**Glossary of terms   
for the Perioperative Mortality infographic on surgery and risk in Aotearoa New Zealand | Te pōkanga me te tūponotanga i Aotearoa**

**Adenoids:** glands (organs that produce hormones) on the back wall of your nose, above the tonsils. The adenoids are part of your body’s immune system.[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Adhesions:** scar tissue that makes organs or structures of organs stick together. Adhesions commonly form after surgery.

**Age standardisation:** a statistical technique that allows us to compare between populations that have different age structures. This is needed because older people are more likely to die after surgery, so a population that has more older people will have a higher rate of surgical deaths.

**Anaesthetic:** a drug that either makes you unconscious and unaware of your surgery or stops you from feeling pain during your surgery.1

**Aneurysm:** abulgeon an artery caused by a weakness in the artery wall.

**Aorta:** the largest artery in your body. The aorta carries blood away from your heart to the rest of your body.

**Appendicitis:** when the appendix, a small tube attached to your large intestine, gets swollen and infected. If not treated, it can burst and cause serious problems, so doctors often remove it with surgery.

**Artery:** a blood vessel that carries blood away from your heart to the rest of your body.

**Biliary tract:** made up of the parts of the body that produce and transport bile (a fluid that helps with digestion). Bile helps to break down fat from food in the stomach so the body can digest it better.

**Bowel:** a long tube that runs between the stomach and the anus, as part of the digestive system. It is also known as the intestine. It is made up of the small intestine (of which the appendix is a part), the colon and the rectum. Different parts of the intestine can be operated on.1

**Caesarean section (C-section):** a surgery where doctors deliver a baby by making a cut in the mother's belly and uterus instead of the baby coming out the usual way. A C-section is usually done when it is safer for the baby or mother than a regular birth.

**Cataract surgery:**the most common type of eye surgery. A cataract is a cloudy area on the lens in the eye. The surgery removes the cloudy lens and replaces it with an artificial clear lens.

**Cholecystectomy:** surgery to remove the gall bladder. The gallbladder is a small organ under your liver.

**Colon:** an organ that is part of the digestive system. It absorbs water from the food we eat. It is also known as the large bowel or large intestine.

**Comorbidity:** when a person has more than one illness or medical condition at the same time.

**Coronary artery:** carries oxygen-rich blood to the heart muscle. This is because the heart, like other muscles, needs its own blood supply to keep pumping.

**Elective surgery:** surgery planned in advance, because it is not urgent. It can improve a person’s quality of life or stop their medical condition from becoming worse.

**Emergency surgery:** for an urgent surgical condition that is likely to lead to death or the loss of a limb (arm or leg) if the patient does not have surgery.

**External fixation:** a way to fix broken bone. A steel bar outside the body is held in place by metal pins that go through the skin and are screwed into the bone above and below the break.1

**Fracture:** a break or crack in a bone in the body.

**Gall bladder:** an organ that stores bile. Bile helps to break down fats from food in the stomach so the body can digest it better.

**General anaesthetic:** used to put you to sleep and keep you unconscious. This type of anaesthetic is controlled by your doctor. For some surgeries, a general anaesthetic is essential. You will be asleep and feel nothing throughout the procedure.[[2]](#footnote-3)

**Generalised orthopaedics:** surgery on bones, joints, tendons and ligaments of the body. In the context of our infographic, this refers to all orthopaedic surgeries that were not on the limbs or the spine (i.e., places on the body other than the spine, shoulder, arm, hand, finger, pelvis, hip, leg, foot or toes).

**Heart surgery:** surgery on the heart to replace or repair a valve that is faulty.[[3]](#footnote-4)

**Hernia:** when an internal organ or other body part bulges through the wall of muscle or tissue that normally holds it.

**Inequities:** the opposite of equity, whichthe World Health Organization defines as ‘the absence of unfair, avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically or by other dimensions of inequality (e.g., sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation)’.[[4]](#footnote-5) Health depends on many things, and ‘equal’ health is hard to achieve. Health providers try to provide quality services to all people in their care. However, factors such as age, poverty (deprivation), ethnicity, housing, health care service designs and government policies can all influence health. Within the health care system, factors that affect health include how easy it is to access services, the cost of services, staffing levels, available technology and medicines, and whether services meet the social and cultural needs of the people they serve.[[5]](#footnote-6) It is important to measure the size of differences in health and health care to understand if there might be unfair differences for some groups of people. ‘Inequity’ is when health care and outcomes (like deaths after surgery) vary between different groups of people. Health inequities are avoidable and unfair differences in health outcomes caused by social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions. Efforts to improve equity recognises that different people may require different approaches and resources to get the same outcomes.

**Inguinal hernia:** when soft tissue, such as part of the intestine, bulges through a weak spot in the abdominal muscles.

**Laparotomy:** surgery in which the surgeon creates a large cut in the abdomen (belly), so they can operate on the organs there.

**Mastectomy:** surgery in which the surgeon removes the whole breast.[[6]](#footnote-7)

**Meniscus:** a part of the knee that acts like a shock absorber.

**Neuraxial anaesthetic:** when a doctor injects an anaesthetic around the nerves in your spinal area. Neuraxial anaesthesia includes epidurals.

**Neurosurgery:** a type of surgery that diagnoses and treats problems with the nervous system (brain, spinal cord and nerves) that can be relieved or cured by surgery.1

**Obstetric surgery:** surgery related to pregnancy, delivery (birth) of a baby, or the six weeks after delivery.

**Ophthalmic surgery:** surgery done on the eyes to fix problems with vision or eye health.

**Orthopaedic surgery:** surgery to treat problems with bones, joints, ligaments, tendons and muscles.

**Pancreatic surgery:** surgery on the pancreas, which is an organ in the belly (abdomen) that helps with digesting food.

**Pericardium:** a thin, protective sac that surrounds the heart and holds it in place.

**Primary care:** is part of the health service based in the community. It is usually the first place people go for healthcare. Primary care is usually provided by family doctors (GPs), practice nurses, pharmacists, and chemists.

**Prioritised ethnicity:** a categorisation method that allocates people to a single ethnicity, even if they identify as multiple ethnicities. This method gives Māori highest priority, followed by Pacific peoples, Asian peoples and all other ethnic groups (including Middle Eastern, Latin American, African, and New Zealand European). In practice, if someone identifies as both Māori and Pacific, they will be counted in the Māori group. If someone identifies as both Pacific and European, they will be counted in the Pacific group. This means a person’s prioritised ethnicity may not represent their preferred ethnic identity.

**Rectum:** the tube at the end of the intestine that connects to the anus.

**Secondary care:** care received in a hospital. It can be as an inpatient (staying overnight) or outpatient (going in for appointments).

**Socioeconomic deprivation:** not having enough money, education, or healthcare to live comfortably and improve your situation. People living in socioeconomically deprived areas often struggle to meet their basic needs.The socioeconomic level of an area is determined by considering many factors. These include household incomes, home ownership, internet availability, and level of education.

**Tissue:** a group of cells in the body that are connected to each other to do the same job. The human body is made up of many kinds of tissue, including bones, muscle, nerves and skin.

**Umbilical hernia:** when part of your intestine bulges through the opening in your abdominal muscles near your bellybutton.[[7]](#footnote-8)

**Uterus:** also known as the womb, the uterus is part of the reproductive system. When a person is pregnant, the baby grows in their uterus.

**Vascular bypass surgery:** surgery to redirect blood around a blocked artery (blood vessel). It creates a new pathway for the blood flow with either a plastic tube (synthetic graft) or your own vein.[[8]](#footnote-9)

**Vascular surgery:** surgery to treat problems with blood vessels, including arteries, veins, and sometimes lymphatic vessels.[[9]](#footnote-10)

**Vein:** a blood vessel that carries blood from your body to your heart.

1. Youngson RM. 1992. *Collins Dictionary of Medicine.* Glasgow: HarperCollins. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust. *Anaesthesia explained: Information for Patients*. URL: <https://anaesthesia.nz/about-anaesthesia/anaesthesia-faqs/> <https://www.hdft.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/anaesthesia-explained.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Heart Foundation. *Heart valve surgery*. URL: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/your-heart/heart-treatments/heart-valve-surgery> (accessed 20 September 2024) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. World Health Organisation. *Health Equity.* URL: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-equity> (accessed 20 September 2024). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Te Tāhū Hauora Health Quality & Safety Commission. *Equity Explorer.* URL: [https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-data/atlas-of-healthcare-variation/equity-explorer](https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-data/atlas-of-healthcare-variation/equity-explorer/) (accessed 23 November 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Breast Cancer Foundation. *Mastectomy*. URL: <https://www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/breast-cancer/treatment-options/surgery/mastectomy> (accessed 20 September 2024) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Mayo Clinic. *Umbilical Hernia.* URL: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/umbilical-hernia/symptoms-causes/syc-20378685> (accessed 23 November 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. RWJ Barnabas Health. *Peripheral Vascular Bypass.* URL: [https://www.rwjbh.org/treatment-care/heart-and-vascular-care/tests-procedures/peripheral-vascular-bypass](https://www.rwjbh.org/treatment-care/heart-and-vascular-care/tests-procedures/peripheral-vascular-bypass/) (accessed 24 November 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand – Capital, Coast and Hutt Valley. *Vascular Surgery.* URL: [https://www.ccdhb.org.nz/our-services/a-to-z-of-our-services/vascular-surgery](https://www.ccdhb.org.nz/our-services/a-to-z-of-our-services/vascular-surgery/) (accessed 19 November 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)