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**TIME TO LIFT THE FREEZE ON MEDICARE REBATES FOR  
 PATHOLOGY SERVICES**  
*AMA Position Statement on Pathology 2019*

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the Government must act immediately to end the freeze on Medicare rebates for pathology services, which has been in place for more than 20 years.

“The Government this week announced it will re-introduce indexation for most diagnostic imaging services from 1 July 2020,” Dr Bartone said.

“It must now do the right thing by patients and do the same for pathology services. The freeze has gone on for far too long. Patients and the Australian health system are the big losers.”

The AMA has today released its updated *Position Statement on Pathology 2019* to reflect new AMA policies and changes to the Australian healthcare system since the Position Statement was first developed in 2011.

The Position Statement underlines the AMA’s ongoing commitment to supporting doctors who provide pathology services, as well as doctors who refer their patients to these services for diagnosis and monitoring.

“The vital role of pathology to 21<sup>st</sup> century health care is too often undervalued, and this must change,” Dr Bartone said.

“The largely ‘hidden’ nature of pathology services makes the sector especially prone to underfunding.

“Pathology is a critical component of modern health care in Australia.

“It provides crucial information for screening, diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring, upon which the entire health system is reliant.

“This means that underfunding of pathology services affects the safety, quality, and timeliness of all health services. It is impacting on the pathology workforce and will seriously challenge the sector’s viability if the underfunding continues.

“Investment in high-quality pathology services ultimately saves taxpayers from higher downstream costs in the acute care sector.”

Dr Bartone said that the AMA has for some time been calling on the Federal Government to provide realistic reimbursements to patients through Medicare so that pathology services remain high-quality, timely, and accessible to people who need them.

“We are highlighting emerging issues that are impacting on the pathology sector, patients, and the broader health sector,” Dr Bartone said.

“The AMA opposes the increasing marketing of direct-to-consumer pathology tests, such as those sold through pharmacies.

“Health checks, screening activities, and diagnostic tests that are not clinically indicated, evidence-based, and cost effective are a vehicle for generating income rather than providing responsible health care services aimed at benefiting patients.

“Opportunistic ‘health screening’ of asymptomatic people leaves them with unnecessary out-of-pocket costs and risks generating needless follow-up consultations and services.

“Pathology tests should only be requested on behalf of a patient by a doctor in the context of providing health care.

“Medical genetic testing, in particular, should always be accompanied by appropriate genetic counselling and patient education,” Dr Bartone said.

Dr Bartone said that the AMA supports a nationally consistent and strategic approach to integrating the rapidly evolving field of health genomics into the health care system.

“Health genomics has the potential to fundamentally change the way illness is prevented, diagnosed, treated, and monitored, offering the opportunity to provide more precise and tailored treatments.

“For example, genomics now helps ensure that treatment for breast cancer is tailored for a specific individual, which means better survival rates and fewer unnecessary and ineffective treatments.

“A national approach is necessary to ensure quality and safety, and, especially, equitable patient access.

“The AMA will continue to promote the importance of supporting a high-quality pathologist and pathology-related workforce.

“Ongoing training and development of the existing workforce and investment in a future workforce are vital to sustaining high-quality and diverse pathology services.

“We desperately need appropriate investment to provide attractive and dynamic career paths for junior pathologists, ensure a high level of professionalism and skill is maintained, and ensure sufficient pathologists can be attracted and retained to meet future demand.”

The *AMA Position Statement on Diagnostic Imaging 2019* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/pathology-2019>.

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