



Guaranteeing Medicare – Investing in pathology

The Australian Government will invest \$667.1 million towards increasing pathology services for Australians, including extending the Medicare subsidies for COVID-19 testing until 31 December 2021. This builds on previous investment, totaling \$1.8 billion since the start of the pandemic.

Pathology has played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic, with testing at no charge forming a central part of the Government’s aggressive suppression strategy.

The Australian Government’s COVID-19 pathology investments include:

- \$493.5 million to extend the COVID-19 microbiology test for the general population and items associated with testing for some essential workers, and
- \$63.6 million to extend the dedicated ‘in-reach’ pathology service for residential aged care facilities to protect those Australians most at risk of the worst effects of COVID-19.

Other pathology-related investments* include:

- \$95.9 million to include 5 new items for pre-implantation genetic testing for individuals who are carriers of serious genetic disorders – such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy, Huntington’s disease, Fragile X and cystic fibrosis – so they may have a child free of that disorder. Expected to benefit 6,800 patients
- \$2.5 million for genetic testing for the diagnosis of hydatidiform moles. Expected to benefit 9,000 patients
- \$6.3 million for genetic testing for pregnancies with identified major foetal structural abnormalities. Expected to benefit 42,000 patients
- \$2.9 million for genetic testing for people with multiple myeloma and chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. Expected to benefit 13,500 patients
- \$2.1 million for point of care quantitation of HbA1c for the monitoring of diabetes in diagnosed patients. Expected to fund around 47,000 tests a year
- \$41,000 for amendments to the Quality Assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Services (QAAMS), items to help manage patients with multiple comorbidities. Expected to benefit 662 patients over 4 years.

- \$375,000 for diagnostic testing for neuromyelitis optica. Expected to benefit 40,000 patients, and
- Amendments to certain genetic testing for childhood syndromes MBS items. Expected to improve patient access.

*These investments are included in Factsheet 11 – MBS review and new inclusions.

Why is this important?

Pathology tests play a vital role in more than 70% of medical diagnoses in Australia and inform many clinical decisions related to patient care. Australia's pathology workforce consists of about 35,000 people who collect, process and report on approximately 500 million pathology tests each year.

The inclusion of new pathology related procedures and tests to the MBS means more Australian patients are able to access these critical diagnostic and monitoring tests, with lower out-of-pocket costs.

Timely and widely available COVID-19 testing supports the management of the disease, including the early detection of cases in the community. This in turn supports rapid and successful outbreak responses, safeguarding the maintenance of eased restrictions and minimising the economic consequences of the pandemic.

Continuing the in-reach pathology testing of senior Australians in aged care is a critical protection for vulnerable Australians.

Who will benefit?

All Australians will benefit from the continued support to access Medicare-subsidised COVID-19 testing. The broad community uptake of testing, particularly at critical times when there is increased risk of COVID-19 community transmission, continues to play a central role in detecting and responding to outbreaks, and ultimately protecting our entire community.

Senior Australians in residential aged care, the workforce who support and care for them, their families and loved ones will benefit with added confidence that COVID-19 testing will be carried out quickly, on-site and without additional cost, in the event of an outbreak affecting aged care.

Additional pathology items added to the MBS will mean more Australian patients will benefit from diagnostic and monitoring testing carried out by pathologists in labs around the country.

Families with predisposition for certain genetic disorders will benefit from access to pre-implantation testing to ensure their children are not born with severe illness.

How much will this cost?

The Australian Government is investing \$667.1 million over 4 years, from 2021-22.