

Glossary of terms

as at 9 June 2026

This glossary explains the words and terms we use in our work, communications, publications, websites, and the health information we share.

It isn't a complete list. We'll keep adding new terms and updating definitions over time.

The definitions provided here are based on information from trusted sources, which are listed below. They are a guide only. People and communities—including different iwi—may use and understand words in their own ways.

Autonomy

Having the freedom and ability to make your own choices and decisions. It is about being in control of your own life, actions, and preferences without someone else deciding for you.

In a healthcare context, it often means that patients have the right to understand their options and choose the care that feels right for them.

Best practice

Activities, disciplines, and methods that are available to identify, implement and monitor the available evidence in health care.

The best way to identify, collect, evaluate, disseminate, and implement.

Bias

When we favour or dislike something, someone, or a group in a way that is not fair. It is like having a 'lean' toward certain ideas or people, which can influence our decisions and actions without us realising it.

Unconscious bias is when we have these unfair preferences or assumptions without being aware of them. They come from our experiences, culture, or things we have learned over time. Because we do not realise we have them, they can affect our behaviour without us noticing.

Conscious bias is when someone is aware of their unfair preference or prejudice. They know they are treating someone differently because of a belief or opinion - such as judging a person based on their age, gender, or background - and they do it on purpose.

Code of rights

Whenever you use a health or disability service in Aotearoa New Zealand, you are protected by the Code of Health and

Disability Services Consumers' Rights. It gives consumers the right to be treated with respect, receive appropriate care, have proper communications, and be fully informed so they can make an informed choice.

Source: Health and Disability Commissioner

Colonisation and decolonisation

Colonisation is when one group of people takes control over another group and their land. This usually involves settlers moving in, claiming ownership, and changing existing systems - like laws, culture, resources, and ways of living - often without the consent of the people who were already there.

Decolonisation is the process of undoing the social, cultural, or political control from the effects of colonisation. It can mean a country gaining independence, but it also includes efforts to restore power, culture, language, and decision-making to the original people whose land was taken. It's about addressing past harm and supporting Indigenous rights and self-determination.

Consumer of health care services

Person receiving health care. There are many terms used to describe someone who receives health care services; these include patient, consumer, birthing person etc. In this document we will use 'consumer' to align with the terms used by the Health and Disability Commission (HDC).

Cultural competence and cultural safety

In healthcare, *cultural competence* means understanding and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practises of consumers of health care services, and using that knowledge to provide appropriate care.

Cultural safety goes further by requiring healthcare professionals and organisations to reflect on their own culture, biases, and assumptions, and how these may affect consumers. It is defined by whether consumers of health care services and their communities feel respected and safe, and it aims to support fair and equitable health outcomes.

Cultural diversity

Having many different cultures, backgrounds, and ways of life in one place. This includes differences in language, traditions, beliefs, foods, art and how people live. When a community is culturally diverse, it brings together a range of experiences and perspectives, which can help people learn from one another and build understanding.

Cultural humility

Is a practice that involves self-reflection and self-critique, as well as a willingness to learn from others. It's about recognising and respecting the beliefs, customs, and values of other people, and acknowledging differences without

judgment. It is a lifelong commitment to understanding and balancing power imbalances, and it requires openness, empathy, and compassion.

Cultural racism

Involves the belief in a cultural basis for racial/ethnic inferiority or superiority. In other words, a person or group's culture is an explanation for their success or disadvantage, rather than structural/systemic explanations.

Discrimination

When someone is treated unfairly because of who they are - such as their race, age, gender, disability, religion, or any other personal characteristic. It means giving someone worse opportunities, choices, or treatment not because of what they've done, but because of a part of their identity.

Duty of care

A moral or legal obligation to ensure the safety or well-being of others.

Emergency

A serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action.

Equity and equality

In Aotearoa New Zealand, people have differences in health that are not only avoidable but unfair and unjust. Equity recognises different people with different levels of advantage require different approaches and resources to get equitable health outcomes.

Source: This is the Ministry of Health's definition of equity. It was signed off by the former Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield in March 2019.

Equality is about giving everyone the same opportunities or resources. This assumes that everyone starts from the same place. Whereas 'equity' acknowledges that we do not all start from the same place and ensures that resources are distributed based on need.

Source: [Thirdspace Projects Aotearoa](#).

Fitness to practise

A concept in the regulation of practitioners and it considers the health professional's ability to practise. Fitness to practise can include, not only matters of technical competence, but also refers to the implications of the health and wellbeing of the professional.

Gender

How people see themselves and how they express who they are. It includes being a man, a woman, both, neither, or something else. Gender is not only about biology – it is also shaped by culture, personal identity, and how someone feels inside.

Hapū	Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe. Section of a large kinship group and primary political unit in traditional Māori society. It consisted of several whānau sharing descent to a common ancestor, usually being named after the ancestor. Also means to be pregnant, conceived in the womb.
Hauora	Be fit, well, healthy, vigorous, in good spirits.
Health and Disability Commissioner	The Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC) promotes the rights of all people in Aotearoa New Zealand who use health and disability services.
Holistic	Looking at the person as a whole rather than focusing on only one part, for example, a physical injury. In healthcare, <i>holistic</i> care considers a person’s physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs together because each part affects their overall wellbeing.
Hui	To gather, congregate, assemble, meet.
Impacts of colonisation	Refers to having power over indigenous people culturally, socially, politically and/or economically—and the exploitation of their land and resources.
Inequity	An unfair difference between people or groups. In healthcare, it means some people have fewer opportunities to be healthy because of factors like income, where they live, or how they are treated.
Informed consent	An ethical principle, that a person must have sufficient information and understanding before making decisions about their care. Pertinent information may include risks and benefits of treatments, alternative treatments, the person’s role in treatment, and their right to refuse treatment (Health and Disability Commissioner code of rights).
Institutional racism	The patterns, procedures, policies and practices within institutions and organisations that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that persistently favour, or disadvantage individuals based on their membership of particular ethnic or racialised groups (Griffith et al., 2007).
Intergenerational trauma	Trauma that is passed from a trauma survivor to their descendants.
Iwi	Extended kinship/group, tribe, nation, people, nationality. Most often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.
Kai	Food, meal.

Kaitiaki Trustee, minder, guard, custodian, guardian, caregiver, keeper, steward.

Source: *Te Aka Māori dictionary*.

Kaitiakitanga Guardianship, stewardship, trusteeship, trustee.

Karakia Prayer, grace, blessing, service, church service - an extension of the traditional term for introduced religions, especially Christianity.

Can also be non-religious - Incantation, ritual chant, chant. A set form of words to state or make effective a ritual activity. There are karakia for all aspects of life.

Karanga A ceremonial call of welcome to visitors on a marae, or equivalent venue, at the start of a Pōwhiri.

Kaupapa Topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative.

Kawa Part of marae protocol - ritual chants (karakia) and customs for the opening of new houses, canoes, and other events.

Koha Gift present, offering, donation, contribution – koha is given (often in the form of money) as a way of contributing to a hui/event), but can also be in the form of taonga, food or any other type of gift.

Kotahitanga Unity, togetherness, solidarity, collective action.

Mahi Work, do, perform.

Mana Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status (person, place, event, or object).

Manaakitanga Hospitality, kindness, generosity, support – the process of showing respect, generosity, and care for others.

Marae Courtyard – the open space area in front of the *whareniui*, where formal greeting and discussion take place. Often used to include the complex of buildings around the marae.

Marae ātea Courtyard, public forum – open area in front of the *Whareniui* Where formal welcomes to visitors takes place and issues are debated. It is the domain of Tūmatauenga the *atua* of war and people - thus an appropriate place to raise contentious issues.

Marginalised	When a group is <i>marginalised</i> , it means they are pushed to the edge of society and don't get the same opportunities, power, or voice as others. Their needs and experiences are often ignored or undervalued, which can make it harder for them to fully participate in everyday life, work, or decision-making.
Mātauranga	Knowledge, wisdom, understanding.
Mauri	Life principle, life force, vital force, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions – the essential quality and vitality of being or entity. Also used for a physical object, individual, ecosystem, or social group in which the essence is located.
Mihi whakatau	Speech or greeting, official welcome speech acknowledging those present at a gathering.
Other service providers	Organisations that provide healthcare services, ie Awanui Labs, Pacific Radiology.
Pathways	In healthcare, <i>pathways</i> are the steps or plan that a person follows to get the care they need (what happens, when, and who is involved).
Pōwhiri/pōhiri	Ritual of encounter; a ceremonial welcome on a marae.
Practising certificate	A certificate that enables a health professional to be able to 'practice' every year. Practising certificates are renewed each year (Annual Practising Certificate/APC). Currently practitioners declare that they are fit and able to practise and that they have kept their knowledge and skills up to date.
Prejudice	When someone forms an opinion about a person or group <i>before</i> knowing them, and that opinion is usually negative or unfair. It often comes from stereotypes, assumptions, or misinformation rather than facts or personal experience.
Privilege	Having advantages or benefits that other people may not have - simply because of who you are or the group you belong to. These advantages are not usually earned; they come from social systems that make life easier for some people and harder for others. Privilege does not mean someone's life has no challenges. It just means they <i>do not face certain barriers</i> that others do.
Racism	Someone is treated unfairly, judged, or harmed because of their race, skin colour, or ethnic background. It can be shown through hurtful beliefs, biased actions, or unfair treatment. Institutional racism (also called systemic racism) happens when the rules, policies, or everyday practices of organisations - like schools, workplaces, or health services - unfairly

	disadvantage certain racial or ethnic groups. It is built into the system, even if no single person intended to be racist.
Registration	A process that healthcare professionals must undergo to practise (in their profession) in Aotearoa New Zealand.
Relevant information	Information that is closely connected or appropriate to what is being done or considered.
Relevant people/ relevant third parties	People that are closely connected or appropriate to what is being done or considered, for example family, whanau and friends, caregivers, legal representatives.
Reporting obligations	A legal requirement to report.
Sociocultural factors	Sociocultural factors refer to the environmental conditions that play a part in healthy and adaptive behaviour and well-being. They include a patient's ethnicity, linguistic diversity, age, gender, health status, lifestyle, education, religion, beliefs, values, demographics, social classes, sexuality, and attitudes.
Status quo	<i>The way things are right now</i> - the current situation, system, or way of doing things.
Systemic racism	Is used interchangeably with the term institutional racism to refer to the systematised discrimination embedded in the laws and regulations of a society or organisation.
Tangata Tiriti	Treaty partners who are not Māori.
Taonga	Property, goods, possession, effects, object. Treasure, anything prized - applied to anything considered to be of value including socially or culturally valuable objects, resources, phenomenon, ideas, and techniques.
Tauwiwi	Non-Māori.
Te aka	<i>Māori dictionary</i> . <i>This is one area where Māori words/definitions/information for this glossary has been sourced.</i>
Te ao Māori	Te Ao Māori is the Māori world view encompassing the language (te reo) culture, knowledge, and spiritual practices. At its core, te ao Māori is a holistic perspective, emphasising the interconnectedness of all things – people, nature, and the spiritual realm, and is grounded in tikanga (customary values and lore) and mātauranga (knowledge).
Te reo Māori	Māori language.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty of Waitangi, a foundational agreement between Māori chiefs and the British Crown establishing governance, rights, and mutual obligations in New Zealand. (signed in 1840).
Tikanga	Correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way, code, meaning, plan, practice, convention, protocol - the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.
Tino rangatiratanga	Self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, self-government.
Toitū te Tiriti	It means 'honour the Treaty'; referring to upholding and respecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the rights of Māori as tangata whenua.
Wairua	Spirit, soul - spirit of a person which exists beyond death. Attitude, quintessence, feel, mood, feeling, nature, essence, atmosphere.
Wānanga	To meet and discuss, deliberate, consider. It also refers to tribal knowledge, lore and learning - important traditional, cultural, religious, historical, genealogical, and philosophical knowledge.
Wellbeing	A state of complete physical, mental, and social health.
Whakawhanungatanga	The concept of building and nurturing relationships, fostering a sense of belonging, and connecting people through shared kinship, community, and mutual support. It is closely linked to whanaungatanga.
Whaikōrero	Formal speeches usually made by men during a pōhiri and other formal gatherings. Formal eloquent language, using imagery, metaphor, whakataukī, pepeha, relevant whakapapa, and references to tribal histories.
Whānau	Extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people - the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.
Whanaungatanga	Relationship, kinship, sense of family connection. A relationship through shared experiences and working together that provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops because of kinship rights and obligations, which also service to strengthen each member of the kin group. It also extends to others to whom one develops a close familial, friendship, or reciprocal relationship.

Wharenui Meeting house, large house – main building of a marae where guests are accommodated. Traditionally the *wharenui* belonged to a *hapū* or *whānau* but some modern meeting houses, especially in large urban areas, have been built for non-tribal groups, including schools and tertiary institutions. Many are decorated with carving, rafter paintings and *tukutuku* panels.

Whenua Land, country, nation, territory, domain. Also refers to the placenta.

Worldview/s The lens through which someone sees and understands life. It includes their beliefs, values, experiences, and the things they think are important.

Also known as *te ao Māori* (this refers to the Māori world/worldview) – the Māori way of understanding and relating to the world. It sees people, land, water, ancestors, and the natural environment as all connected. Relationships, balance, and care for the *whenua* (land) and each other are central.

Sources include: [Te Aka Māori dictionary](#), Mike Hollings ([Haemata](#)) – also *kaumatua* to MSS staff (source details to be included), the [Health and Disability Commissioner](#), [Ministry of Health \(Defining equity\)](#), [Te Aka \(Māori dictionary\)](#), [Medical Council of New Zealand](#), [Thirdspace Projects Aotearoa \(Equity isn't the same as equality\)](#), [Springer Nature \(International Journal for Equity in Health\)](#) – Curtis et al.