

# The structural drivers of homelessness in Australia 2001-2011

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# Background

- Limited large scale quantitative evidence to inform policy on potential structural drivers of homelessness
- International literature suggests some useful approaches using cross sectional and panel data
- The evolution of the measurement of homelessness in Australia

# Definitions

- The ABS (Cat No. 4922.0, 2012e) defines someone as homeless if they do not have suitable alternative accommodation and their current living arrangement:
  - is in a dwelling that is inadequate, or
  - has no tenure or their initial tenure is short and not extendable ,  
or
  - does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.
- Structure = material/ economic resources rather than norms, traditions or ideologies

# Research questions

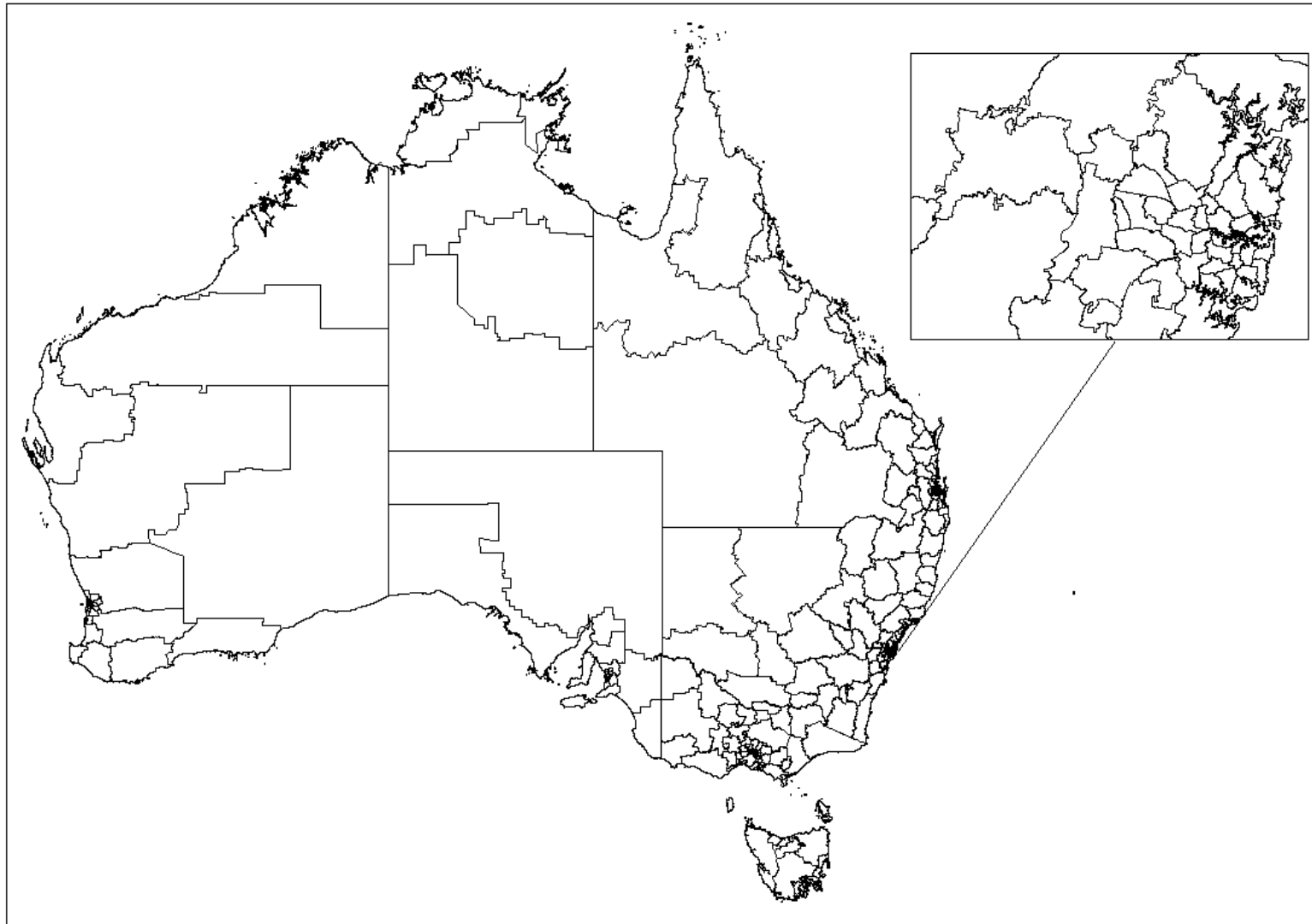
1. What role do housing market factors play in shaping the rate of homelessness across Australia over time?
2. What role do labour market factors (unemployment) play in shaping the rate of homelessness across Australia and over time?
3. Are homelessness rates higher in regions with lower income or more unequal distributions of income?
4. Does the demographic profile of a region's population matter?

# Data Sources

Panel data set constructed using:

- The ABS Census of Population and Housing
  - The Time Series Profile dataset (2001, 2006, 2011)
  - Homelessness Estimates(2001, 2006, 2011)
  - Housing affordability, availability and suitability special request (2001, 2006, 2011)
  - Remoteness structure
- Climate data from the Bureau of Meteorology
- All data sourced at the SA3 level for 2001, 2006 and 2011

# What is an SA3?



# Key variables

- **Housing Market** (median rents, dwelling and tenure composition, rent to income ratios, supply of affordable housing)
- **Income and Income inequality** (household income; rent to income ratios, Gini coefficients)
- **Labour Market** (unemployment, part time employment, unskilled work, education)
- **Demographic characteristics** (age, gender, household type, indigenous, marital status,.....)
- **Climate** (summer and winter temperatures, climate variability)

# Empirical strategy

- Descriptives examining bivariate relationships between each indicator and rates of homelessness.
  
- Panel modelling
  - National models
  - 328 regions; observations in 2001 2006 and 2011
  - giving 984 observations for modelling



# Modelling – some key findings

- Demographic characteristics - males, young, sole parents, indigenous
- Income inequality
- Supply of affordable housing and labour markets

# How do we make sense of these findings?



|  | <b>REGION A</b> | <b>REGION B</b> |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Population</b>                            | 100             | 100             |
| <b>Median Rent per week</b>                  | \$300           | \$600           |
| <b>Unemployment Rate</b>                     | 12%             | 3%              |
| <b>Median household income per week</b>      | \$900           | \$1800          |
| <b>Public Housing as % of all households</b> | 7%              | 2%              |
| <b>“At risk” group</b>                       | 8               | 2               |
| <b>Homeless</b>                              | 2               | 1               |
| <b>Homeless rate per 100</b>                 | 2               | 1               |
| <b>Homeless as per cent of at risk group</b> | 25%             | 50%             |

# What we still don't know: future research

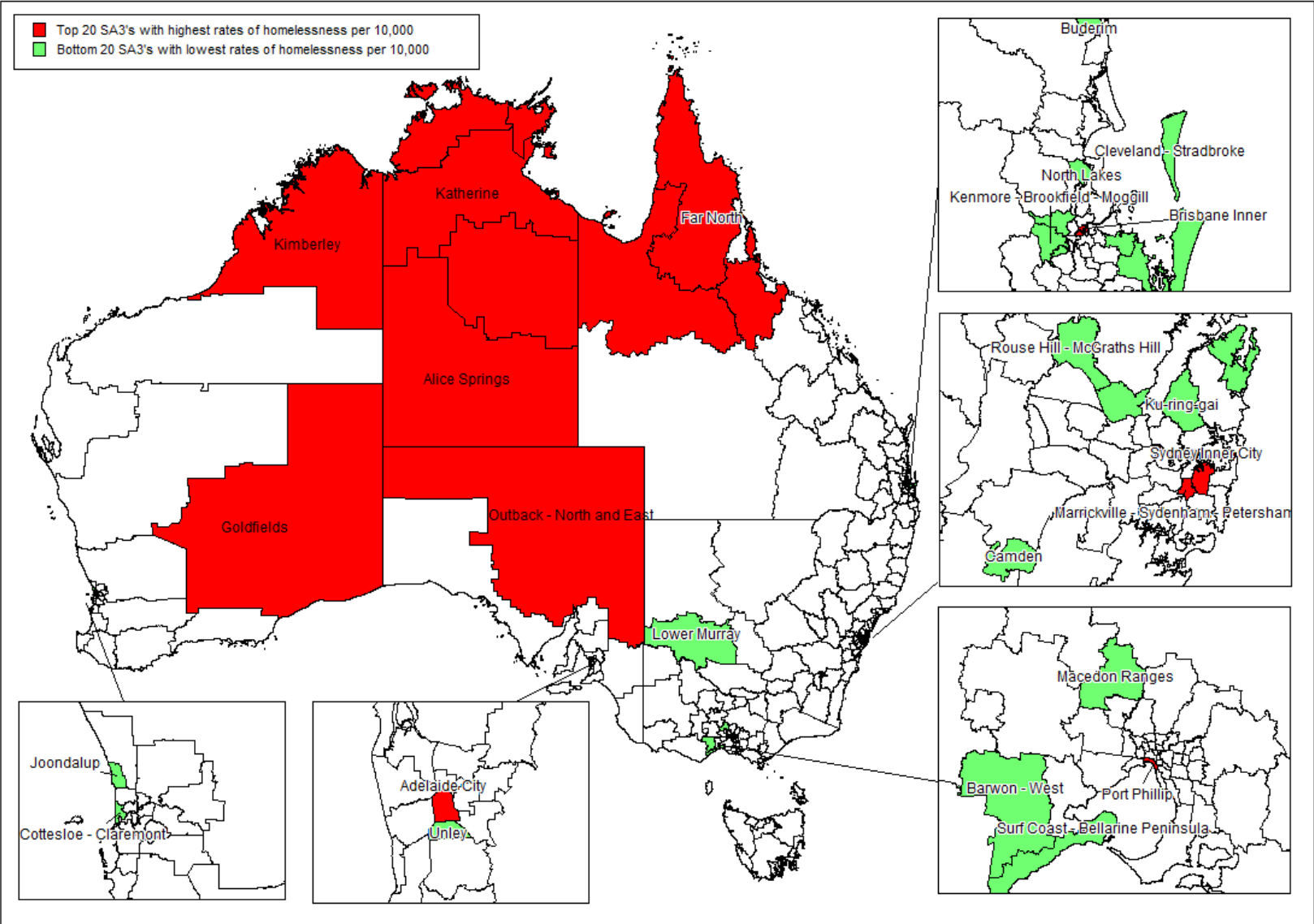


- The geographical mobility of the homeless population
- Other structural drivers
- Teasing out the importance of individual vs structural level drivers

# Implications for policy

- Targeting of services to areas with particular demographic profiles to ensure a better match
- Interventions aimed at addressing indigenous homelessness need to target regional areas.
- Need to prioritise affordable housing in regions with strong labour markets (otherwise mobility patterns could lift national rates of homelessness)

# The top and bottom 20 SA3s with the highest/lowest rate of homelessness per 10,000 in 2011



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