

## Media Release

# Surgery in Victoria is safe

28 October 2020

Surgery in Victoria is safe. The latest Victorian Audit of Surgical Mortality (VASM) annual report states that there are less than three deaths for every thousand procedures, which is comparable to data published in both Australasia and the developed world.

From 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019, there were 709,906 surgical procedures in Victoria with 1,767 deaths reported to VASM, representing a death rate of just 0.2 per cent. From the audit, 926 clinical reviews were conducted for cases where patients died while under the care of a surgeon.

The key findings in Victoria are similar to the figures from the national audit. These are:

- The most common health risk factors related to cardiovascular, age and respiratory.
- The majority of surgical deaths occurred in elderly patients admitted as an emergency with acute life-threatening condition.
- Unplanned return to the operating theatre remained high, which can reflect timely recognition, intervention, and escalation of care for complications.
- There was a reduction in preoperative transfer delays to and between hospitals.
- There was a reduction in clinically significant surgical infections.
- There was a reduction in clinical management issues that were preventable.

Clinical Director of VASM, Associate Professor Philip McCahy said that he was pleased by the continued decline in surgical deaths in Victoria, and that the audit will prove to be a valuable resource in future years as the state recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“VASM continues to monitor trends in surgical deaths via independent peer-review assessments. In the current report, there is a small number of cases where our surgical assessors find adverse events that were probably preventable.

“Reassuringly, compared with the data for previous years the frequency of these cases is decreasing. Despite this trend, VASM is motivated to continue its educational role in disseminating ‘lessons learned’ to clinical teams through educational events, case note review booklets, published scientific papers and hospital governance reports.”

“VASM’s role extends further by working more closely with Safer Care Victoria’s newly formed Victorian Perioperative Consultative Council. The current findings also outline key recommendations that reflect the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards to enable health services to improve the quality and safety of surgical care in Victoria. Whilst the current report does not cover the coronavirus pandemic, VASM is closely monitoring surgical deaths to assess any impact from COVID-19, and this will be likely captured in future reports.”

---

**Media enquiries:** Abderazzaq Noor, Manager, Marketing & Communications **Contact:** t: +61 3 9249 1263 | m: +61 429 028 933

**About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)**

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery. [www.surgeons.org](http://www.surgeons.org)

VASM is managed by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and supported by Safer Care Victoria, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Australian Orthopaedic Association. The report contains clinical information on 8,135 deaths that have gone through the full audit process since 2012. All Victorian public and private hospitals providing surgical services are part of the audit process.

The full report is available at <https://www.surgeons.org/-/media/Project/RACS/surgeons-org/files/surgical-mortality-audits/vasm/2020-10-14-vasm-report-final.pdf>.