What is weight-loss (bariatric) surgery?
Weight-loss surgery is called bariatric surgery. It can be an option for people who are very obese and who can't control their weight through any other methods. If obesity is complicated by other medical conditions such as diabetes and heart problems, then weight-loss becomes even more important. Surgery may be an option if you have several significant health problems related to your obesity.

There are different types of weight-loss surgery, including gastric band, sleeve gastrectomy, and gastric bypass. Not all of these are available through the public funded surgery.

Who is eligible for publicly funded bariatric surgery?
A limited number of people aged between 18 and 65 years are eligible for publicly funded weight-loss surgery. Publicly funded means that the surgery is paid for by the public health system.

Because there is a limit on the number of publicly funded surgeries available, there is an assessment and selection system in place. Also, funding for weight-loss surgery is pooled across the district health boards (DHBs) in the South Island. This system aims to ensure that the people who would most benefit from surgery will receive it through the public health system. Some patients selected for weight-loss surgery might have to travel elsewhere in the South Island for their surgery.

If you don't want to wait or you can afford to pay for your surgery, you may wish to look at having it done privately.

This fact sheet describes the assessment and selection process for publicly funded weight-loss surgery.

The assessment and selection process

**Important:** The following process is the only way to apply for publicly funded weight-loss (bariatric) surgery.

1) The first step is to see your general practice team.
   - Your doctor will ask you about your general health and find out if you have any health problems related to your obesity.
   - Your doctor will also check if you meet the South Island criteria for bariatric surgery.
   - Your doctor will measure your body mass index (BMI). Only patients with a high BMI are considered for publicly funded surgery.
   - Before you are considered for surgical treatment, you must have been obese for at least five years. It is also expected that you will have followed an intensive weight-loss programme for at least two years.
   - You may need other checks or blood tests.
   - If you meet all of the qualifying criteria and you want to be considered for surgery, your doctor will explain the process.
2) Your doctor will then send a referral to the surgical service at your local DHB. All your relevant medical information is included in this referral, so that the surgeon can consider your case.

3) You will be offered an appointment with a bariatric surgeon or other health professional. They will ask you questions about your health and examine you to help decide if you are a suitable candidate for surgery. The surgeon will explain about the surgery and ask about your understanding of what is involved, and your expectations. They will use a Ministry of Health scoring tool to give you a ranking, relative to other patients. This ranking system helps decide which patients would most benefit from surgery.

If you are still interested in surgery, your name will be forwarded for the next step (see below).

4) If your ranking is high, and the surgeon thinks you are suitable for surgery, then your case will be reviewed by a committee of experts. They meet regularly throughout the year to select the most suitable candidates for surgery. It may take up to four months before you find out the outcome.

5) During this process, your medical records will be seen by the surgeon who assesses you and gives you your ranking. The committee of experts who reviews your case will also see your medical records. Your doctor will make sure that you understand this and that you give your consent to your medical records being used in this way.

If your application is successful

1) You will be offered a team assessment appointment with a surgeon, dietitian, psychologist, and exercise specialist.

2) Your surgery will be arranged with a surgical provider in Christchurch or Invercargill.

If your application is not successful

- If your application is not successful, you may be referred again if your situation has changed.

- If within one year you have not been offered surgery, your doctor may refer you again. Talk to your doctor about any risk factors that you can improve (for example, quitting smoking) as this may improve your chances next time. Your doctor can't refer you again if you are not eligible for public funding. Your doctor can also give you advice about healthy eating and exercise.

- If you do not want to wait, or if you are able to pay for surgery, you may want to have the surgery done privately.

More information

- You can find a PDF pamphlet *An introduction to weight-loss surgery and the Southern DHB bariatric program* on the bariatric surgery page on HealthInfo.