

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

13 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000233

Question Subject: Covid-19 testing

Type of Question: Written

Questioner: Senator Gallagher

Question:

1. Why has Tasmania's test rate per head of population been lower than other states and territories?
2. Who is paying for tests- the State or Federal Government?
3. How much does each test cost?

Answer:

Question 1

As at 0630 hrs, 18 May 2020, the total tests per 100,000 population in Tasmania was 4,087. This is on par with the National testing rate of 4,128 per 100,000 at the same point in time. Laboratory testing recommendations have been developed and revised throughout the COVID-19 epidemic by the Communicable Diseases Network Australia's COVID-19 National Guideline for Public Health Units.

Testing rates in each jurisdiction will vary over time based on changes to the testing recommendations, their local epidemic context, as well as the likely number of at-risk people meeting the testing criteria (e.g. the number of returned travellers from overseas).

Questions 2 and 3

Pathology testing for COVID-19 is a joint effort between Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. Tests are conducted in state and territory facilities and by the private sector.

The Commonwealth Government has implemented dedicated Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for pathology tests for COVID-19, with a fee of \$50 for public laboratories and \$100 for private laboratories. MBS funded pathology tests for COVID-19 must be bulk billed, that is, provided at no cost to the patient.

The differential MBS fee reflects the significant funding contribution the Commonwealth Government is providing to the states and territories through the *National Partnership on COVID-19 Response* (National Partnership).

Under our COVID-19 response the Commonwealth Government has agreed to provide an uncapped 50 per cent contribution to the costs incurred by state and territory public health and hospital systems, in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, including for diagnostic services.

The vast majority of pathology tests for COVID-19 provided by public laboratories are expected to be funded under the National Partnership.

As at 18 May, in Tasmania there have been over 300,000 MBS funded COVID-19 tests.