

**2013**

**SURVEY RESULTS:  
The Regulation of  
Medical Laboratory  
Assistants**



Prepared by William Allen

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## **Regulation of Medical Laboratory Assistants**

### **Purpose:**

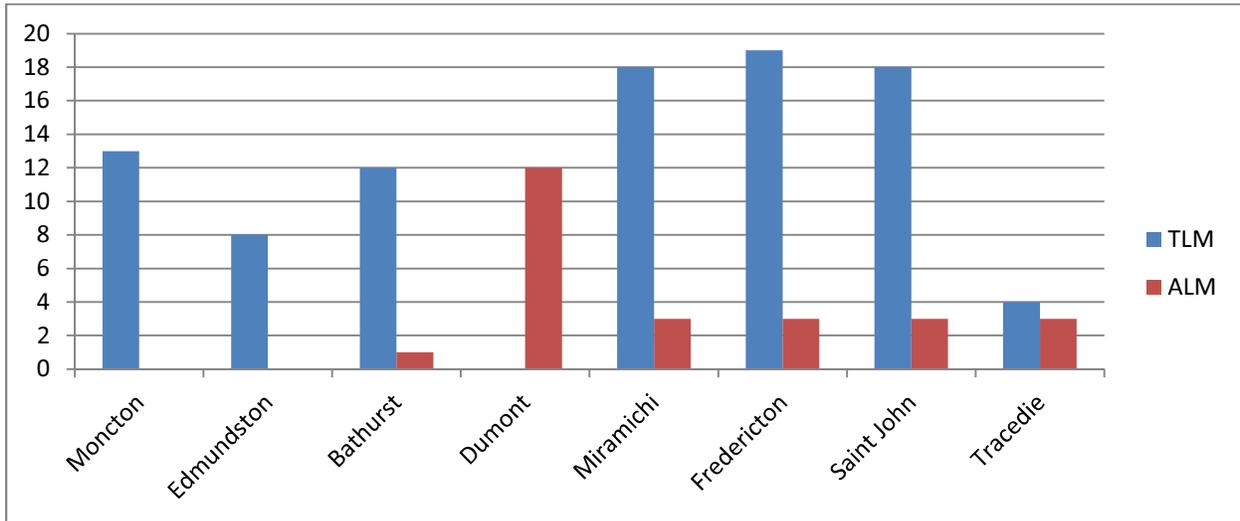
The discussion of Medical Laboratory Assistants (MLA) becoming regulated in New Brunswick has been a hot topic throughout the province in both the workplace and with the NBSMLT Board of Directors (BOD). The BOD had requested further information and input from the Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs), MLAs, and Laboratories. In the fall of 2012 a letter had been sent to the Laboratory Directors and Lab Managers asking for input on MLA regulation; having received the feedback from the directors and managers, communication with the NBSMLT members and MLAs in the province began next. The Executive Director and Registrar had completed lunch and learn meetings during the spring of 2013; included in the sessions was a short survey distributed to the MLAs and MLTs. This report will present and analyze the results of the survey, which will help to give a better understanding of the thoughts of how the MLT and MLAs in New Brunswick view MLA regulation.

It is important to note that the NBSMLT is able to contact MLTs to invite them to meetings and to circulate surveys; however the society does not have contact information for MLAs in New Brunswick. MLTs were relied upon to communicate these meetings and to distribute the surveys to the MLAs in their work areas. For this reason there may be a non-response bias in the survey results.

### **Lunch and Learns:**

The Executive Director and Registrar had conducted lunch and learn meetings in 7 laboratories across the province. A total of 117 MLTs and MLAs had attended these sessions to learn more about the regulation of MLAs and to provide their input. Table 1 shows the breakdown of MLTs and MLAs in attendance. In total there were 92 MLTs and 25 MLAs.

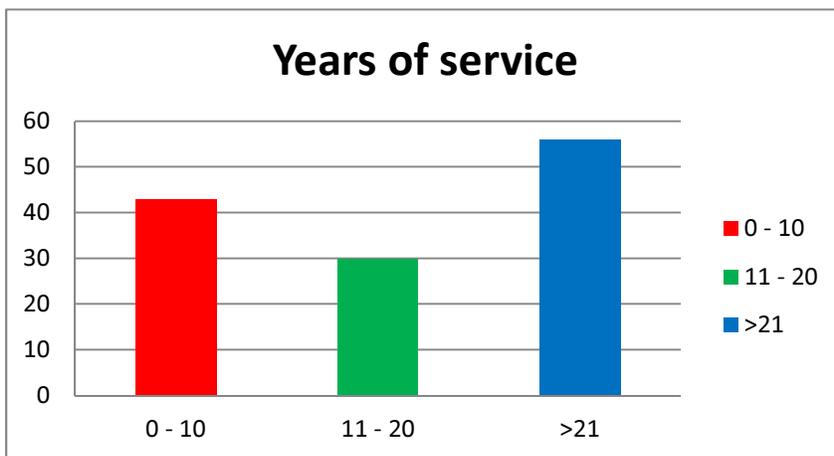
Figure 1



**Survey results:**

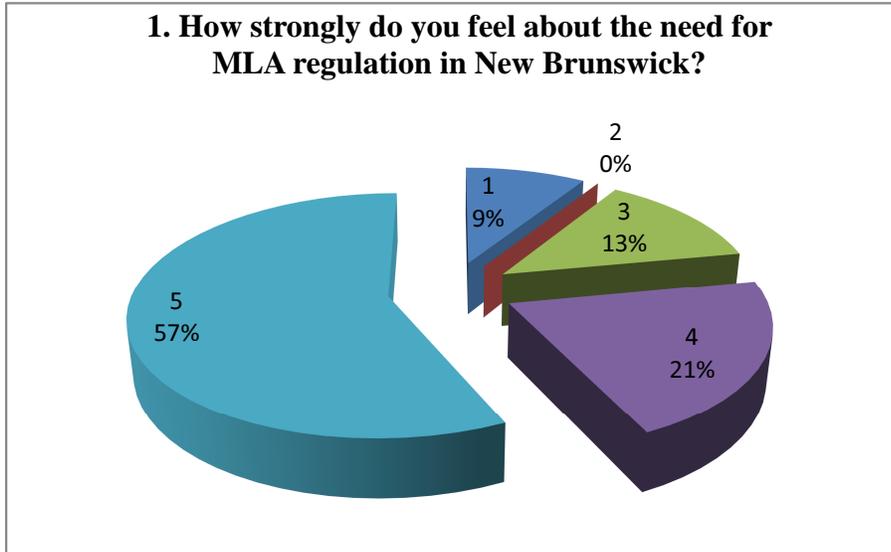
The survey was available in both online and paper formats. Sixty-two surveys were submitted online and 67 submitted on paper, for a total of 129 surveys. Please see the appendix B for a copy of the survey. The survey requested a response to each question on a scale of 1 to 5; 1 meaning completely disagree and 5 meaning completely agree. The survey had been completed by 103 MLTs and 26 MLAs. Figure 2 displays the years of service of the MLT and MLAs who submitted the survey and Figures 3 to 10 show the results of each question.

Figure 2



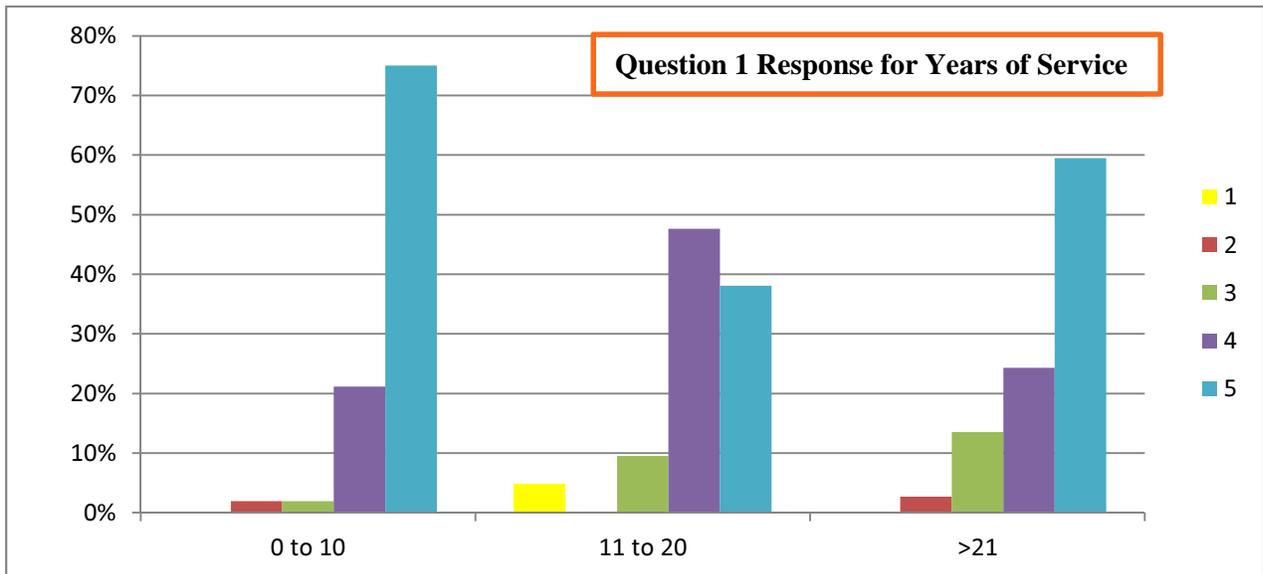
It is interesting to note that the years of service group 11 to 20 years had about lowest survey participation.

Figure 3



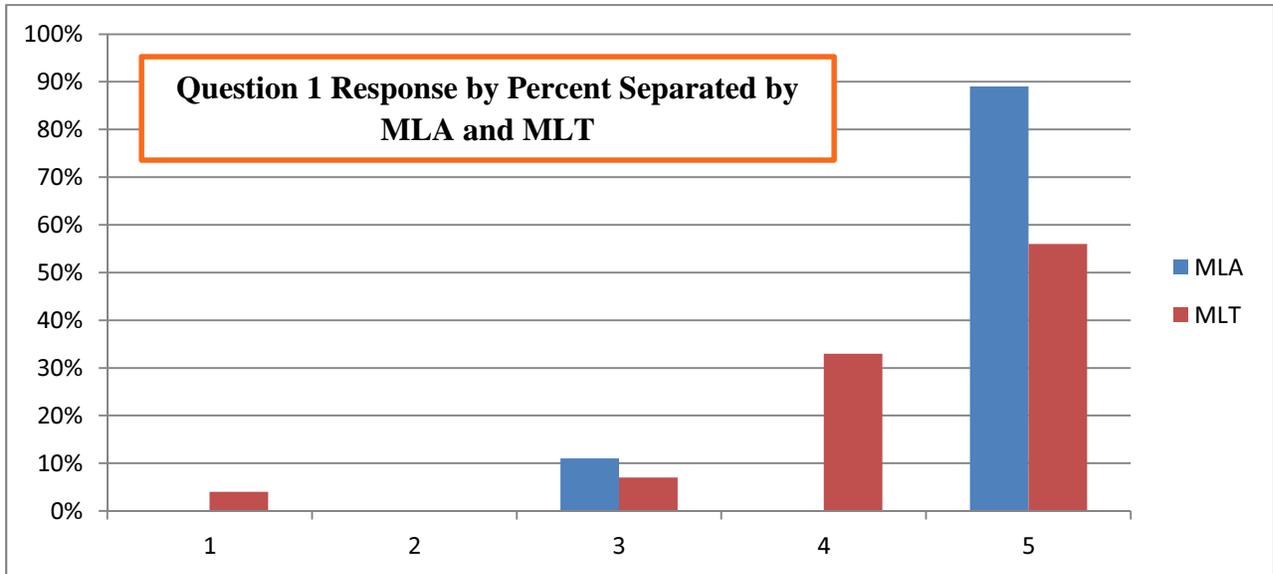
78 % of participants feel strongly for MLA regulation, while only 9% strongly disagree and 13% are undecided.

Figure 4



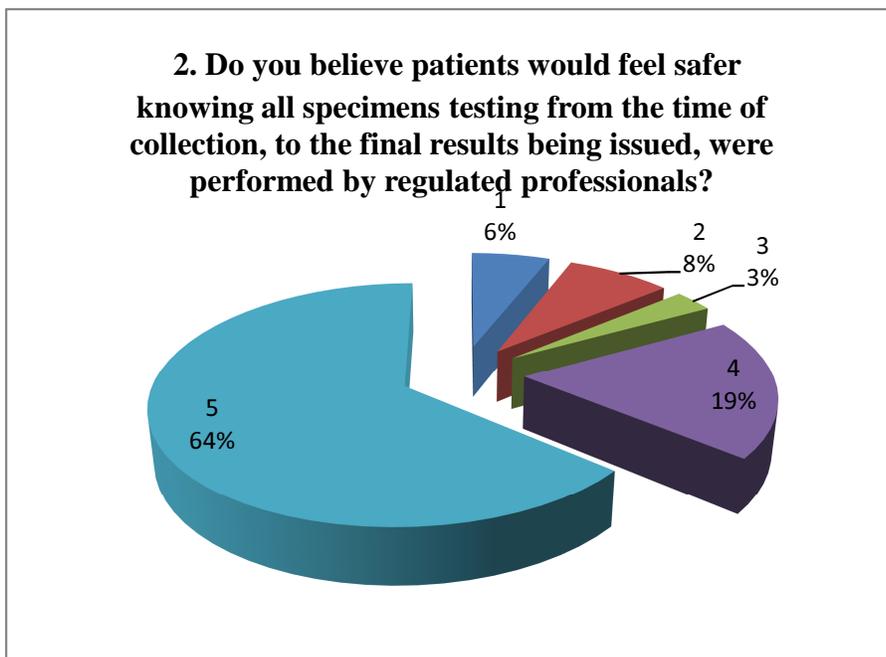
The above graph demonstrates the years of service; group 0 to 10 years feels the strongest for MLA regulation, followed by the MLTs and MLAs with >21 years of service. While individuals in the 11 to 20 years of service responded similarly with numbers 4 and 5, which would still be over 80% in favor of regulation.

Figure 5



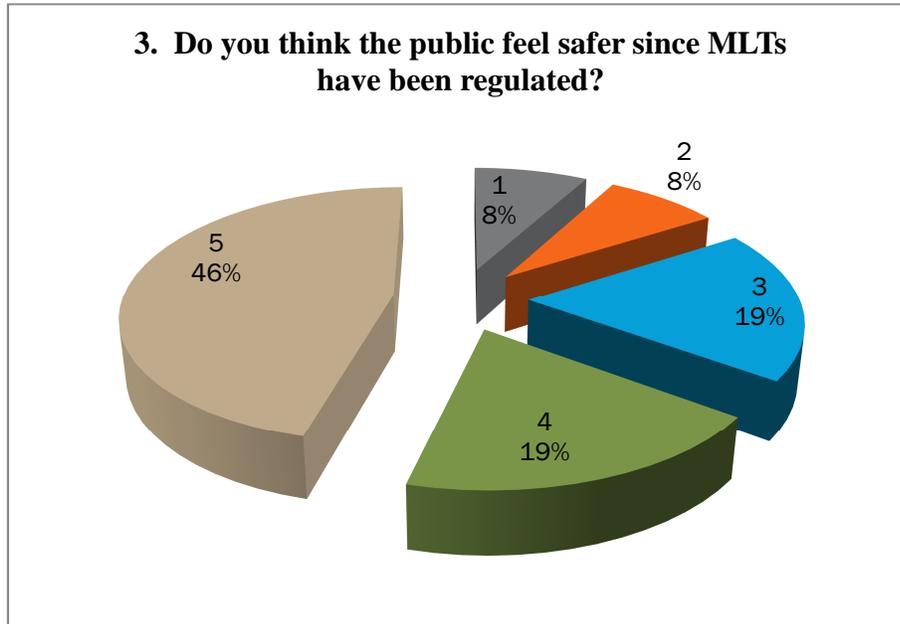
The responses for question 1 in figure 5 have been separated to demonstrate the percentage of MLAs and MLTs who feel strongly for MLA regulation. It is clear to see that of the 23 MLAs who submitted the survey, over 80 % would like to see the MLA profession regulated. It is interesting to note that only about 55% of the MLTs who participated in the survey feel the need to regulate MLAs in New Brunswick.

Figure 6



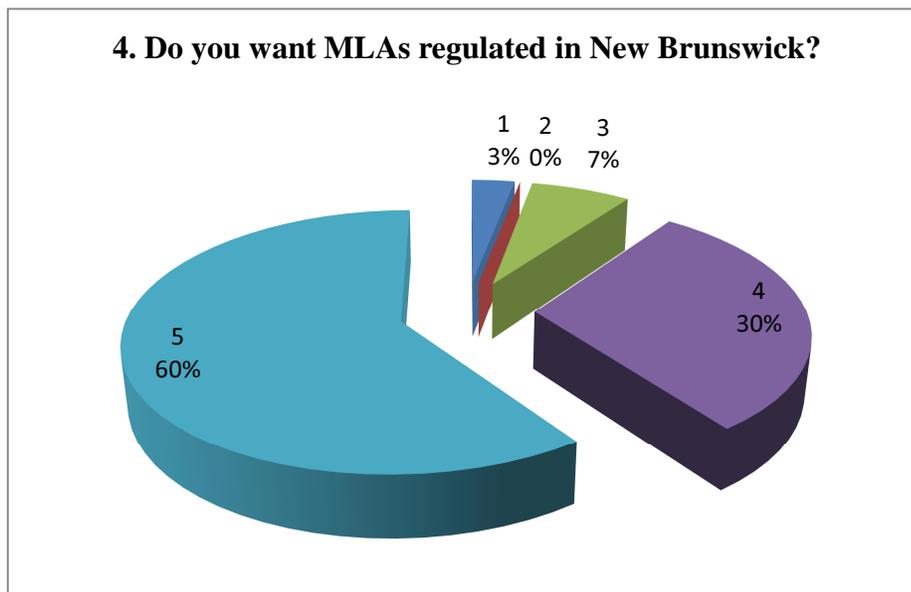
83% strongly believe patients would feel safer knowing MLAs would be regulated. MLAs are in most cases the first contact the patient has with regards to specimen collection.

Figure 7



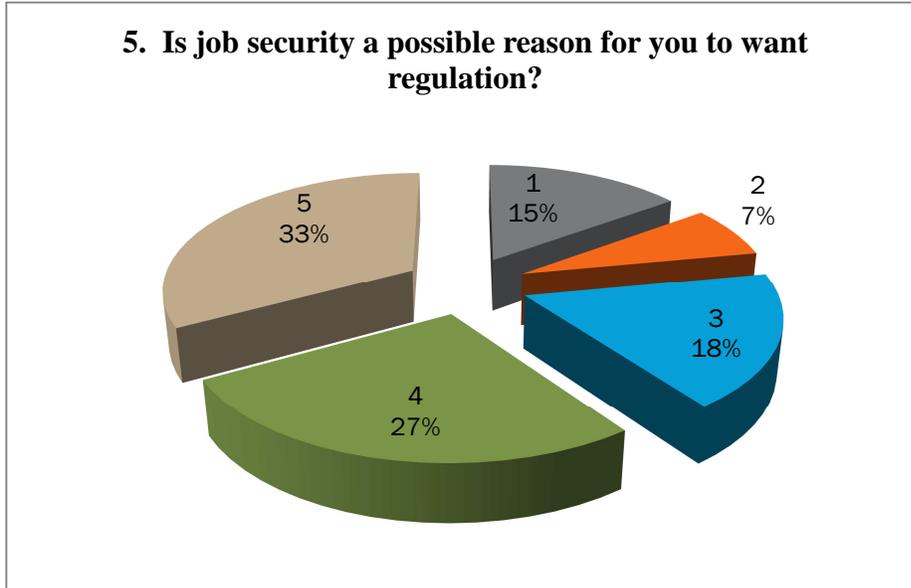
Only 65% feel strongly that the public feel safer knowing MLTs are regulated. This maybe in part due to the fact the general public are not familiar with what MLTs do. This is an issue that the BOD has identified and is working with the PR committee to improve.

Figure 8



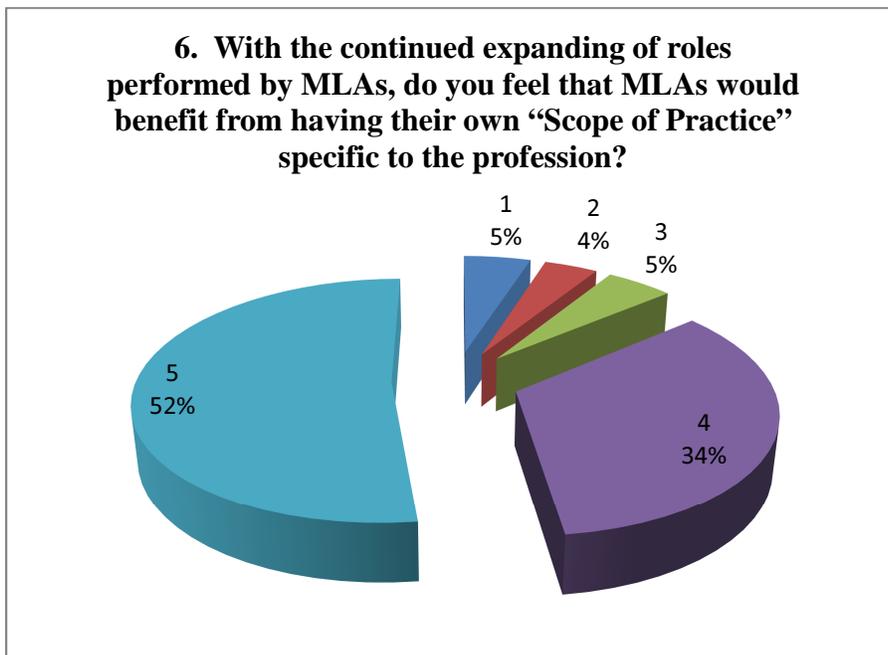
Compared to question number 1, with only 78 % agreeing there is a need for regulation in New Brunswick, here we have 90% want to see MLAs regulated.

Figure 9



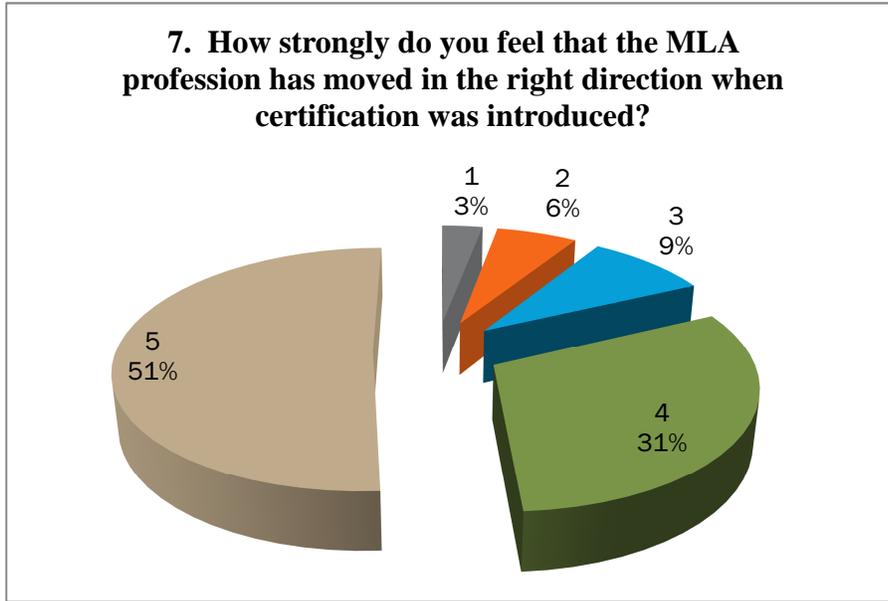
60% believe that a possible reason for MLA regulation is for increased job security.

Figure 10



MLAs would greatly benefit from having their own scope of practice. This is something which has come up many times with labs asking the question; “Can MLAs do this...?” 86% felt the MLAs feel the need for a specific scope of practice for the MLA profession.

Figure 11



The CSMLS certification of MLAs has been a move in the right direction and has been the first step towards the regulation of the profession. 82% of the surveys received demonstrate just this.

See appendix A for the many comments provided by the MLT and MLAs in the survey (questions 8, 9 and 10).

**Conclusion:**

The discussions during the lunch and learn sessions went very well with plenty of input shared by the MLTs and MLAs in attendance. The majority of those who attended and submitted the surveys feel strongly the MLAs in New Brunswick should look further into regulating the profession.

## Appendix A

### **Comments received for following survey questions:**

#### 8. What are some of the concerns you have about MLA regulation?

Those working and do not have the course or certification for MLA, will they be let go.

If the MLA regulating body does as much as the MLT regulating body and registration is as much, why bother?

The public has little knowledge of whom and what MLTs are.

Possibility that a new MLA position could effectively replace potential MLT positions

Will opening the act to regulate MLAs affect the MLTs?

Being sure they understand the importance behind the job they do, and ensuring as little pre-analytical error as possible.

No concerns they should be regulated.

I am not sure if it makes any difference right now with a hiring freeze. There doesn't seem to be a good outlook for work. People don't really know much about MLA's and their role as it is still quite new. We don't seem to be recognized as professionals.

In hospital laboratories MLA could be used for all pre analytical work and there not being used as well as they should be in New Brunswick.

How much will our annual dues have to increase in order to accommodate the legal ramifications and upkeep of the MLAs in our Association?

Get it done.

The cost for membership and more responsibilities, but will the salaries reflect this.

More MLA than MLT in labs.

Overlapping duties (i.e. phlebotomy) MLT and MLA can perform this task. Will this change?

That the MLA might be limited in our jobs, more than we are now.

How long will it take.

That opening the MLT Act will cause problems with our own act.

Are we going to be confused as to what the difference in scope of practice is between MLT and MLA?

Not enough work, they may cut the work load too much.

Infringing on MLT Scope of Work.

9. Do you have any questions about the reasons for undertaking to regulate MLAs?

Who will be on the board to come up with regulations?

Those who have written the national exam, but did not follow the MLA course, will they be regulated too?

Would they need education credits to accumulate every 3 years?

What about furthering education? Adding new skills perhaps

Why now? Why hasn't it been done in any other province?

Do not want them taking over MLT positions.

10. Why do you want to see MLAs regulated?

Continuing Ed. Requirements and certification guarantee.

Job security.

Will give better definition to duties in a lab.

That the regulations be established with MLA and MLT duties.

To know who is working in our labs and what training they received.

To have more responsibilities.

For security and to have more of a voice to express ourselves.

We want to be recognized and have a voice. Have a professional title.

Standards of education and scope of practice

Safety for the NB public.

As a MLA I find that it would be more secure if we were regulated.

Less work for MLTs that would mean job cuts.

How do we proceed to determine the level of certification and competence?

Define area of practice through the province and make the profession for phlebotomy and MLA different.

Would certified do the work for MLA?

It would enhance professionalism of MLAs

Properly trained, regulated professionals performing the job. Accuracy, integrity and job security all play roles.

So there are clear policies in place as far as what they are regulated to do.

No more grandfathering in of inferior 'techs' with no CSMLS certifications. Had the misfortune of working with some who cannot perform simple dilutions yet anything complicated. An embarrassment to the profession.

I think regulation will help to ensure that MLA's are properly trained. It would be beneficial for them to have a regulatory body and a scope of practice.

I believe the public has no idea who is regulated and who is not.

Safer for the patients, give the profession a voice

They need a scope of practice safer for the patients, give the profession a voice

So they have a better understanding of what their job entitles them to do.

#### STANDARDIZATION OF SCOPE OF PRACTICE

I would like to know that I am able to fully trust that the MLA's I'm working with completely understand the implications of the work they do, and just how important it is to the patients care in ensuring correct results.

For public safety and quality control

I would like their scope of practice to be standardized so they are not performing functions beyond their scope, also I see them as being underutilized in some areas where it is unsure what their scope is.

Job security, recognition, benefits, own union

I feel anyone who handles patient specimens should be regulated. They are often the first step in the path a specimen takes, a very important role in the integrity of the specimen.

For security in knowing that the person in the lab was educated and qualified to perform the tasks that there required to do.

Patient safety and MLT vs. MLA specific tasks in the lab.

I feel comfortable that they are only requested to perform task training to do.

Continuing Education should be made mandatory.

## Appendix B

Please check whether you are a MLT or MLA so that we may better interpret the results of this survey. Circle the corresponding number for each question. 1 meaning no or completely against, and 5 meaning yes or completely agree.

MLT: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years practicing: \_\_\_\_\_

MLA: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years practicing: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How strongly do you feel about the need for MLA regulation in New Brunswick?  
1 2 3 4 5
2. Do you believe patients would feel safer knowing all specimen testing from the time of collection, to the final results being issued, were performed by regulated professionals?  
1 2 3 4 5
3. Do you think the public feel safer since MLTs have been regulated?  
1 2 3 4 5
4. Do you want MLAs regulated in New Brunswick?  
1 2 3 4 5
5. Is job security a possible reason for you to want regulation?  
1 2 3 4 5
6. With the continued expanding of roles performed by MLAs, do you feel that MLAs would benefit from having their own "Scope of Practice" specific to the profession?  
1 2 3 4 5
7. How strongly do you feel that the MLA profession has moved in the right direction when certification was introduced?  
1 2 3 4 5
8. What are some of the concerns you have about MLA regulation?
9. Do you have any questions about the reasons for undertaking to regulate MLAs?
10. Why do you want to see MLAs regulated?



This survey can also be filled out online by scanning the attached QR code or at [www.nbsmlt.nb.ca](http://www.nbsmlt.nb.ca)  
Thank-you for taking the time to fill out this survey. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the NBSMLT office.