

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

02 June 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000363

Question Subject: Sonic Healthcare contract to run a rapid COVID-19 collection and testing service for aged care facilities.

Type of Question: Written

Senator: Stirling Griff

Question:

On 1 June 2020, The Guardian reported that the Federal Government handed major pathology companies lucrative COVID-19 contracts through limited tenders, provided large subsidy increases as well as waived normal registration fees.

Sonic Healthcare was given a contract to run a rapid COVID-19 collection and testing service for aged care facilities. I understand this was awarded through a limited process given the urgency of the situation. At a cost of \$22 million for the contract, how many tests does the Department expect Sonic will conduct during the contract period of 30 April to 30 September?

Answer:

The Government announced a \$2.4 billion Health Plan to fight COVID-19 on 11 March 2020. This included funding for pathology testing to be conducted in aged care facilities.

After a limited tender process, Sonic Healthcare was contracted to provide a dedicated, end to end in-reach pathology service for all residential aged care facilities. Under the contract, Sonic is required to conduct as many tests as requested until 30 September 2020.

The contract provides for:

- the establishment and maintenance of a dedicated national hotline to receive medical requests for COVID-19 testing of residents or staff of a residential aged care facility;
- arranging for a specialised COVID-19 pathology collector to collect a sample at a residential aged care facility for immediate testing at the nearest COVID-19 testing laboratory;
- the prioritisation of requests, requiring results to be provided to the requesting doctor within 24 hours in metropolitan areas and 48 hours in regional areas;
- if, due to remoteness, Sonic Healthcare is unable to provide collection services, the supply of pre-prepared COVID-19 collection kits to a residential aged care facility, and the required training and support to use these kits; and
- at the requesting doctor's request, following a positive result, the deployment of a specialised COVID-19 collection team to collect specimens from all staff and residents.

As of 9 June 2020, Sonic Healthcare has conducted more than 7400 tests in more than 1000 residential aged care facilities.