



Neuromyelitis Optica Testing

Last updated: 27 October 2021

- From 1 November 2021, a new MBS item will be available to assist diagnosis of Spectrum Disorder (NMOSD) or Myelin Oligodendrocyte Glycoprotein (MOG) Antibody-Related Demyelination (MARD).
- These changes are relevant for all specialists who manage patients with suspected NMOSD and MARD.

What are the changes?

NMOSD and MARD are conditions that affect the central nervous system. They have similar symptoms to multiple sclerosis (MS), but may not respond to MS treatments such as natalizumab and can lead to worse outcomes. A correct diagnosis is important because some MS treatments are harmful to people who have NMOSD or MARD, and vice versa. From 1 November 2021, these antibody tests will allow a doctor to make a more accurate diagnosis and start treating the patient with the correct medicines earlier. This testing is currently claimed under generic MBS item numbers 71119 or 71165, which are non-specific single antibody tests.

Why are the changes being made?

In July 2020, the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) supported public funding for testing aquaporin-4 antibodies and MOG antibodies in serum for diagnosis (only) of NMOSD and MARD. MSAC considered that the test is cost-effective, safe and can inform better clinical care for people living with NMSOD and MARD. MSAC noted that this test would only be funded for diagnosing these two conditions, and not for monitoring disease progression or response to treatment. Following the recommendation, the Australian Government agreed to public funding of a new Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) listing for an antibody test to investigate the presence of NMOSD or MARD by detecting aquaporin 4 antibodies (AQP4-Abs) in serum and/or cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) as part of the 2021-22 Budget.

The item is to be listed in the *Health Insurance (Pathology Service Table) 2020*, Group 4 – Immunology.

What does this mean for providers/referrers/other stakeholders?

Specialists who manage patients with suspected NMOSD and MARD will be able to request a test to determine if a patient has NMOSD or MARD.

To be eligible for Medicare rebates, laboratories providing this service must be accredited according to the pathology accreditation standards specified in the *Health Insurance (Accredited Pathology Laboratories-Approval) Principles 2017*.

How will these changes affect patients?

This listing of this service will lead to more rapid diagnosis and better targeted treatment, to improve patient outcomes.



Who was consulted on the changes?

Consultation has been undertaken with key stakeholders, clinical experts and providers, and consumer health representatives as part of the MSAC process, including the Royal College of Pathology Australasia, The Australian and New Zealand Association of Neurologists and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists.

How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

The new MBS items will be subject to MBS compliance processes and activities, including random and targeted audits which may require a provider to submit evidence about the services claimed.

Significant variation from forecasted expenditure may warrant review and amendment of the items and fees, and incorrect use of MBS items can result in penalties including the health professional being asked to repay monies that have been incorrectly received.

Where can I find more information?

The full item descriptor(s) and information on other changes to the MBS can be found on the MBS Online website at www.mbsonline.gov.au. You can also subscribe to future MBS updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.

The Department of Health provides an email advice service for providers seeking advice on interpretation of the MBS items and rules and the Health Insurance Act and associated regulations. If you have a query relating exclusively to interpretation of the Schedule, you should email askMBS@health.gov.au.

Subscribe to '[News for Health Professionals](#)' on the Services Australia website and you will receive regular news highlights.

If you are seeking advice in relation to Medicare billing, claiming, payments, or obtaining a provider number, please go to the Health Professionals page on the Services Australia website or contact the Services Australia on the Provider Enquiry Line – 13 21 50.

The data file for software vendors was released on 22 September 2021 and can be accessed via the MBS Online website under the [Downloads](#) page.

Please note that the information provided is a general guide only. It is ultimately the responsibility of treating practitioners to use their professional judgment to determine the most clinically appropriate services to provide, and then to ensure that any services billed to Medicare fully meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the legislation.

This sheet is current as of the Last updated date shown above, and does not account for MBS changes since that date.