Statement on vulnerability and disadvantage

Relationships Australia is committed to social justice and inclusion, and respects the rights of all people, in all their diversity, to live with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships. Relationships Australia has been a provider of a broad range of services to support children, families and communities for more than sixty years. Relationships Australia works with many families and individuals who are vulnerable and in need of guidance and support during a period of personal or family crisis, and with other families who are experiencing long-term disadvantage.

Relationships Australia believes

- in a society committed to ensuring that the basic needs for safety and survival for all people in the community are met;
- children and adults experiencing and exposed to family violence are vulnerable and in need of support;
- all people have a right to participate in the community through relevant family, community, work and recreational activities;
- there are major inequalities in our society preventing the full participation of some people in the community;
- some segments of society are more exposed to social, economic, health, educational and employment risks than others;
- that Relationship Australia's support to those who do not have an equal opportunity to participate in our community and are faced with a greater exposure to risk to their safety and wellbeing, is a measure of our commitment to a belief in human rights, and to the need to promote social integration and participation of all people within the Australian community.

Vulnerability can be transient or permanent. Ongoing vulnerability can turn into disadvantage and social exclusion. A significant proportion of Relationships Australia's clients are vulnerable due to a variety of personal and social circumstances, permanent and temporary. With support from education, counselling, mediation and community development programs, many will be able to lead independent and fulfilling lives and not tip over into permanent disadvantage. Some clients, however, will always be vulnerable, and they live with disadvantage. These clients are in need of more intensive support, tailored to meet their individual needs.

Certain groups are more prone to vulnerability, disadvantage and social exclusion in Australia. They include, but are not limited to:

- Aged people
- Public housing tenants
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- One parent families

- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds[1]
- Some people with disability, especially if they experience more than one of the above factors
- People living in identified areas of disadvantage

"The most disadvantaged have the poorest health....While a range of factors has been found to be associated with inequalities, the most significant and persistent include level of education, occupation, income, employment status and area of residence, disability and refugee background."[2]

Those people who most need services often don't receive them. These families also need services across the family lifecycle – a single intervention will not move families experiencing multiple and complex problems out of disadvantage.[3] The needs of people in the 'at-risk' category are unlikely to be met by one agency, and collaborative approaches will be needed both to ensure the holistic wellbeing of the client and to ensure that the client is not overwhelmed by uncoordinated service delivery.

Relationships Australia is committed to
- making Relationships Australia services accessible to the most disadvantaged groups;
- fostering social inclusion for all Australians;
- recognising underlying social determinants of disadvantage;
- understanding that the issues faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and families are complex and contextual;
- breaking the cycle of disadvantage;
- a social justice stance that takes a proactive approach to eliminating disadvantage and discrimination for individuals, families and communities;
- calling on existing evidence of "what works" for these groups, and being prepared to change the way we work with some client groups to more effectively engage with and assist them to meet their needs;
- community involvement and engagement;
- respect for language and culture;
- commitment to working with, not for, people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage;
- working with families and communities through partnerships, networks and shared leadership; and
- creative collaboration that builds bridges between public agencies and the community, and coordination between communities, non-government organisations and government agencies to ensure services are available to meet client needs.

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[1] Australian Social Inclusion Board. *A Compendium of Social Inclusion Indicators*, Australian Government. May 2009 pp xi-xii
[2] Australian Social Inclusion Board. *A Compendium of Social Inclusion Indicators*, Australian Government. May 2009 P75
[3] Shipley, M; Blakemore, T; and Zubrick, S. *Trajectories of family disadvantage in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.* Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, July 2010.