



Canberra  
Health  
Services



**ACT**  
Government

# Canberra Health Services Consultation Paper

Molecular Pathology Continuous 7-day Service  
ACT Pathology

July 2024



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# Introduction

Canberra Health Services (CHS) is focussed on the delivery of high quality, effective, person-centred care. It provides acute, sub-acute, primary, and community-based health services to the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)—a catchment of approximately 400, 000 people. It also services the surrounding Southern New South Wales (NSW) region.

CHS administers a range of publicly funded health facilities, programs, and services.

ACT Pathology is a part of CHS and is responsible for providing specialist pathology services to all CHS facilities - The Canberra Hospital (TCH) and North Canberra Hospital (NCH) and Outpatient Collection Centres (OPCC). ACT Pathology also services to private hospitals and patients in the community who are referred by GPs and specialists. Pathology is a medical specialty that determines the cause and nature of diseases by examining and testing body tissues (from biopsies and aspirates, for example) and bodily fluids (from samples including blood and urine). Pathology is essential to the prevention, early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of many clinical disorders.

## Purpose

This proposal seeks to enhance the preparedness and quality of Molecular Pathology services within ACT Pathology by establishing a continuous 7-day service, including weekends and public holidays. It opens avenues for improving existing turnaround times and test availability, prompting a thoughtful examination of the clinical services needed to bolster the ACT health system and community. Aligned with the vision of Canberra Health Services to collaboratively create exceptional healthcare, the proposal actively backs the three strategic priorities of personal health services, fostering an exemplary work environment, and positioning itself as a leading specialist provider.

Consultation is required due to the proposed formalisation of the continuous 7-day service.

ACT Pathology is seeking further input from staff and unions regarding this proposal, prior to any final decisions being taken.

## Background and Current Model

Before 2020, Molecular Pathology services were conducted on-site at Canberra Hospital, operating from Monday to Friday between 08:30 and 16:51, with a weekend roster to support the winter surge, particularly for respiratory testing.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022, there was a significant reconfiguration of scientific and technical officer staffing in the Molecular Pathology Department at ACT Pathology. This adjustment was made in direct response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, aiming to deliver essential SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic services to the Canberra community.



The implementation of a 7-day service became imperative to effectively handle the daily volume of SARS-CoV-2 tests. This was essential not only to ensure appropriate test turnaround times for optimal clinical care and public health management but also to support infection control and patient flow management within the Canberra and North Canberra Hospitals. Moreover, this presented opportunities to enhance existing turnaround times and test availability for other assays, prompting a reflection on the clinical services needed to support the overall ACT health system and community.

In July 2023, the Molecular Pathology Department returned to hours of work for non-shift workers as per B17 of the Health Professional Enterprise agreement. Additionally, a winter surge roster for respiratory testing on weekends was continued.

Maintaining BAU in Molecular Pathology without a weekend roster would have adverse effects on crucial rapid diagnostic services essential for optimising individual patient care and Public Health purposes. Services such as meningococcus nucleic acid amplification testing (NAAT), measles NAAT, and monkeypox virus NAAT depend on the constant availability of Molecular Pathology. Additionally, the prompt notification of routine tests is vital for early clinical decision-making regarding individual patient care and early identification and management of potential outbreaks with public health significance, particularly in the case of respiratory viruses.

While there remains uncertainty regarding the specifics of what "COVID normal" will entail from a testing perspective, it is reasonably certain that the virus will persist in circulating and mutating globally. This ongoing presence will be linked to seasonal epidemics of influenza and RSV, inevitably resulting in testing surges and necessitating the continuous availability of Molecular Pathology services. In the last month, Australia has seen the emergence of highly pathogenic avian influenza, and with H5 occurring in the United States the year, the importance of having responsive molecular services is further emphasised.

The provision of diagnostic services seven days a week holds particular significance within hospital/s for bed management and patient flow. This continuous service aids in facilitating earlier clinician decision-making, supporting patient bed placement, managing intra- and inter-facility transfers, and addressing infection control measures. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in supporting outbreak investigations within healthcare facilities and high-risk community settings.

Establishing a reliable weekend and public holiday service in Molecular Pathology will position ACT Pathology to effectively meet future demands in diagnostic services and emerging molecular technologies. This initiative ensures an optimal level of support as Canberra Health Services progresses into the future.

## Proposed Changes

To address fluctuations in demand arising from the winter season, surges, and potential outbreaks, it is proposed to establish a consistent service to accommodate the dynamic workflow in Molecular Pathology. This involves providing a 7-day service throughout the year, incorporating rostered Health Professional (HP)/Technical Officers on Saturdays, Sundays,



and Public Holidays. The proposed working hours for the staff are intended to remain consistent on weekdays (Monday-Friday).

In order to be able to achieve rostering of the Molecular Pathology workforce we propose to include the requirement to participate in weekend and public holiday rosters as part of the duty statement of all technical officers and Health Professionals to reflect this practice as part of their work. Following the completion of the consultation process, it is proposed that relevant rostering amendments will be made, noting individual circumstances will be considered.

Should this proceed, rosters will be published in line with Clause Q15 – Rostering Practice of the ACTPS Technical and Other Professionals Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026; and Health Professionals Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026.

A minimum of 28 days' notice will be given prior to the commencement of the first roster, to allow staff to work with their families to set-up for working a rotating roster to include weekend/public holidays.

Following the completion of the consultation process, the changes (if any) to be implemented will be communicated as soon as practical to ACT Pathology, the unions and any relevant external stakeholders.



# Consultation methodology

The table below details the consultation timeline. There are still details that need to be determined and your feedback, suggestions and questions will assist in further refining the proposal.

## Consultation Timeline

|   | Action  | Dates   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>1a. Initial presentation of the proposal at meeting with the Molecular Pathology team, ACT Pathology, including time for questions and answers;</p> <p>1b. Documentation (including presentation described above) to be provided to all Molecular Pathology Staff; and</p> <p>1c. Letter and consultation document to be provided to the unions – (HSU, CPSU), and formal consultation document (this document) to be circulated to all ACT Pathology Molecular Pathology staff.</p>   | <p>10/07/2024</p> <p>10/07/2024</p> <p>10/07/2024</p> |
| 2 | <p>Consultation period open. Feedback can be provided via email to <a href="mailto:ACTPathologyED@act.gov.au">ACTPathologyED@act.gov.au</a>. We are seeking responses to the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Do you support updating all Molecular Pathology &amp; Health Professional &amp; Technical Officer duty statements to include the requirement to participate in weekend and public holiday rosters.</li> <li>2) Do you support the formalisation of a continuous 7-day service;</li> <li>3) Do you have any other feedback you would like to be considered in relation to the formalisation of a continuous 7-day roster?</li> </ol> | 10/07/2024  |
| 3 | Consultation feedback period ends   | 24/07/2024  |
| 4 | Face to face Q&A session to address any questions within the consultation period.   | 18/07/2024  |
| 5 | <p>Feedback collated.</p> <p>All suggestions from consultation to be reviewed and any changes incorporated into the decision paper</p>  | 25/07/2024 – 01/08/2024                               |
| 6 | Decision paper to be presented and circulated.  | 08/08/2024  |



For any further information relating to the expansion of the ACT Pathology Molecular Pathology service hours of operation at The Canberra Hospital and subsequent consultation process, please contact [ACTPathologyED@act.gov.au](mailto:ACTPathologyED@act.gov.au).

## Available Support

CHS places the highest priority on employee health and wellbeing and offers several support options for you and any immediate family members, should this process become stressful for affected staff members.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP), through Converge International, offers free, professional and confidential services to support staff members and their immediate family through both personal and work-related issues. To access support, staff are welcome to call 1300 687 327 (1300 OUR EAP). This number is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. More information on the EAP and how to access services is available at the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\) \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Additional support can be sought from the Workplace Resolution and Support Service by contacting [CHS-HDWorkplaceResolution@act.gov.au](mailto:CHS-HDWorkplaceResolution@act.gov.au) or ph. 5124 3656.

## References

| Document  | Author                                     |
|---|--|
| Consultation Guidelines for Managers                  | People & Culture, Canberra Health Services |
| ACTPS Union Engagement Policy                         | ACT Public Service                         |
| Health Professionals Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026   | ACT Public Service                         |
| Technical and Other Professionals Agreement 2023-2026 | ACT Public Service                         |



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Information about the directorate can be found on the website:  
[www.canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au](http://www.canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au)



### Acknowledgement of Country

Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life of this region.

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