

MEDIA RELEASE

1st November 2023

Reproductive Carrier Screening is available on Medicare from today, 1st November 2023

The peak body representing Australia's private pathology industry, Australian Pathology has announced that Reproductive Carrier Screening will be available on Medicare from today, 1st November 2023. The three most common genetic conditions have been included. These are cystic fibrosis (CF), spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), and fragile X syndrome (FXS).

Australian Pathology President Mark Neeham said, "this once costly but vital screening has now become accessible to all Australians. It gives individuals and couples the knowledge to make informed decisions about their reproductive choices and gain access to the right prenatal care."

Australian Pathology CEO, Liesel Wett said, "today has been years in the making. Australian Pathology began advocating for Medicare funding for the Reproductive Carrier Screening in 2018. It's a momentous achievement to have the item numbers appear on the Medicare Benefits Schedule today. It gives all Australian families the ability to access the screening."

Dr Melanie Galea, Genetic Pathologist and Director of Genetics at Douglass Hanly Moir Pathology explains the process and when it's best to undertake the screening.

"The new Reproductive Carrier Screening rebates are available to patients who are either pregnant or planning a pregnancy to determine their carrier status for the three included genetic conditions. If they are found to be a carrier for either CF or SMA, testing of their reproductive partner for carrier status for that particular condition can then be subsequently undertaken under the rebate to inform their reproductive risk."

"Testing can be conducted either prior to pregnancy or in early pregnancy. However it is always preferable that the testing is undertaken prior to pregnancy because more management options are available to the individual or couple when that information is known early" explains Dr Melanie Galea.

Healius Pathology's Director of Genomics, Dr Kym Mina said the change will help more couples to make informed reproductive choices.

"One in 20 Australians will be a carrier for at least one of these genetic conditions, however most will not have a family history of the disease. Importantly, carriers are usually unaffected by the condition themselves, but have a higher risk of having an affected child.

"Genetic testing is the only way to find out whether or not you are a carrier for one of these conditions," explains Dr Kym Mina.

Liesel Wett
CEO, Australian Pathology
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Associate Professor Mirette Saad, National Director of Molecular Genetics at Australian Clinical Labs said the three conditions covered by the carrier screening test will identify the large majority of genetic abnormalities carried by potential parents.

“Knowing whether you are a carrier of Cystic Fibrosis, Spinal Muscular Atrophy or Fragile X and can plan your family armed with this knowledge has the potential to make these conditions a thing of the past”.

How great is it that pathology can deliver these Medicare funded genetic tests for all Australians,” said Associate Professor Mirette Saad.

The Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care said, “These new Medicare rebates for cutting-edge genetic testing will strengthen Medicare and make healthcare more affordable and available.”

“The new Medicare rebate for reproductive carrier testing will provide confidence to women and their partners as they plan a pregnancy and start a family.”

“Many children affected by genetic conditions are born to families with no history of disease because of the rare nature of the conditions and how they are inherited.”

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) guidelines recommend that information on genetic carrier screening is offered for every woman and couple who are either planning or in the first stage of pregnancy, regardless of their risk factors.

ENDS

Available for interview:

Dr Melanie Galea, Genetic Pathologist, Director of Genetics, Douglass Hanly Moir Pathology

Dr Kym Mina, Director of Genomics, Healius Pathology

A/Prof Chris Barnes, National Director, Australian Clinical Labs

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