

# New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists' Manifesto for the next General Election



Ahead of the next general election, the New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists - Ngā Ringa Tauwhiro o Aotearoa (NZSA) **calls on all political parties and candidates to commit to practical, evidence-based policies that strengthen our health system, improve patient outcomes and make Aotearoa New Zealand a great place to work for all health professionals.**

This manifesto outlines priority areas towards achieving this, which the NZSA recommends be incorporated into health policy and planning.

**Specialist anaesthetists play a central role in delivering safe, high-quality surgical care across the entire perioperative pathway — from pre-operative assessment and optimisation, through intra-operative management, to post-operative recovery, and pain medicine services alongside specialist pain medicine physicians (SPMP).**

While anaesthesia during surgery is now safer than ever, the greatest opportunity to improve surgical outcomes lie in the pre-and post-operative phases. Focused care at these stages enhances patient experience, reduces complications, and lowers overall health system costs.

Anaesthetists are uniquely positioned to inform health policy. Their cross-specialty involvement provides a whole-of-system perspective on surgical flow, workforce pressures, service design, and patient safety. This system-wide insight is critical to sustainable planning, particularly as demand for surgical services continues to grow.

The NZSA represents anaesthetists and SPMP working across Aotearoa in both public and private sectors. Through our national sub-specialty and special interest networks, the NZSA is uniquely positioned to provide expert, clinically grounded advice.

We urge the next Government to engage directly with anaesthetists and SPMP to ensure future decisions strengthen patient safety, improve surgical outcomes, and support the long-term sustainability of our health system.



**1045** Anaesthetists registered with the NZ Medical Council.<sup>[1]</sup>

**41** Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians (SPMP) registered with the NZ Medical Council.<sup>[1]</sup>

**35** Estimated number of SPMP actively practising. Estimated national FTE is **8-10**.<sup>[2]</sup>

[1] Medical Council of New Zealand. [www.mcnz.org.nz/about-us/our-data/](http://www.mcnz.org.nz/about-us/our-data/) (Accessed 26/01/26)

[2] NZSA SPMP Network of Aotearoa/New Zealand Workforce Survey, June 2025

The NZSA has identified the following priority areas that the next Government should incorporate into health policy and planning.

We welcome any engagement to discuss these further.



Include anaesthetists at the table of health policy development



Maintain our high skill sets and standards of anaesthesia and sedation care



Implement a coordinated plan for a cohesive public-private healthcare model



Make New Zealand's health sector a competitive and attractive place to work



Reduce the social and economic burden of pain through system reform

# Include anaesthetists at the table of health policy development

Specialist anaesthetists can provide broad systems delivery insight across patient pathways, surgical specialities, perioperative care and pain services.



## The government should:

- Involve specialist anaesthetists early in the design and implementation of health policies that affect surgical capacity, access to care, patient safety, and pain services.
- Utilise the NZSA's nationwide networks to access timely, practical clinical advice across subspecialties and regions.
- Employ proven regional perioperative care models nationwide to improve patient outcomes and efficiency particularly in the pre and post operative stages of the perioperative journey where the greatest gains can be made.

# Maintain our high skill sets and standards of anaesthesia and sedation care

New Zealand is one of the safest places to have an anaesthetic or deep sedation. Maintaining this depends on sustained investment in our highly trained anaesthesia workforce and its service capacity.



## The government should:

- Engage with professional bodies, including the NZSA, on anaesthesia workforce planning and development.
- Prioritise strategies that utilise our existing qualified and highly skilled workforce.
- Increase post-fellowship FTE positions to enable new specialists to enter and remain in New Zealand's health services.



# Implement a coordinated plan for a cohesive public-private healthcare model

Private healthcare in Aotearoa can support the public system when needed through appropriate planning and considered approaches.



## The government should:

- Develop clear, transparent frameworks for public–private collaboration that prioritise patient safety, outcomes, continuity of care, and workforce impact.
- Ensure private providers and insurers are accountable for upholding clinical judgement and safety over financially driven decision-making.
- Initiate long-term planning to safely and sustainably increase public health services in parallel to short-term solutions using private facilities.

# Make NZ's health sector a competitive and attractive place to work

A stable, supported workforce leads to better outcomes for patients.



## The government should:

- Fund national workforce initiatives that improve retention, workforce wellbeing, and cultural safety as core system requirements.
- Create a national blueprint before deploying or regulating any new healthcare workforces to ensure roles are collaborative and complementary while protecting standards of care and the sustainability of the existing workforce.
- Resource Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora to deliver on the commitments in the Health Workforce Plan.
- Support initiatives that increase Māori and Pasifika participation in anaesthesia training, building a workforce that reflects the population it serves.



# Reduce the social and economic burden of pain through system reform

Pain medicine remains under-recognised and under-resourced, with significant consequences for individuals and society.



SPMPs are dual-qualified medical specialists who provide comprehensive, evidence based, whole person pain management using an integrated sociopsychobiomedical approach.

## The government should:

- Adopt a national approach to pain that prioritises prevention, early intervention, and integrated models of care across community, regional, and tertiary services.
- Recognise the major, multidimensional burden that acute to chronic pain places on New Zealand's healthcare system.
- Fund chronic pain services using patient-centred, SPMP led, interdisciplinary models. With medical and allied healthcare professionals qualified in pain medicine.
- Address the critical shortage of Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians (SPMP) to ensure equitable access to care throughout the motu.

## Who are Anaesthetists?

Specialist Anaesthetists complete a minimum of five years anaesthesia training before Fellowship (FANZCA) is awarded, to work as a Specialist.

They play a critical role across the health system, including:

- Leading perioperative care and patient risk assessment before, during, and after surgery.
- Providing acute and chronic pain management.
- Working across operating theatres, ICUs, emergency departments, and obstetric services.
- Teaching and training the future anaesthesia workforce.
- Contributing to research that improves outcomes and reduces inequities.
- Upholding standards of practice to ensure patient safety.

## Perioperative Care The greatest opportunity

**The pre-and post-operative stages of the perioperative journey are where we can make the most significant improvements to surgical outcomes.**

Perioperative care focuses on a patient's entire surgical journey – from when surgery is contemplated until recovery is complete.

If considered a separate category, post-operative mortality would be the third leading cause of death worldwide.<sup>[3]</sup> Major post-operative complications are common. They are terrible for patients and expensive for the healthcare system. This cost burden will increase exponentially with our ageing population and the rising number of surgical procedures performed on increasingly unwell patients.

Great work is already being done across the country by anaesthetists and other specialists involved in perioperative care. Now is our opportunity to utilise these to ensure that all of Aotearoa New Zealand can access the same range of comprehensive perioperative care.

[3] Nepdgodiev et al. Lancet, 393:401, 2019.



[www.anaesthesia.nz](http://www.anaesthesia.nz)

[nzsa@anaesthesia.nz](mailto:nzsa@anaesthesia.nz)

+64 4 494 0124