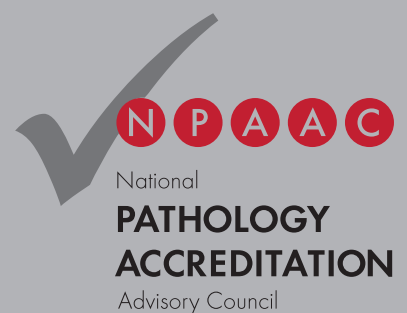




Australian Government
Department of Health

NATIONAL PATHOLOGY ACCREDITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (NPAAC) **STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025**



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NPAAC Strategic Plan 2020–2025
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ENQUIRIES

Notice

From 1 July 2021, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) is responsible for coordinating the Australian Pathology Accreditation Scheme and managing the development of the pathology accreditation standards.

For enquiries about this publication, email pathology@safetyandquality.gov.au.

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NPAAC STRATEGIC PLAN, 2020-2025

Pathology services provided to the Australian public continue to be safe, accessible and efficient when compared to those in other high income countries.¹ In the last three years, the National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Committee (NPAAC) has set new Standards to address new technologies and to deliver on the Australian public's expectation of good governance in the delivery of healthcare.

In return, the sector has successfully delivered a world first paradigm shift in cervical screening, adapted practice to an inaugural standard for genomic testing which will underpin the introduction of genomic medicine and set the principle of risk to patients at the centre of its approach to service provision. These measures are transformative events and these successes speak to the professionalism of the Australian medical laboratory workforce.

In the past few months the COVID-19 pandemic has presented an extreme challenge to both healthcare and the entire community. The response of Australia's pathology services to the call for high volumes of testing was prompt and effective and has underpinned Australia's efforts to contain the spread of the disease.

This new strategic plan seeks to build on this foundation of competence and quality in the sector and ensure that pathology services continue to support the health of the Australian community.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The recognition of diagnostic services as critical national infrastructure, glimpsed during cyber-attacks and weather events, was made clear in Australia and internationally during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The strengths of Australia's pathology sector were evident. After a world first breakthrough in which scientists from The Doherty Institute grew the virus, in house assays for COVID-19 were developed rapidly by a small number of experts and distributed within laboratory networks and testing was externally validated as being of consistently high quality across the nation. The crisis also revealed the weakness of the sector's highly efficient model of service when the business continuity of some laboratories was compromised by the dramatic fall in the volume of routine testing that accompanied the coronavirus shut down. The focus over many years, in Australia and internationally, has been on strategies to deliver progressive increments in efficiency. Those with the greatest potential e.g. mergers and acquisitions have already been enacted in the Australian setting. Other cost cutting measures such as employing lower cost and less qualified staff, and reducing staff numbers deliver a smaller dividend and may compromise the ability of the sector to deliver the required services as well as respond to future crises. Regrettably there are reports of such measures in the Australian context. Lastly the pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of Australia, a small and distant market, to any failures in the supply chain.

1. <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2018/07/the-healthcare-diagnostics-value-game.pdf>

Pathology testing using new technologies is increasingly available to the Australian public outside of the mature accreditation framework required by Government for the payment of Medicare rebates. Assuring the Australian public of the safety of this testing by non-accredited laboratories, or direct to consumer products, or overseas laboratories, presents a growing challenge.

There has been a rapid evolution in the relationship between consumers and their pathology testing. The introduction by the Australian Government of the digital health record system, My Health Record, has given record holders direct access to their pathology testing and provides another layer of scrutiny to identify un-actioned reports. Point of care testing, increasingly available in the General Practice setting, will move, in time, to the patient's home, so that the patient may act as the pathology laboratory providing their results in a telehealth consultation.

Lastly, a succession of Royal Commissions² has demonstrated that the Australian public has a high degree of confidence in its institutions and services and will not tolerate failures in the conduct of their managers or failures of regulatory bodies to hold a sector to account. Conduct enacted to meet profit or personal performance targets has been identified as requiring the regulator's attention.

2. <https://www.afr.com/policy/banking-royal-commission-hayne-a-wakeup-call-for-boardrooms-around-australia-20190207-h1azmp>

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1

Patient safety:

To protect the interests of Australian patients by identifying and responding to significant risks in the sector by -

- Continuing to build and disseminate the evidence base of risks in the sector, including testing outside the accreditation framework and cybersecurity
- Using the risk based approach in selecting targets for new Standards and in the setting of Standards.

KEY OUTCOMES

- A low incidence of patient harm events in the accredited pathology sector.
- Continuing accreditation of pathology practices
- Inclusion of testing with significant clinical utility inside the accreditation framework

ACTIONS

- Make available to the sector any new risks identified from incident reports, the risk register and accreditation experience via the NPAAC website and other channels of communication
- Advise the accrediting agency of key risks to patient safety that require review in the sector
- Develop new Standards to describe and address major risks in plain English
- Develop a Quality framework, including a Standard, to support the use of point of care testing in community settings.
- Seek a review of the public health risk of non-Medicare pathology services.

OBJECTIVE 2

Governance in the pathology sector:

To support laboratory medicine professionals to develop a sound risk management framework by -

- Providing advice to the sector on the development of risk structure and culture
- Harnessing the insights of the sector on their response to COVID-19 pandemic to identify the key risks and mitigant strategies in this case and as a case study of an extreme challenge to the provision of laboratory services.
- Identifying any failures in the workforce with respect to skills, innovation, disruption or changed work environment, and facilitating solutions.

KEY OUTCOMES

- There is an understanding of the value of a risk management framework within the pathology practice and in the sector
- There is a regular testing of plans for crisis management and business continuity.
- A reliable pipeline for the supply of a skilled workforce is developed

ACTIONS

- Links to risk management resources are published on the NPAAC website
- A survey of the sector's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic is conducted and recommendations made to reduce the risk to patients from pathology testing functions in future similar events.
- Specific workforce skills shortages are identified through registration or certification and other channels and solutions developed.

OBJECTIVE 3

Whole of healthcare value:

To maximise the value of pathology services to the Australian public through collaboration with other healthcare bodies by -

- Providing advice on the introduction
- of new technologies and the design of the quality framework
- Providing advice where pathology testing is the foundational technology in a healthcare strategy

KEY OUTCOMES

- NPAAC is an early and effective contributor to the work of TGA, MSAC, ACSQHC and Government policy units
- NPAAC contributes to the development of an understanding of the role of pathology service provision as critical infrastructure in healthcare.

ACTIONS

- A formal structure is developed to include NPAAC in consultations with Government patient quality and safety agencies and policy areas

OBJECTIVE 4

Partnering with patients and consumers:

To develop advice and information on testing in accredited and non- accredited settings, point of care, testing overseas, direct to consumer testing

- To advise on resources to support consumers accessing pathology results in the My Health Record.

KEY OUTCOMES

- A Standard on Direct to Consumer testing will be developed.

ACTIONS

- NPAAC to provide links to information for consumers on pathology testing, including Lab Tests on Line
- NPAAC to develop a Standard on DTC testing

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. The incidence of patient harm involving the Australian pathology sector as reported in the public domain.
2. Accreditation status of Australian medical pathology laboratories
3. Measures of pathology workforce sufficiency are established
4. New and revised Standards are published within a fifteen month cycle.





www.health.gov.au/npaac

All information in this publication is correct as at August 2020

DT000831 August 2020