



Dear [REDACTED]

DECISION ON YOUR ACCESS APPLICATION

I refer to your application under section 30 of the *Freedom of Information Act 2016* (FOI Act), received by Canberra Health Services (CHS) on Friday 7 May 2021.

This application requested access to:

'I am looking for the following information under FOI in relation to Covid-19 testing within the ACT:

- The cost to date of the ACT's covid testing program. Please include the date range*
- The cost to ACT taxpayers of a PCR test. This is to get an idea of the cost per person tested and would include the cost of the test itself, staff costs associated with taking the swab, lab staff and equipment. I would be happy with total cost of the testing program divided by the number of tests conducted*
- What is the cycle threshold cut-off used for the Covid-19 RT PCR test within the ACT (ie what determines a positive vs negative test result).'*

I am an Information Officer appointed by the Chief Executive Officer of Canberra Health Services (CHS) under section 18 of the FOI Act to deal with access applications made under Part 5 of the Act. CHS was required to provide a decision on your access application by **Monday 7 June 2021**.

Decisions

CHS is unable to quantify the figures or provide a combined amount of the covid testing program to satisfy the scope of the information sought. This is due to the involvement of a large and diverse group of stakeholders administering the covid testing program including private non-government companies. From an ACT Pathology perspective, staff do not perform exclusively covid related duties and whilst additional staff have been employed to assist with demand, it is not possible to disaggregate those staff costs into a covid testing specific amount.

Additionally, funding is received from both jurisdictional and commonwealth avenues. ACT pathology attracts a Medicare rebate per test for eligible tests which mitigates the effect of covid testing on the overall cost pressure on CHS. Therefore, in accordance with section 35(1)(b), CHS do not hold any documents relevant to the first two dot points of the scope of your request.

However, in relation to your third dot point, I can confirm that ACT Pathology interprets the results of each individual test according to the manufacturer's instructions. Specimens which are regarded as "positive" on initial testing for SARS-CoV-2, particularly those with high ct values, are repeated on

a different +/- same assay to confirm the result prior to issuing a final result. In addition, whether or not an individual receives a specific diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 is based on the results of all tests (eg repeat specimen collection, serological testing) in association with the epidemiological and clinical information available.

ACT Pathology works very closely with ACT Public Health Communicable Diseases in determining true cases where there may be uncertainty in the results due to high ct values and/or discordant results. Whilst it is not impossible that there may be people which have been falsely designated as a positive case, it is likely to be very few and would not impact significantly on the overall numbers of positive cases.

Furthermore, I would like to encourage you to explore the ACT Health and Medicare websites where information of interest is proactively published:

<https://health.act.gov.au>

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au>

Charges

Processing charges are not applicable to this request.

Disclosure Log

Under section 28 of the FOI Act, CHS maintains an online record of access applications called a disclosure log. The scope of your access application and my decision released to you will be published in the disclosure log not less than three days but not more than 10 days after the date of this decision. Your personal contact details will not be published.

<https://www.health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/freedom-information/disclosure-log>.

Ombudsman review

My decision on your access request is a reviewable decision as identified in Schedule 3 of the FOI Act. You have the right to seek Ombudsman review of this outcome under section 73 of the Act within 20 working days from the day that my decision is published in ACT Health's disclosure log, or a longer period allowed by the Ombudsman.

If you wish to request a review of my decision you may write to the Ombudsman at:

The ACT Ombudsman
GPO Box 442
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Via email: ACTFOI@ombudsman.gov.au
Website: ombudsman.act.gov.au

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) review

Under section 84 of the Act, if a decision is made under section 82(1) on an Ombudsman review, you may apply to the ACAT for review of the Ombudsman decision. Further information may be obtained from the ACAT at:

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal
Level 4, 1 Moore St

GPO Box 370
Canberra City ACT 2601
Telephone: (02) 6207 1740
<http://www.acat.act.gov.au/>

Further assistance

Should you have any queries in relation to your request, please do not hesitate to contact the FOI Coordinator on (02) 5124 9831 or email HealthFOI@act.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N. Coatsworth', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Nick Coatsworth
Executive Director of Medical Services
Canberra Health Services

20 May 2021