

Position Statement

Appropriate Utilization of Medical Laboratory Resources

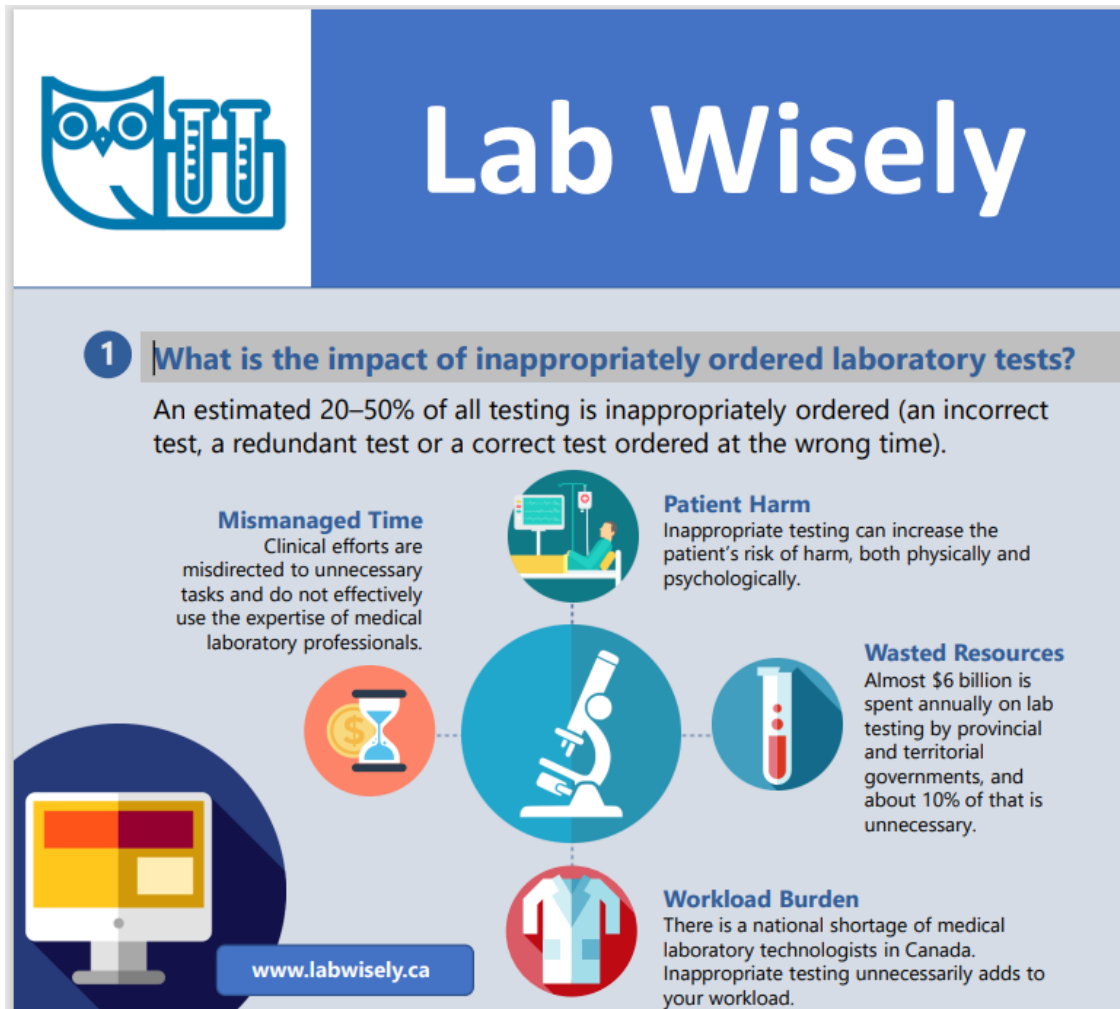
The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) believes medical laboratory professionals (MLPs) are vitally placed in the health care system to support appropriate utilization management strategies for laboratory tests.

Traditionally, ordering practices have been left to the discretion of individual health care professionals. Although individuals have contributed to improving these practices, concise guidance regarding resource stewardship that is shared within the entire healthcare profession is needed. There have been many initiatives to improve the utilization of health care resources in general, but none have been as large or have gained as much momentum as Choosing Wisely, which began in the United States in 2012 and came to Canada in 2014. It has since expanded, spreading to other countries around the globe. For [Choosing Wisely Canada \(CWC\)](#), over 60 professional societies have contributed to more than 540 recommendations at the time of issuing this statement.

A recent shift has occurred to place more effort into the study of “lab utilization,” which focuses on whether test orders are appropriate or inappropriate. This goes beyond historical efforts of Six Sigma and Lean projects to make our lab processes “effective and efficient,” a popular saying over the past couple of decades. The current trend places greater emphasis on the impact that lab utilization of tests and procedures can have on the system as a whole. This means looking at the lab as more than an assembly line of machines with dutiful workers. It sees patients, health care professionals and the health system (resources and fiscal responsibilities) as intertwined, with each of these components regarded as equally important. Thus, when we talk about effective and efficient lab utilization today, we encompass a greater sphere of responsibility and examine impact in a more meaningful way.

The CSMLS and University of Alberta project team conducted a survey in 2019 to understand and enhance the participation of MLPs in initiatives that seek to reduce unnecessary tests and procedures within the health care system, particularly the clinical laboratory. MLPs are highly trained health professionals who work in the clinical laboratory but who are not commonly or explicitly included in campaigns to improve the utilization of laboratory tests; however, by virtue of their proximity to the work, they are uniquely placed to support initiatives and campaigns. As the individuals receiving test orders, obtaining patient specimens and processing laboratory tests, MLPs represent a pivotal stopgap in the test utilization pathway that can help improve traditional and common-place practices. CSMLS encourages advocacy and hopes to inspire participatory roles of MLPs and clinical laboratory administration to investigate, validate and help sustain

appropriate utilization practices and become proud contributors of the Lab Wisely campaign: CSMLS Lab Wisely.



MLPs believe they have an important role to play in resource stewardship. In this regard, the responsibility should not rely solely on physicians or clinical management. Affecting change is a responsibility that can be shared with MLPs by their participation in interdisciplinary teams or collaborations. In fact, it is the duty of the MLPs to recognize risk-prone situations in order to minimize harm to patients as well as to utilize professional and institutional mechanisms to intervene when witnessing unsafe or unethical practices (as per the CSMLS Code of Ethics). Despite this, we note MLPs face barriers in realizing their role in resource stewardship and that is why we believe collaboration with other healthcare professionals is essential to maximize their impact to the benefit of the Canadian healthcare system.

It is the responsibility of clinical laboratory administration in all regions across Canada to identify opportunities for appropriate utilization management strategies and contribute to the national evidence-based movement. Clinical laboratories have the unique prospect to examine internal test utilization data and should support MLPs in fostering national change through increased policy and practice conversations. Such analysis and process changes should be published to support awareness and facilitate a national discussion around laboratory utilization within the Lab Wisely community.

To understand the collected evidence that supports these recommendations, CSMLS fosters the Lab Wisely laboratory specific [searchable recommendation database](#). This database is searchable, made for MLPs and is aligned with the way the medical laboratory work is organized. The database includes only the CWC recommendations related to the medical laboratory profession and thus we also encourage MLPs to visit the CWC [website](#) for the full scope and context of their initiatives.