

# Affordable, quality, efficient and EFFECTIVE LABORATORY MEDICINE SERVICES



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**T**he value and role of pathology and laboratory medicine services are often unrecognised in medicine; generally, they receive less attention than they deserve.

Laboratory medicine is a part of the healthcare delivery system that plays a pivotal role in many clinical decisions, including diagnosis, treatment and management of diseases. In the South African public sector, laboratory medicine services are provided by the National Health Laboratory Services,

a national public entity and an asset of the national Department of Health.

The current legislation on national health insurance (NHI) envisages that certain pathology and laboratory test investigations will be covered under the NHI; these are among the essential services required to achieve universal health coverage. Therefore, quality, affordability, efficiency and effectiveness of these services remain crucial.

It is a reality that healthcare costs are escalating in both the public and private healthcare sectors and laboratory medicine services are among the top three main cost-drivers in the public healthcare system. The Department of Health has placed a demand management system at its health facilities nationally, which aims to ensure rational utilisation of laboratory test investigations so that laboratory services remain affordable. However, additional strategies should be considered - those that will sustain and build on the gains already achieved by this system and strengthen the economic status of laboratory medicine. These are strategies that will favourably impact on efficient and effective laboratory medicine services provision, improve quality, patient care and management.

**“THE POINT OF DEPARTURE FROM THE DEMAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY SHOULD BE THE INTRODUCTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A UNIQUE PATIENT IDENTIFIER. THE LACK OF USE OF A UNIQUE PATIENT IDENTIFIER CURRENTLY RESULTS IN UNNECESSARY REPETITION OF TESTS AND THE WASTE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES.”**