



Strengthening Primary Care – COVID-19 pandemic response – Pathology

The Australian Government continues to support the pathology sector's critical role in the COVID-19 response and will extend funding for COVID-19 testing for a further six months, to 31 March 2021. The Government will continue to:

- Supplement state and territory testing efforts, funding 50 per cent of the costs of public health testing facilities.
- Fund bulk-billed COVID-19 tests through Medicare, for patients referred for testing by their doctor.
- Fund special bulk-billed tests for aged care workers, interstate truck drivers and interstate rail crew workers. These tests can be for asymptomatic workers, and these people do not need to be referred by a doctor.
- Provide funding for a dedicated 'in-reach' COVID-19 pathology collection and testing services for residential aged care facilities.
- Provide an extension to Laboratory Medicare accreditations which are due to expire in the next six months.

Both public and private sector pathology providers have contributed to the more than 7.6 million COVID-19 tests conducted since the pandemic began.

Why is this important?

Pathology testing remains an important part of the strategy to contain the spread of COVID-19. Australian Government funding under Medicare has assisted in increasing testing rates, by incentivising testing and facilitating testing platform diversification.

Extending support for COVID-19 testing through Medicare, including special arrangements for aged care and transport workers, will maintain Australia's capacity to detect and track the spread of the disease, support the easing of restrictions and minimise the economic consequences of the pandemic.

There has been an upswing in usual pathology services following a sharp decrease in March and April 2020 as a result of lockdown measures. This increase in usual services has made it possible to bring forward the end date of two temporary pathology viability measures introduced in April 2020: a temporary waiver of approved pathology collection centre renewal fees; and the moratorium on opening of new approved collection centres. These two

temporary viability support measures, previously planned for removal from 1 September, concluded on 30 June 2020.

Who will benefit?

This continued support will ensure all Australians have access to bulk-billed COVID-19 tests under Medicare. Essential workers in the aged care sector and interstate freight industry will continue to get priority access to rapid testing under Medicare.

The risks to aged care residents from COVID-19 are higher than the general population, requiring a coordinated and targeted testing approach. Maintaining dedicated residential aged care testing capacity will ensure services are available quickly and without additional administrative work for aged care providers at a time of crisis.

Disease progression in the community and advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee will determine whether these measures are required for a longer time.

How much will this cost?

This Government has committed over \$1.1 billion from 2019–20 to 2020–21, including for the demand-driven COVID-19 testing under Medicare.