

## NON-ALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE FOUND IN OVER ONE-THIRD OF RURAL VICTORIANS

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THE prevalence of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease – a major cause of cirrhosis and liver cancer – may be as high as 45% in rural Victoria, according to research published today in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Researchers led by Professor Stuart Roberts, Director of Hepatology at Alfred Health in Melbourne, analysed data from 705 invited adults from four towns in the Goulburn Valley of Victoria. Participants completed clinical, laboratory and questionnaire evaluations of alcohol use.

Of the 705 participants, 274 met the fatty liver index criterion for NAFLD (crude prevalence, 38.9%; age- and sex-standardised prevalence, 35.7%). A larger proportion of people with NAFLD were men (50% v 41%). Metabolic risk factors more frequent among participants with NAFLD compared with those without NAFLD included obesity (69% v 15%), hypertension (66% v 48%), diabetes (19% v 8%), and dyslipidaemia (63% v 33%).

In people aged 60 years or more, and in people with metabolic risk factors the prevalence rates exceeded 45%.

"Another important finding was that prevalence of several metabolic risk factors, including obesity, elevated fasting blood glucose levels, hypertension, dyslipidaemia, and metabolic syndrome was high in our rural sample," wrote Roberts and colleagues.

"The prevalence of metabolic risk factors was particularly high in participants with NAFLD, including obesity (69%), diabetes (19%), hypertension (66%), and dyslipidaemia (63%).

"Our data not only provide strong justification for the proposed change in nomenclature from NAFLD to metabolic-associated fatty liver disease (MAFLD), but also the inclusion of obesity as a diagnostic criterion for MAFLD," they wrote.

"The high prevalence rate, strong association with metabolic risk factors, and high levels of non-invasive markers of liver injury in people with NAFLD have significant public health implications for the coming decade."

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CONTACTS: Professor Stuart Roberts  
Director of Hepatology  
Alfred Health  
Ph: 03 9076 3328  
Email: [S.Roberts@alfred.org.au](mailto:S.Roberts@alfred.org.au)