



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health**

**CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**

12 April 2017

Dear Colleague

**Interim arrangements for the National Cervical Screening Program**

On 23 February 2017 I announced the delay of the National Cancer Screening Register implementation, and the subsequent delay of the renewed National Cervical Screening Program from 1 May to 1 December 2017.

The implementation of the renewed National Cervical Screening Program, with the new Cervical Screening Test, is contingent upon a high quality nationally consistent register to provide a safety net for women to ensure they get the follow up they need. The decision to delay was taken in consultation with, and support from the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

I would like to thank you for your engagement and support of the National Cervical Screening Program to date. I understand that some doctors and patients may be aligning cervical screening to the start of the new Cervical Screening Test, a primary human papillomavirus (HPV) test, and understandably, are disappointed by this unexpected delay.

Until 30 November 2017, please continue to encourage all eligible women aged 18-69 to have their two yearly Pap test, and attend their follow up appointment when due. Regular screening remains the best way to prevent cervical cancer, and women should not delay cervical screening. The National Health and Medical Research Council *2005 Screening to Prevent Cervical Cancer: Guidelines for the Management of asymptomatic women with screen-detected abnormalities* (2005 Guidelines) remain in place until 30 November 2017.

To ensure Australia's highly effective National Cervical Screening Program continues the Department of Health has developed the following interim arrangements:

**Cervical Screening MBS items**

*From now until 30 April 2017*

The Medicare rebate for the conventional cytology test will remain. The Liquid Based Cytology (LBC) test is not available under the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and women will be privately billed for this service.

*From 1 May–30 November 2017*

LBC will be added to the MBS. For each patient a Medicare rebate will only be payable for one cervical screening test for cytology, either the LBC test or the conventional cytology test. If you choose to do both tests, you will need to inform patients that they will incur an out-of-pocket cost.

The LBC test will be set at a Medicare fee of \$36.00 per test and will exist alongside the rebate for the conventional cytology test.

Adding LBC to the MBS will help to reduce workforce pressures in the pathology sector. Until 1 December 2017, turnaround times for cervical screening test results may be longer than usual; however this is still clinically safe for women.

The availability of a rebate for the LBC test is good news for women who are currently paying for this test. It is important to inform patients that the LBC test is as effective as the conventional cytology test.

Please liaise with your pathology provider about the scope of cervical screening technologies they offer and for advice about preparing conventional slides or LBC samples.

*From 1 December 2017*

The Medicare items for cervical screening will change on 1 December 2017 when the renewed National Cervical Screening Program is implemented. More information and resources about these changes will be available closer to the implementation of the renewed National Cervical Screening Program.

**State and territory registers**

Until 30 November 2017, the current state and territory registers will continue to send cervical reminder and follow up communication to eligible women, and their providers, where applicable. Please continue to issue recalls and reminders to patients as per your current procedures.

**How is the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program impacted by the delay to the National Cancer Screening Register?**

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program already has a national register that is managed by the Department of Human Services.

GPs can reassure patients (aged 50-74) that they will continue to receive test kits as part of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program and should continue to participate in the Program.

The Department of Health acknowledges the crucial role of health care professionals in cervical screening and looks forward to your continued support in our world-class National Cervical Screening Program.

If you have any questions in relation to the interim arrangements or the renewal of the National Cervical Screening Program please email [cervicalrenewal@health.gov.au](mailto:cervicalrenewal@health.gov.au) or visit [www.cancerscreening.gov.au/cervical](http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au/cervical)

Yours sincerely



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