How many SAMHSA's Buprenorphine Practitioner Locator providers in California actively prescribe buprenorphine: a geospatial analysis Supported by the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) New Investigator Award

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OBJECTIVES

Qualified clinicians must obtain a practitioner waiver (i.e., "DATA-waiver") to offer buprenorphine, a medication for opioid use disorder (OUD). However, many counties experience fewer buprenorphine prescriptions due to factors such as "DATA-waiver" providers underutilizing their buprenorphine prescribing ability. Our study aimed to compare the availability of active buprenorphine-prescribing clinicians in California to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)-listed DATA waived prescribers under each 5-digit ZIP Code.
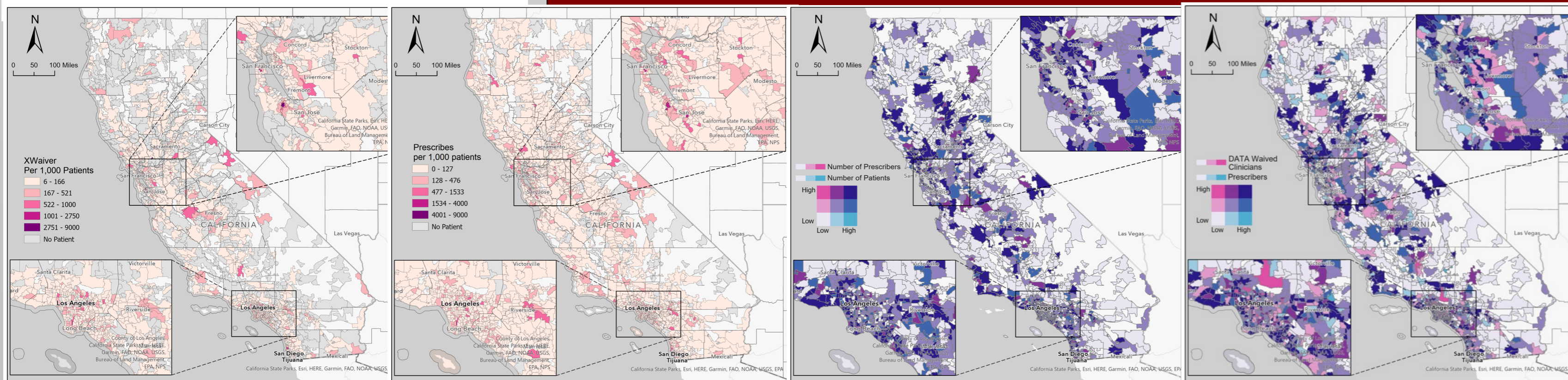
METHODS

Data source:
- Our analysis utilized the buprenorphine prescription dispensing data of 2021 from California's Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System (CURES), including the patient's 5-digit ZIP code of residence, as well as the 5-digit ZIP code of both the prescriber and the dispensing pharmacy, product name, form, strength, and quantity of the prescribed drug.
- The list of locators for all X-waiver clinicians was obtained from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) webpage.
- 5-digit ZIP Code-based sociodemographic variables obtained from the US Zip Codes Database (Pareto Software™, version 2023).

Analysis:
- CURES data enabled us to identify the active buprenorphine-prescribing clinicians and patients who were buprenorphine recipients within each ZIP Code in California, utilizing unique prescriber and patient identifiers.
- We then procured a roster of "DATA waived" clinicians from SAMHSA.
- In the final phase, we linked these two datasets by the 5-digit ZIP code, yielding a final dataset that encompasses the corresponding county/city names for each ZIP Code and the counts of patients receiving buprenorphine, active buprenorphine-prescribing clinicians, and DATA-waived clinicians operating within each ZIP Code.
- We pictured the spatial relationship of DATA waived clinicians, active buprenorphine prescribers, and patient volume under each ZIP code in gradient maps and nine class bivariate choropleth maps.

CONCLUSIONS

Among physicians listed in the SAMHSA roster, not all were actively prescribing buprenorphine. Significant disparities in access to active prescribers and DATA waiver prescribers persist between rural and urban areas in California.

Acknowledgment

Findings

- Among 1,600 ZIP Codes where patients resided, 62.1% housed DATA-waived physicians, and 57.8% had active buprenorphine-prescribing clinicians. In ZIP codes with more than 1,000 patients, 82% have between 0 and 127 active prescribers.
- A disproportional distribution between buprenorphine-prescribing clinicians and DATA-waived physicians was evident.
- White and Black communities within these ZIP codes tend to have more patients and DATA waiver prescribers. Factors such as older age and high income are negatively associated with high patient volume and the presence of DATA waiver providers. However, physicians are more likely to prescribe buprenorphine and register in neighborhoods with higher owner-occupied home values in the SAMHSA DATA waiver roster.