**Glossary of terms   
for the Perioperative Mortality Review Committee’s infographic on surgery and risk in Aotearoa New Zealand | Te pokanga me te tuponotanga 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)

**Age standardisation:** a way of adjusting for the ages of populations in statistics. 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 main artery that carries blood away from your heart to the rest of your body.[[2]](#footnote-3)

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

**Biliary tract:** the biliary tract is 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.

**Caudal anaesthetic:** a type of anaesthetic that is often used for children having surgery. A caudal anaesthetic is given under general anaesthesia to numb pain in the lower half of the body for when the child wakes up after surgery.

**Cholecystectomy:** surgery to remove the gall bladder.

**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 burden:** the number and severity of diseases or medical conditions a person has at the same time.

**Elective surgery:** elective surgery is planned in advance. It can improve a person’s quality of life or stop their medical condition from becoming worse.

**Emergency surgery:** emergency surgery is 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.

**Epidural anaesthetic:** when anaesthetic is injected near the spinal cord to numb a large part of the body. It is often used for pain relief during labour and childbirth or for people having operations in their abdominal (belly) area.

**External fixation:** a way to fix broken bone. An external steel bar is held in place by steel 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 anaesthesia:** used to put you to sleep and keep you unconscious. This type of anaesthesia is controlled by your doctor. For some surgeries, general anaesthesia is essential. You will be asleep and feel nothing throughout the procedure.[[3]](#footnote-4)

**Generalised orthopaedics:** surgery on bones, joints 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 (ie, places on the body other than the spine, shoulder, arm, hand, finger, pelvis, hip, leg, foot or toes).

**Haemorrhoids:** twisted, enlarged veins in the anal canal (the tube that connects the rectum at the end of the intestine to the anus). They may cause pain, bleeding and a sense of incompleteness (‘like you haven’t gone’) when pooing.1

**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 (eg, 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) As a first step in trying to make things fairer, it is important to measure the size of the differences in health and health care. ‘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 and environmental conditions. Equity recognises different people with different levels of advantage, 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.

**Intestine:** a long tube that runs between the stomach and the anus, as part of the digestive system. It is also known as the bowel. 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

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

**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, caudal and spinal anaesthesia.

**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.

**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.

**Pharynx:** the throat; it starts behind the nose and ends at the top of the trachea (windpipe) and oesophagus (the tube that goes to the stomach).[[6]](#footnote-7)

**Prioritised ethnicity:** allocating 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.

**Socioeconomic deprivation:** looks at how ‘well-off’ a person is compared to others. It includesmany factors like income, amount of education, and where a person lives.

**Spinal anaesthetic:** when a doctor injects an anaesthetic into the fluid surrounding the spinal cord, so the legs and lower abdomen don’t feel pain. It can be used both during and after surgery to reduce pain.

**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 the blood vessels that carry blood away from (arteries) and back to (veins) your heart.[[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. American Heart Association. *Your Aorta: The Pulse of Life.* URL: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/aortic-aneurysm/your-aorta-the-pulse-of-life> (accessed 23 November 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Oxford University Hospitals. Anaesthesia Explained: Information for Patients. URL: <https://www.ouh.nhs.uk/patient-guide/leaflets/files/13762Panaesthesia.pdf> (accessed 23 November 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. World Health Organisation. *Health Equity.* URL: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-equity> (accessed 24 November 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. 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. National Cancer Institute. *Pharynx.* URL: <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/pharynx> (accessed 23 November 2022). [↑](#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)