



Engaging with vulnerable adults at risk of harm [Fact Sheet]

Throughout safeguarding resources, the terms *Adult at Risk* and *Vulnerable Adult* are used interchangeably. Official church documents provide similar definitions for the two terms. This fact sheet aims to provide an awareness of these terms and the characteristics present when workers of Chancery and Parishes are engaging with and providing ministry to adults who are vulnerable or at risk of harm.

Definition of an adult at risk

The National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (Ed.2) 2022 defines an adult at risk as *any person aged 18 years and over who is at increased risk of experiencing abuse, such as people:*

- *Who are elderly*
- *With a disability*
- *Who suffer from mental illness*
- *Who have cognitive impairment*
- *Who have suffered previous abuse*
- *Who are experiencing transient risks*
- *Who in receiving a ministry or service are subject to a power imbalance*
- *Who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander*
- *Who are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background*
- *Who are of diverse sexuality*
- *Who have any other impairment or adversity that makes it difficult for them to protect themselves from abuse*

Definition of a vulnerable adult

The National Redress Framework 2022, defines a vulnerable adult as *any person aged 18 years and over who is at increased risk of abuse, such as those who: are elderly, have a disability, suffer from mental illness, have diminished capacity, have cognitive impairment, are experiencing transient risks, such as bereavement or relationship breakdown (or other such adversity) have any other impairment that makes it difficult for that person to protect themselves from abuse or exploitation.*

Vos Estis Lux Mundi 2023 defines a vulnerable adult as *any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offense."*

Possible characteristics of a vulnerable person or group of people:

- Impaired intellectual or physical functioning
- Low socio-economic background and/or unemployment
- Subjection to modern slavery, which involves human exploitation and control such as forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking, and child labour.
- Being elderly
- Socially isolated
- Poverty and its common consequences such as malnutrition, homelessness, poor housing and destitution



- Rural migrant workers
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Having chronic illness
- Experiencing trauma and/or grief
- Addiction / substance abuse

It is important to note that having one or more of the above-mentioned characteristics does not mean that one is automatically at risk or vulnerable to harm. However, a person who is experiencing these characteristics may be abused or exploited due to the imbalance of power.

Support Services

If you are concerned and wish to report an adult at risk of abuse or exploitation, these services may be able to assist:

Emergency: 000

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732

NSW Ageing and Disability Abuse

Helpline: 1800 628 21

NSW DV Line: 1800 656 463

More Information

If you have any concerns regarding an adult at risk or wish to clarify any information, contact the Safeguarding Office (Chancery and Parishes) at safeguarding@bbcatholic.org.au or phone **02 8379 1605**.

References

National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (Edition 2) 2022

https://www.acsltd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/National-Catholic-Safeguarding-Standards-Edition-2_FINAL_December2022.pdf

National Response Protocol 2022

<https://www.acsltd.org.au/national-response-protocol/>

Vos Estis Lux Mundi 2023

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20230325-motu_proprio-vos-estis-lux-mundi-aggiornato.html

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