

Word for Word

Disparities in meaning: *High-risk vs. underserved*



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Underserved and *high-risk* populations sometimes overlap, but they are not always the same.

The term *high risk* refers to individuals or populations that are at greater risk for specific health outcomes. Because a patient or group who is at high risk for one health condition may not be at high risk for others, the terms “*high-risk patient*” and “*high-risk population*” should be avoided. Instead, use phrases such as “the patient was at high risk for surgical complications” or “smokers have a high risk of lung cancer.”

The term *underserved* describes health disparities among different groups.¹ Medically underserved areas are those with a lack of medical care services (e.g., counties, urban census tracts).² Medically underserved populations include individuals who are at higher risk for poor health outcomes owing to factors like racial and socioeconomic status. Some examples of medically underserved populations are people experiencing homelessness, people who have low incomes, and migrant farm workers.

Resources

1. [https://www.amamanualofstyle.com/view/ 10.1093/jama/9780190246556.001.0001/med-9780190246556-chapter-11-div2-23?rskey=nMEzjG&result=1](https://www.amamanualofstyle.com/view/10.1093/jama/9780190246556.001.0001/med-9780190246556-chapter-11-div2-23?rskey=nMEzjG&result=1)
2. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/workforce-shortage-areas/shortage-designation#mups>

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