

Terms of Reference – Laboratory Operational Committee

Mandate

The Committee provides PHSA and the Ministry with advice and guidance on operational issues related to the laboratory system in BC. The Committee's approach is evidence-based, and its advice reflects medical and scientific knowledge, patient advocacy and current clinical practice. Committee recommendations aim to maintain and improve the quality, safety and performance of the BC laboratory system.

Background

In April 2014, the Government of British Columbia (BC) passed the Laboratory Services Act (Act) to move forward on the laboratory reform mandate. Enacted on October 1, 2015, the Act consolidates responsibilities for governance, funding, and service delivery oversight of publicly funded medical laboratory services under a single statute. To assist the Ministry of Health (Ministry) with operationalizing the administrative aspects of the Act, the Ministry established the Laboratory Operational Committee (Committee) to provide timely access to expert advice when making critical operational decisions under the new Act. In the 2018/19 Mandate Letter to the Provincial Health Services Authority, the Minister of Health directed BC's Agency for Pathology and Laboratory Medicine (Agency) to accept accountability for Ministry-assigned functions to support the Act, which included administration of this Committee.

Governance and Authority

The Committee advises PHSA and the Ministry on matters related to laboratory services across the province, including, but not limited to

- Approvals and cancellations of laboratory facilities providing benefits
- New laboratory requisitions or changes to existing laboratory requisitions
- Introduction, replacement and/or elimination of publicly-funded clinical laboratory tests for inpatients and outpatients
- Development and implementation of laboratory protocols and guidelines
- Policy issues that may impact the quality of services, care of patients and/or the delivery of laboratory services in the province
- Initiatives that may optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of various aspects of the laboratory system
- Reports of, or concerns about, actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation to laboratory facilities

To facilitate the provision of advice and assistance, the Chair, in consultation with PHSA and the Ministry, may appoint sub-committees or working groups, as required.

Membership

The Committee consists of

- Two (2) Agency members appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair
- One (1) government member appointed by the Ministry
- Seven (7) to eleven (11) voting members

The Agency and Ministry recruit voting members by seeking expressions of interest from relevant stakeholder groups such as patient advisory groups, health authorities, publicly-funded/privately-owned laboratory facilities, the Doctors of BC, and the boards/councils of relevant professional colleges or associations. The Agency and Ministry review submitted applications and evaluate education, experience, discipline expertise, and job position to fill the following positions

- Five (5) medical/clinical practitioners, including
 - Two (2) laboratory medicine physicians (representing clinical pathology, anatomical pathology, hematopathology, medical microbiology, medical biochemistry, or genetics)
 - One (1) clinical scientist
 - One (1) referring practitioner
 - One (1) medical laboratory technologist
- Two (2) persons representing BC's publicly-funded laboratory facilities – preferably one from an urban health service delivery area and the other from a rural health service delivery area
- One (1) person representing the public

At the discretion of the Chair, the Committee may invite other persons to participate in meetings as non-voting members, such as

- Subject Matter Experts and others acting as resources to the Committee
- Ministry or Agency staff providing Ministry- or Agency-assigned functions
- Others as deemed appropriate by the Chair, in consultation with the Ministry

The Agency will designate a Program Coordinator to provide administrative and logistical support for the Committee.

Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)

All voting and non-voting members, invitees and others participating in the activities of the Committee, including its sub-committees and working groups, must sign the Committee's Non-Disclosure Agreement. No participant shall knowingly divulge information to non-Committee members, unless legally required to do so.

Breach of the Committee's NDA may result in removal from the Committee.

Conflict of Interest (COI)

All voting members sign the PHSA Conflict of Interest agreement annually and disclose real, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest. Additionally, as applicable, members must disclose arising real, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest before each meeting.

Breach of the Committee's COI Policy may result in removal from the Committee.

Member Qualifications

Committee members provide expertise to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based evaluation, deliberation, and recommendation of issues requested by the Agency. Voting members require the following competencies.

- Knowledge of issues related to the health care system at the community, regional and/or national level
- Experience in committee and/or community work
- Ability to comply with the Committee's Conflict of Interest Policy
- Ability to act with integrity and independence of specific interests
- Ability to relate to and respect a diverse range of values and beliefs
- Ability to review and synthesize considerable amounts of information
- Availability to commit the time necessary to participate fully
- Experience working in a team-based collaborative decision-making environment
- Objectivity, strong reasoning skills, and ability to understand complex systems

The public voting member also requires the following additional competencies.

- Awareness of, and interest in, the perspectives of members of the general public on issues related to health care services, particularly laboratory services
- Experience with public engagement
- Broad economic expertise (preferred)

Voting Member Responsibilities

Voting members are expected to participate in at least seventy-five percent (75%) of Committee meetings each term or they may be asked to forfeit membership. In addition, members must

- Review distributed meeting documents before each meeting and be prepared to discuss the agenda items
- Provide at least thirty (30) days written notice to the Chair before resigning

Committee Chair Responsibilities (and Vice-Chair as required)

The Vice-Chair assumes the Chair responsibilities at the request of the Chair, or when the Chair is unable to fulfill responsibilities. The Chair

- Reports the Committee's activities to the Ministry
- Liaises between the Committee and the Ministry
- Acts as the main spokesperson for the Committee
- Ensures administrative and logistical support
- Schedules regular and ad-hoc/special meetings
- Prepares meeting agendas in collaboration with the Ministry
- Ensures the COI and NDA are properly applied
- Documents reasons when a recommendation is not endorsed

Agency Program Coordinator Responsibilities

The Program Coordinator provides ongoing logistical and administrative support to the Committee and Chairs. The Program Coordinator

- Schedules and coordinates regular and ad hoc/special meetings
- Prepares and distributes meeting materials five (5) working days in advance of the meeting, or in the case of a special meeting, as far in advance of the meeting as is practicable
- Distributes draft meeting records ten (10) days following each meeting
- Maintains approved meeting records that include
 - Committee recommendations with rationale
 - Reasons for denial of recommendations
 - COI disclosures and measures taken to mitigate specific conflicts of interest
- Maintains permanent records of COI disclosures and the measures taken to mitigate specific conflicts of interest

Term of Office

The terms for Agency and Ministry voting members are indefinite. Appointments of remaining voting members comprise a two-year term with a maximum extension of three (3) consecutive terms (6 years).

The Chair retains the option to

- Adjust the length of appointment to allow overlapping terms to support ongoing succession planning
- Grant exceptions and approve an extended absence of a voting member, while retaining the right to replace the member at any time

Meetings

The Committee meets up to six (6) times per calendar year for approximately three (3) to four (4) hours, depending on the agenda. The Agency hosts committee meetings in person, and provides options for remote participation, such as Skype meetings or teleconferences.

The Chair will confirm the meeting schedule at the last meeting of each calendar year and may schedule additional meetings as needed.

Quorum

For regularly scheduled meetings and special meetings, the Committee requires a quorum of fifty percent (50%) of current voting members. In the event of a reduced membership, a quorum is defined as four (4) voting members, including the Chair.

Conduct

Formal meeting discussions are limited to topics that fit within the mandate. All members of the Committee commit to respectful and informed knowledge discussions on recommendations brought forward.

Meeting records

The meeting record reflects all items brought forward to the committee for discussion, action, and decision of the voting members.

Remuneration and reimbursement

Voting members do not receive remuneration beyond the rates of reimbursement for travel expenses to which they are entitled by virtue of position or employment.

PHSA reimburses voting members for travel expenses to attend meetings in accordance with the PHSA Travel and Business Expense Policy. Members must submit travel claims to the Program Coordinator within thirty (30) calendar days of the meeting.

Accountability and Reporting

In addition to providing advice and recommendations to the Ministry, the Committee will report to the Ministry and PHSA as requested.

Termination of Committee

The Ministry may terminate the Committee at any time as advisory requirements evolve.