Age-standardised mortality rates related to viral hepatitis C in Belgium

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Key messages

- **Belgium seems on track to meet the hepatitis C-specific WHO mortality target by 2030.**
- **Regional differences in mortality rates must be further investigated.**
- **A national surveillance system for HCV infections is highly needed to tackle viral hepatitis in Belgium.**

Introduction

- Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection is a major cause of chronic liver disease, cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma resulting in a high burden for patients and the healthcare system.
- Direct-acting antiviral treatments, available since 2015 in Belgium, are highly effective and pave the way for HCV elimination.
- The WHO has set up specific targets to eliminate viral hepatitis, including mortality targets: reduce attributable mortality by 10% by 2020 and 65% by 2030 compared to 2015 levels. [1]
- Very few data have been published on HCV-related mortality in Belgium.

⇨ **Objective:** assess age-standardised mortality rates from HCV in Belgium and evaluate progress towards the WHO targets.

Methods

- Data source: Statistics Belgium, the national statistical office
- Analysis of the Belgian national causes of death registry data from year 2000 to year 2019:
  - Identification of ICD-10 codes B17.1 (acute HCV infection) and B18.2 (chronic HCV infection) as underlying cause of death or any other cause of death
  - Deaths registered according to place of residence
- Descriptive statistics and calculation of crude and age-standardised mortality rates:
  - Direct standardisation method, according to five age groups (0-19 years, 20-39 years, 40-59 years, 60-79 years, >=80 years)
  - Belgian mid-year 2010 population used as reference population

Results

- From 2000 to 2019: 3,793 HCV-related deaths
  - 68.4% with a chronic HCV infection
  - 51.3% female
  - 47.5% aged 60-79 years, 31.1% aged >=80 years, and 19.1% aged 40-59 years
- In 2019: 103 HCV-related deaths
  - 58.3% with a chronic HCV infection
  - 45.6% female
  - 33.0% aged 60-79 years, 33.0% aged >=80 years, and 32.0% aged 40-59 years
- Age-standardised HCV-related mortality rates in Belgium seemed stable between 2000 and 2008, ranging between 2.17 and 2.65 per 100,000 population
- Decline from 2008 onwards
- Highest rate consistently observed in Brussels capital region, followed by Wallonia and Flanders
- Between 2015 and 2019: decline of nearly 30% (from 1.18 to 0.85 per 100,000 inhabitants)

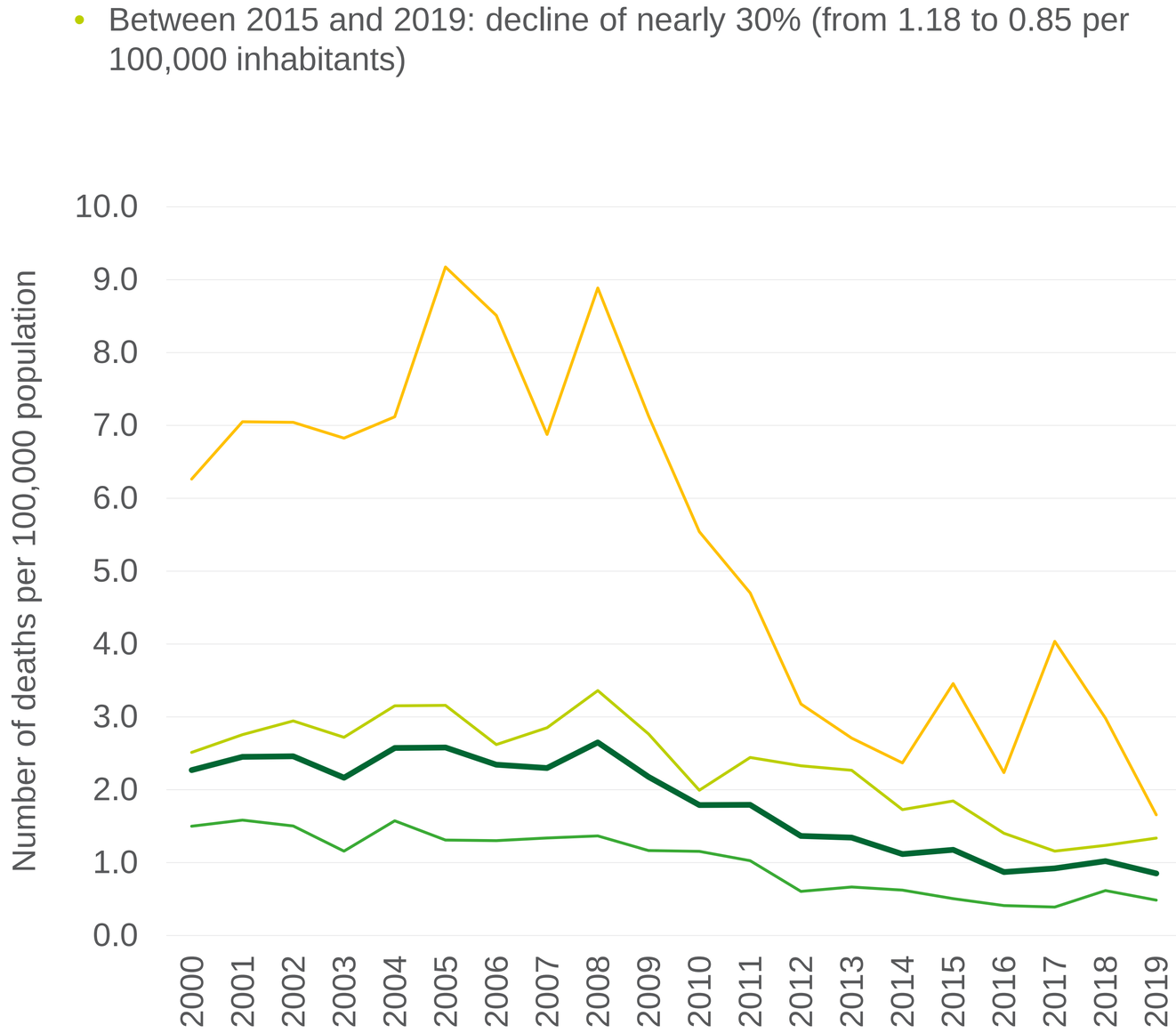

Fig 1: Age-standardised mortality rates, chronic and acute hepatitis C, by region, Belgium, 2000-2019

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. Combating hepatitis B and C to reach elimination by 2030: advocacy brief [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016. Available from: https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/206453

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Elias Neirynck, Statbel (Statistics Belgium)

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