does it take...? No, this is not the beginning of a joke waiting for a punch line, but a critical capacity and workforce issue that threatens the quality of care delivered to our patients. In most regions across Canada, there remains a critical shortage of rheumatologists.<sup>1,2</sup> Furthermore, the distribution of rheumatologists may not align with populations in greatest need. Models of care delivery have been championed by provincial<sup>3</sup> and national organizations including the Arthritis Alliance of Canada (AAC);<sup>4</sup> and include multidisciplinary care teams, and Telehealth and travelling clinics to improve access to care delivery in rural and remote areas. But how do we measure how many rheumatologists are required per capita to plan for current and future needs of our population?

The Canadian Institutes of Health Information (CIHI) reports on the ratio of physicians per capita, however it does not report on the number of rheumatologists, only the total number of specialists.<sup>5</sup> In 2014 the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) counted 383 rheumatologists in Canada.<sup>6</sup> While this estimate provides a general idea of the supply of rheumatologists in Canada, it does not consider the time rheumatologists spend seeing patients in clinic, and says little about where they are seeing patients (as Telehealth and travelling clinics are not accounted for). Currently, the map displayed is the limit of our understanding of the distribution of rheumatologists at a national level.

The Canadian Council of Academic Rheumatologists (CCAR) is a reliable data source that counts academic rheumatologists and estimates full time equivalents (FTEs) at academic sites;<sup>7,8</sup> however, data on community rheumatologists are limited to those with an academic affiliation. The 2014 CCAR survey

reports that there are 207 adult rheumatologists and 34 pediatric rheumatologists.<sup>9</sup>

Another source that can be used to estimate the number of practicing rheumatologists is administrative billing claims. Estimating the availability of care from rheumatologists is more challenging than it might appear, though, as some rheumatologists bill as internists or pediatricians instead of as adult and pediatric rheumatologists. These claims data may not accurately reflect service capacity provided.

Based on the long waiting times across Canada for patients to see a rheumatologist, we need to accurately assess the capacity of rheumatology specialists and the anticipated need for care, in order to plan for the future and ensure timely and equitable access for all Canadians with arthritis. Estimating workforce capacity is a crucial element to inform models-of-care and address long wait times. Consequently, a measure of the number of rheumatologists per capita has been included in a set of six performance measures for model-of-care evaluation by the AAC.<sup>10</sup> This measure is of critical importance to the CRA and provincial organizations when addressing workforce capacity issues based on accurate evidence; it is also of interest to trainees looking for jobs.

We are asking for your support in mapping current service demands and capacity in rheumatology to inform resource planning for the future. To do this we need accurate information about the services rheumatologists provide and where we provide them. Over the next year we will evaluate methodologies to examine workforce capacity in rheumatology and start measuring and mapping rheumatologists in Canada.

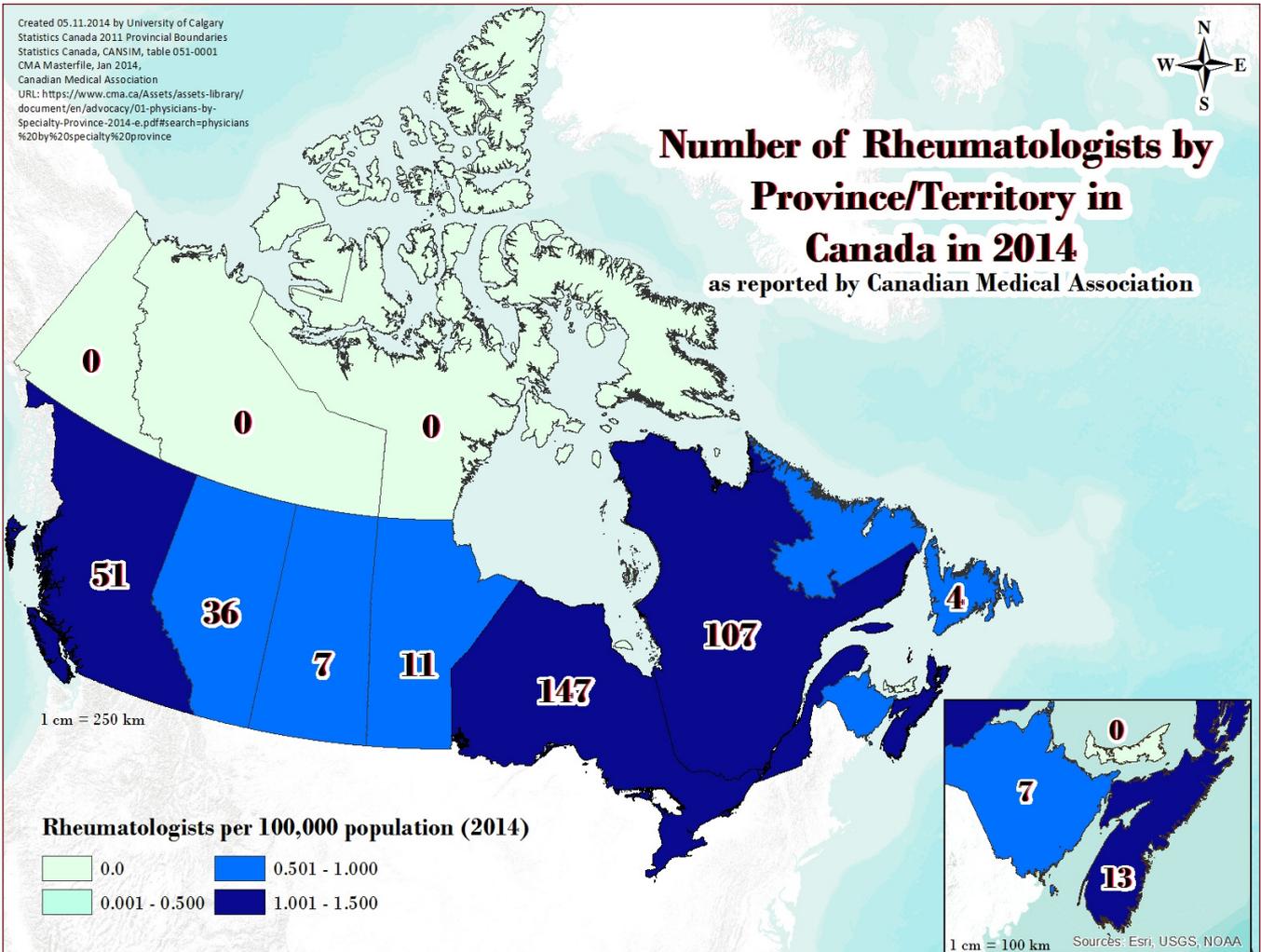
Will you join us by standing up to be counted?

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 Statistics Canada 2011 Provincial Boundaries  
 Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 051-0001  
 CMA Masterfile, Jan 2014,  
 Canadian Medical Association  
 URL: <https://www.cma.ca/Assets/assets-library/document/en/advocacy/01-physicians-by-Specialty-Province-2014-e.pdf#search=physicians%20by%20specialty%20province>



## Number of Rheumatologists by Province/Territory in Canada in 2014

as reported by Canadian Medical Association



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*Claire Barber, MD, FRCPC*  
 Clinical Assistant Professor,  
 Department of Medicine,  
 Division of Rheumatology,  
 University of Calgary  
 Calgary, Alberta

on behalf of Lauren Jewett, BSc; Dianne P. Mosher, MD, FRCPC;  
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