

**Test stockpile - is this an essential part of a National Testing Strategy for  
COVID-19 Recovery? May 4 2020**

**Key Points:**

- In general terms, Pathology Technology Australia members support the formation of a national stockpile for COVID-19 testing. But only as part of a well-thought-out National Testing Strategy for COVID-19 Recovery.
- Developing a national stockpile for COVID-19 testing products is not the same as a stockpile for PPE.
- Most of the COVID-19 testing in Australia is performed on proprietary platforms with dedicated test consumables. Any stockpile for testing must contain consumables from multiple manufacturers to effectively diversify risk.
- These products often require very specific storage conditions and have short shelf-lives. Careful management of these will be essential.
- Stockpiling needs to consider the potential for mutations of the viral RNA and the ability of stored tests to detect new forms of the virus.
- Without a clear strategy to manage such a stockpile millions of dollars will be wasted and will not serve the purpose envisaged.

Pathology Technology Australia is the peak body representing the manufacturers and suppliers of pathology testing products used in pathology laboratories, hospitals, in community clinics and for home testing. As such we hold an integrated picture of all testing capabilities in pathology laboratories and have clear sight of test development and supply for COVID-19 tests now and into the future. More than 20 members of PTA manufacture or supply a combined 90% of all COVID-19 serology tests and between 65 and 85% of the viral RNA detection and extraction products (respectively). We hold significant skills and knowledge of both the science and logistics of storing and supplying such materials.

Dean Whiting, CEO of Pathology Technology Australia (who is a trained clinical biochemist) says that Pathology Technology Australia member companies generally support the formation of a national stockpile for COVID-19 testing products. In general terms, PTA members would participate in establishing the stockpile to build the diversity required to make it useful.

PTA has completed an extensive audit of the COVID-19 capability in our accredited pathology labs to find that we have considerable spare capacity on existing installed testing platforms, and we are building on this every day. Major manufacturers of

COVID-19 tests and the required consumables, have increased production capabilities 5x, 10x and in some cases 20x their normal levels. Holding a diverse stockpile of critical COVID-19 related tests and technology will help protect the Australian population against unplanned interruptions to supply.

There is the potential for this stockpile to be of little value if the complexities associated with COVID-19 testing are not adequately considered. The large majority of PCR based COVID-19 tests are performed on proprietary platforms which generally require dedicated consumables. If the national stockpile does not comprise products representing the diversity of testing in the laboratory, then its use is very limited.

There are other important factors which will contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a successful stockpile:

- Suitable temperature control and monitoring. Many of these products need to be stored at below -20C. Active temperature validation and monitoring will be required to ensure the products perform as expected.
- These products often have limited shelf-life and required active management to reduce write-offs.
- Stockpiling needs to consider possible mutations in viral RNA. Small changes in the genetic make-up of the virus might reduce the effectiveness of testing products over time. Manufacturers monitor this and modify testing products as needed. It will therefore be important to set stock levels that can be consumed within such lifecycle changes in the virus.
- Such a stockpile is best established under a well-articulated National Testing Strategy for COVID-19 Recovery.

A well-articulated national testing strategy for COVID-19 recovery is urgently required and the provisioning of a national stockpile is best determined and communicated within an integrated and well-thought-out National Testing Strategy for COVID-19 Recovery.

### **About Pathology Technology Australia**

Pathology Technology Australia Ltd is the peak industry body representing manufacturers and importers of technologies, vital to testing patient samples in the clinical laboratory, in hospitals and in the community.

This technology enables more than 500 million tests to be performed in Australia every year. With an aging population and increasing disease chronicity, pathology technology will play an increasingly important role in providing high quality, accessible and affordable healthcare services in Australia's future.