MEDICAL SCIENCES COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND
TE KAUNIHERA PŪTAIAO HAUORA O AOTEAROA

Early engagement: Management of evolving medical laboratory practice

16 January 2026

The Council is considering the future of the medical laboratory science profession in an environment of rapidly changing technology, workforce shortages and other challenges.

The Council is charged with ensuring the protection of those receiving medical laboratory services by ensuring that practitioners are fit and competent to practice. The Council is considering what (if any) additional regulatory action is required to ensure the public receive safe care from practitioners who are working at an expanded or advanced level, including the safe adoption of novel and evolving technologies.

To inform its work in this area, the Council is providing an opportunity for practitioners and stakeholders to share their view about the risks and benefits of novel, expanded and advanced practice. **This is an early engagement not a formal consultation**, and the information will be used by the Council in considering the appropriate regulatory response. Any changes that are proposed would undergo public consultation prior to being adopted.

Background

Medical laboratory science is defined in the draft scopes developed by the Council as the collection, receipt, preparation, investigation, laboratory analysis and interpretation of samples of human biological material for the purpose of supporting patient diagnosis, management, and treatment, and for the maintenance of health and wellbeing.

Advances in technology and practice mean that medical laboratory science practice has and will continue to develop. The Council has been considering what this means in its regulatory role, particularly regarding the analysis and interpretation of information obtained, and the evolving role of scientists in clinical decision making.

The Council's scope of practice and competence standards for medical laboratory scientists are set at a threshold level. Many practitioners work at a competence level much higher than the threshold but still fall within the scope of practice. Practitioners may also undertake activities that are not usual for the scope of practice but enable patients to receive more effective care.

Expanded and advanced practice

The Council currently has a policy for expanded practice where suitably educated registered medical laboratory science practitioners may undertake approved activities that are in addition to the competencies for their relevant scope of practice. Advanced activities refer to practice that is over and above what are described in the entry-level competence standards.

Some activities and/or roles that have been identified that fit into this category include:

- Clinical scientists
- Hospital scientific officers
- Data scientists and Bioinformaticians
- Personalised medicine activities
- Advanced practice clinicians.

The Council is considering what regulatory response is required to support the development of the profession while continuing to ensure public safety. The Council has been engaging with practitioners and stakeholders to understand the risks involved, how these may be managed within the proposed scopes, and what other regulatory mechanisms may be required.

Many of these roles and activities are an extension of existing skills for those already working in medical laboratory science, however, some may also be performed by people who have a non-laboratory science background and cannot meet the current requirements for registration. These may include data scientists, or those with highly specialised qualifications and/or experience, eg transplantation or bioinformatics specialists.

The Council is interested in practitioner and stakeholder views to assess the risks associated with changes in practice. This information will inform the Council's regulatory response and future development options.

Questions

Q: What risks to the public have you identified with advanced or expanding practice? You may want to include specific examples of these in your answer.

Q: What advanced or expanded practice activities do you think could be performed by practitioners working at an advanced level that are not currently permissible?

Q: Do you think the Council has a role in the regulation of people with a non-laboratory science background who are working in the laboratory? Why or why not?

Q: What other information do you wish to discuss?