

MEDIA RELEASE

11 May 2021:

Budget investment of Pathology tests a winner for all Australians

Tonight's Federal Health budget has the health of all Australians clearly in its sites, with funding for COVID-19 Pathology testing a key element of the \$667.1 million investment package.

President of Australian Pathology, Mark Neeham, welcomed the Commonwealth's commitment and ongoing support for COVID-19 pathology testing, as well as the many new measures for genetic tests for women and families announced in tonight's package.

Mr Neeham said the Treasurer's budget has put the role of private pathology front-and-centre, with more than half of all COVID-19 pathology tests completed by Australian Pathology members continuing to be funded through Medicare, with no out-of-pocket costs to Australians.

"This is a great win for all Australians, especially as we continue to see the need for Australians to be tests for COVID-19," Mr Neeham said.

"The private sector has been fundamental to Australia's response to the pandemic, often being the first to set up COVID-19 drive-through and pop-up clinics within hours of a case or new hotspot being identified. It has been great to see the private sector work collaboratively with the Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, to knock down COVID-19 transmissions through quick, efficient and 24-hour reporting of test results.

"Australia will continue to lead the world in its response to the pandemic."

Whilst COVID was a major focus of the Health budget, the Federal Government tonight also funded access for women and families to essential genetic tests, particularly in the area of antenatal and pre-natal care.

Australian Pathology CEO, Liesel Wett, also welcomed the significant investment in new Pathology tests.

"These new genetic tests are the Pathology tests of the future, and will have a positive impact on the health of many women and couples planning families, through the funding of pre-implantation genetic testing where there are known serious familial genetic disorders that may prevent them from starting families," Ms Wett said.

“It’s a great win for Australians, especially as Pathology has one of the highest bulk billing rates in the community at 99.6 per cent, meaning there will now be no out-of-pocket costs for these tests. A great win for women and families.”

In addition to these steps towards genetic testing, the Medicare funding for the faecal calprotectin test – a ‘poo test’ – will have a major impact on the treatment paths of Australians, enabling GPs and specialists to identify the treatment for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) from inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Both have very different treatment pathways, and the listing of this test on Medicare means the difference between having a blood test, as opposed to colonoscopies and the need for Gastroenterologist Consultations and procedures.

“The faecal calprotectin test now on Medicare means that GPs can work collaboratively with their patients to rule out more serious bowel disease quickly and efficiently. It will also have a major impact on the Health budget; no longer needing procedures such as colonoscopies to diagnose different disease,” Ms Wett said.

“This is a great win for patients, for their treating doctors and for pathologists who are working together with GPs and specialists to ensure Australians get the best and most contemporary care they should.

“What a great win for all involved, and a true way the private sector is working with the Government to get these tests listed.

“The partnership between the Government and private pathology laboratories has been critical in keeping Australians safe and preventing the mass outbreaks we have seen overseas.”

Mark Neeham agreed.

“This is a great example of a partnership approach to the delivery of Pathology services that benefit Australians, both now in the pandemic, and in the future, with new genetic tests being supported by Government on the Medicare schedule,” Mr Neeham said.

“Thank you to our 35,000 people working in pathology, especially those who have, every single day stood and worked at COVID-19 testing sites and clinics, in full personal protective equipment. We all say thank you to you, and thank you to the Government for funding these tests.”

ENDS

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