Pathology Technology Australia (PTA) welcomes the release of the Federal Government's long awaited Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Review into improved access to medicines. This is an important step in providing Australians more timely and equitable access to new medicines and targeted treatments.

This review was initiated as part of the last Medicines Agreement and as such was largely limited to HTA and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Schedule (PBS).

CEO of Pathology Technology Australia, Dean Whiting, believes the extensive review process was a lost opportunity. "When almost all medicines are prescribed after a diagnosis is made, and between 70 and 100% of all diagnoses depend on a pathology test, broader inclusion of diagnostic testing would have been beneficial."

Any improvement in availability of medicines could be compromised because the HTA and Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC – the group that assesses diagnostic tests for Medicare funding) processes were not extensively reviewed and are commonly seen as no longer fit for purpose. This is particularly so when considering innovative pathology technology in genomics, point of care testing, digital enablers and supporting infrastructure. The HTA /MSAC processes need to be more agile, flexible, and reflective – with decisions made reviewed on a frequent basis.

The Minister for Health, Hon. Mark Butler MP, recently announced a Targeted Pathology Review looking at elements of pathology test funding, and the impact of emerging pathology technologies. Mr Whiting and the PTA membership are supportive of this approach but caution that patients are already missing out. "Long delays in reviewing and reforming HTA/MSAC could lead to delays in implementing faster access to medicines and see Australia fall further behind in access to innovative pathology technology," said Mr Whiting.

PTA is working closely with Government and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care to facilitate more agile technology assessment and funding of vital pathology technology to ensure we can continue to provide the right test, to the right patient, at the right time.