



## THE PORTUGUESE HEALTH REGULATION AUTHORITY

**Title:** The Sector of Laboratory Tests Provision in Portugal

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### Executive summary

This report focuses on the sector of laboratory tests provision in Portugal, with the objective of assessing users' access to such services, the competition among the corporate groups that own the service providers and the quality and costs of the services. This study was conducted following a request from the Portuguese Ministry of Health, and under the remit of the Portuguese Health Regulation Authority (ERS) set forth in its legal statute.

The main results of the analyses undertaken led to the following conclusions:

- i) The relevance of the sector of laboratory tests provision in Portugal is unquestionable, given the frequency with which users resort to these complementary diagnostic tests, their relevance in hospitals of the Portuguese National Health Service (*Serviço Nacional de Saúde*, SNS) and the fact that they constitute the most important source of expenditure by the SNS with non-public services provision;
- ii) Notwithstanding the fact that users' access is found to be generally positive, there are regional discrepancies between the supply and the potential demand that evidence a less positive access in some areas, especially in the jurisdiction area of the Northern Regional Health Administration;
- iii) Regarding the competition among providers, negative results are mainly identified in the region of Alentejo, but also in the regions of Algarve and Centre, where a higher degree of structural market concentration is indicative of a weaker degree of competition;

iv) The recent strengthening of the powers of ERS, both concerning the licensing of health care providers and the handling of users' complaints, should produce increasingly positive results in the quality of services in this sector;

v) The results of the production costs analysis of the laboratory tests indicated that almost all assessed average unit costs of the public hospitals are lower than the prices that these hospitals must charge. It should, however, be noted that this cost analysis was hampered by problems regarding the availability of information and the lack of homogeneity in the accounting procedures of the hospitals.

This study complements and updates previous reports published by ERS on the topic of laboratory tests.