



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Ministry of Public Health

Policy Statement

**National Policy
for Medical Laboratories
in the Health System of
Afghanistan**

April 2006

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National Policy for Medical Laboratories in the Health System of Afghanistan

This policy establishes the guidelines for the redevelopment of the laboratory diagnosis system as an effective part of the Afghan health system. Medical Laboratories provide swift and accurate diagnosis services to improve the Public Health system in Afghanistan.

A. The Roles of Medical Laboratories in the Health System

Medical laboratories are essential for proper health care services.

Clinical biology analyses are fundamental tools at the service of Medical staff in their daily practice.

A great number of currently observed pathologies can easily be identified with adapted analyses, thus allowing a fast, effective and rational therapy.

Laboratory analyses are also often critical to the therapeutic follow-up. They can provide information that allows the medical staff to better monitor and evaluate the adopted therapeutic strategy and, if required, to modify it.

Medical laboratories have a role in the prevention of many health problems that can be diagnosed before the appearance of the clinical symptoms. It can minimise the seriousness of health problems and reduce the cost of health care services.

Moreover, medical laboratories are a tool for epidemiology. They can cooperate with public health laboratories and contribute to the early identification of an epidemic to facilitating a rapid response.

The Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS) are being implemented throughout Afghanistan.

According to these programmes, medical laboratories must be located within the organisational structure of Comprehensive Health Centres (CHCs), District Hospitals (DHs), Provincial Hospitals (PHs), Regional Hospitals (RHs) and participate in the delivery of quality of health services.

This policy is focused on six priority actions:

1. To organise a national network of medical laboratories.
2. To strengthen the delivery of quality Laboratory analysis.
3. To rationalise requests for Laboratory analyses.
4. To enforce cost-effective management of laboratory services.
5. To create a system for capacity building of laboratory workers
6. To legislate for the regulation of the private laboratory sector

1 - To Organise a National Network of Medical Laboratories

The establishment of a national network of medical laboratories is essential in order to offer high quality health care for the whole of the Afghan population.

Making medical laboratory services accessible throughout the country is a main priority of this policy. This national network is directly linked to the BPHS and EPHS. Laboratories have been established in comprehensive health centres and are present in district, provincial and regional hospitals.

Improving the quality of medical laboratory services requires ongoing monitoring, supervision and regular evaluation of all laboratories in the public sector by the MoPH.

This network will be used to establish proper supply, communication, training, supervision and reporting systems.

2 – To Strengthen the Delivery of Quality Laboratory Analysis

According to National Health Policy, the mission of the Ministry of Public Health is to ensure the accelerated implementation of quality health care for the population of Afghanistan. Medical laboratory services are an integral part of the fulfilment of this mission.

The reliability of Laboratory analysis depends on the quality of all stages in the analysis process. The goal is to reach international quality standards.

The MoPH will introduce the *Strategic Plan for Medical Laboratory Services*. This reference document describes the global organisation of medical laboratories in the whole country. The role and responsibilities of each of them at each level and the techniques and equipment that have to be implemented are specified. The national procurement and supply systems are explained. It also prescribes safety measures and the recording and reporting systems that must be established for each laboratory, as well as the quality assurance strategy. Medical laboratories must observe the rules and techniques defined in the Strategic Plan.

A *Guide to the Proper Practice of Laboratory Analyses* must be developed by the MoPH and implemented in every laboratory, including those dependent on the Ministry of Higher Education, with the support of Central Laboratory of Kabul. This document establishes the quality assurance standards. The MoPH must supervise the observance of these rules.

The responsibility of the MoPH is also to provide medical laboratories with quality reagents, consumables and equipment and to ensure their proper use and maintenance.

Medical laboratory workers must observe the following rules when dealing with patients:

- Patients must at all times be treated with respect.
- Staff must maintain the confidentiality of patients' results and personal details.
- Under no circumstances should results be divulged without the permission of the patient, except to the medical staff involved in the patient's case.

3 - To Rationalise Requests for Laboratory Analyses

Carrying out laboratory services is expensive. Therefore, it is important that doctors request analyses appropriate to the clinical context. The request must take place after the clinical examination of patients.

The laboratory tests must be carried out only when it is necessary and as mandated by the diagnostic and therapeutic processes.

4 - To Enforce Cost-effective Management of Laboratory Services

It is important to try to minimise the cost of laboratory services through proper organisation of the laboratory, taking inventory on a regular basis, and applying appropriate technical and administrative management. Therefore, medical laboratory service providers must commit to enforcing cost effective management at all levels to minimise the National Health Budget. According to the national policy of the MoPH, public medical laboratories at all levels are not allowed to set up cost recovery systems.

5 - To Create a System for Capacity Building of Laboratory Workers

Medical science is progressing rapidly and thus all health professionals ought to update their knowledge and skills continuously to provide high quality health services.

Regional diagnostic centres will be responsible for organising training and refresher courses for laboratory staff (technical and administrative), under the supervision of the Training Department of the Central Laboratory in Kabul. The practical impact of this training has to be evaluated by trainer supervisor and reported to the MoPH.

In this manner, capacity building of laboratory staff is implemented continuously for better patient care.

6 – To Legislate for the Regulation of the Private Laboratory Sector

The private laboratory sector has a very important role in the health care system in offering proximate services. Nevertheless, this service has to operate under the same rules as the public medical laboratory sector in terms of quality, reliability, management and staffing. *The Guide to the Proper Practice of Laboratory analyses* has to be implemented and respected by the private sector. Laboratories must keep accurate and reliable records of all of their activities.

The private laboratory sector should be monitored and inspected regularly by the MoPH (the Directorate of Diagnosis Facilities and Blood Bank and the Direction of Laws & Regulations).

B. Implementation of the Medical Laboratory Policy

Implementation of this policy is absolutely crucial to improving the quality of medical laboratory services for the population of Afghanistan. The Ministry of Public Health, General Directorate of Curative & Diagnostics Care and the General Directorate of Policy and Planning are responsible for implementing this policy and ensuring that it is applied in all medical laboratories in Afghanistan.