

MEDIA RELEASE

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**THE RCPA CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO END FREEZE ON MEDICARE
REBATES FOR PATHOLOGY TESTING**

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA) has called on the Government to end the freeze on Medicare rebates for pathology testing which has been in place for over 20 years. This follows the announcement from the Government that the current indexation freeze on all GP services on the MBS will be lifted from 1 July 2019, along with various diagnostic testing rebates from 1 July 2020.

Associate Professor Bruce Latham, President of the RCPA, said,

“It is disappointing to see a continuation of the freeze on Medicare rebates for pathology testing. Pathology is central to many of the health initiatives announced in the Federal Budget 2019, including personalised treatment of cancers, diabetes prevention, care and research, tackling antimicrobial resistance, diagnosis of blood borne viruses and STIs, genomics, and biobanking”

Beginning on 1 July 2019, the indexation of rebates for 119 general practitioner item numbers on the MBS will be reintroduced, whilst rebates on X-rays and ultrasounds will increase from mid-2020. The freeze on rebates for pathology testing remains in place.

“Whilst we welcome the intention to more adequately fund diagnostic imaging, oncology and surgery, it is important to note that none of these modalities actually diagnose cancer. One hundred percent of all cancer diagnoses are made by medical specialist pathologists and, despite the dramatically increasing complexity and expense involved in cancer diagnosis, MBS rebates for all pathology tests remain frozen.”

“Personalised cancer treatment requires molecular genetic analysis of tumour cells. It is not true to say that genetic analysis is only in the future or that it is currently just a research issue. Over 1,000 molecular genetic tests are in routine diagnostic use today but only about 30 of these items are covered on the MBS. These tests are absolutely vital in guiding treatment choices, however, due to their cost are not accessible to all who need them” said A/Prof Latham.

Recent nationwide research conducted by the RCPA for the Department of Health, showed that genetic and genomic testing is becoming increasingly integrated into healthcare, reflected by a 73% increase in test requests over the past 5 ½ years. More than 660,000 genetic/genomic tests were reported over the one-year survey period. Of the 79, 000 requested for cancer the vast majority were funded by patients themselves or public hospitals.

“The more than 20-year rebate freeze has created two significant problems that threaten the future of pathology services for Australians. One is that newer, mainly genetic, tests are not funded by Medicare at all and the other is that established tests are now critically underfunded. The high quality and timely pathology testing to which Australians are entitled is threatened to the point of near-extinction. The Government must intervene and end the rebate freeze,” said A/Prof Latham.

The RCPA is the leading organisation representing pathologists in Australasia and will continue to support pathologists and improve the use of pathology testing to achieve better healthcare for all Australians. The RCPA continues to work with the Government to ensure that pathology services are accessible and affordable for all Australians.



For more information on the RCPA, visit www.rcpa.edu.au or see our updates on [Facebook](#) or Twitter - [@PathologyRCPA](#) [#RCPA](#) [#pathology](#) [#MedicinesPathology](#).

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About the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia:

The RCPA is the leading professional organisation representing pathologists, medical specialists and scientists who provide pathology testing in Australasia. Its mission is to train and support pathologists and to improve the use of pathology testing to achieve better healthcare.

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