

Question on Notice

No. 458

Asked on 18 April 2024

MR J KRAUSE ASKED MINISTER FOR HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN (HON S FENTIMAN)—

QUESTION

With reference to Pathology Queensland—

Will the Minister advise (reported separately by financial year from 2015-16 to 2022-23, the percentage of (a) Complexity Code 4.1 samples completed within 48 hours, (reported separately for each Pathology Queensland Laboratory listed on Pathology Queensland's website (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/pathology-queensland/healthcare/laboratories>)), (b) Complexity Code 4.1 samples completed within 48 hours, state wide, (c) Complexity Code 6 samples completed within seven days (reported separately for each Pathology Queensland Laboratory listed on Pathology Queensland's website (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/pathology-queensland/healthcare/laboratories>)) and (d) Complexity Code 6 samples completed within seven days, state wide?

ANSWER

Over the last 10 years, the Anatomical Pathology (AP) workload has increased by 50 per cent. The histology registrations have also grown by around 11 per cent in the last 12 months. There are many drivers of demand for AP including an increase in the volume of biopsies and increasing volume of diagnostic pathology requests from surgeons.

There is a current national and international shortage of anatomical pathologists particularly in the regional centres which, coupled with increased to workforce not keeping pace with demand, has greatly impacted on Pathology Queensland's (PQ) histology turnaround times.

To address this, PQ has undertaken a sustained recruitment drive. Since July 2023, PQ has invested an additional \$8.89 million in AP. This represents an increase of 34 frontline positions including 15 additional APs, 6 additional registrars and 13 additional laboratory and support positions.

The anatomical pathologists work is subject to ongoing review and allocation of work to align with clinical priorities. Clinically urgent samples such as breast cores are prioritised over other samples that are dependent on externalities such as autopsy reports.

A further investment of \$6.9 million has been committed to roll out digital anatomical pathology capacity across laboratories providing anatomical pathology services. In the period for which data is sought, PQ made some significant changes in its data management processes to improve accuracy.

To access data prior to April 2022 would be an unreasonable diversion of resources. Data for the period from April 2022 is set out below:

While the turnaround times below are for the time points requested (48 hours and 7 days), it should be noted that the the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS) uses 96 hours for HISL4.1 and seven days for HISL 6 for a reference for first validation.

HISL 4.1 per cent within 48 hours				
Testing Lab	2021/22 Jan – Jun	2022/23 Jul - Jun	2023/24 Jul - Dec	2023/24 Jan - current
Cairns	30%	33%	35%	37%
Central-RBWH	5%	5%	5%	6%
Gold Coast	50%	37%	29%	22%
PA	38%	17%	8%	10%
Prince Charles	51%	46%	44%	42%
SCUH	28%	15%	11%	15%
Toowoomba	20%	15%	7%	9%
Townsville	41%	41%	32%	36%
PQ Overall	26%	20%	16%	16%

HISL 6 per cent within 7 days				
Testing Lab	2021/22 Jan - Jun	2022/23 Jul - June	2023/24 July - Dec	2023/24 Jan - Current
Cairns		88%	75%	0%
Central-RBWH	27%	29%	22%	20%
Gold Coast	61%	50%	42%	35%
PA	62%	49%	35%	34%
Prince Charles	89%	92%	94%	92%
SCUH	68%	41%	12%	17%
Toowoomba	61%	47%	22%	21%
Townsville	26%	29%	34%	60%
PQ Overall	49%	44%	34%	34%

Technical notes to accompany data

- Data sourced from AUSLAB
- Financial year 2021/22 is for the period 1 April to 30 June 2022 and financial year 2023/24 is for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 April 2024.