



Review of the *Ageing and Adult Safeguarding Act 1995 (SA)*

Fact Sheet 6 – Definition of Vulnerable Adult

Who is a Vulnerable Adult?

The *Ageing and Adult Safeguarding Act 1995* ('the Act') currently defines a 'vulnerable adult' as:

"... an adult person who, by reason of age, ill health, disability, social isolation, dependence on others or other disadvantage, is vulnerable to abuse."¹

Current Issues

One of the Act's primary aims is to safeguard vulnerable adults from abuse or neglect, which means that the definition of a 'vulnerable adult' combined with the types of abuse being experienced (see Fact Sheet 7) determines the legal obligation of the ASU to respond to situations reported to it.

The Act's current definition of 'vulnerable adult' focuses on certain characteristics (such as age and disability) that could lead to the assumption that having certain characteristics or traits (such as age and disability) makes an adult inherently vulnerable. However, being vulnerable to abuse or neglect usually arises out of specific factors or a combination of factors – for example, declining health and cognitive impairment or social isolation that result in a adult being unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect. In addition, the term 'vulnerable' may be perceived among older adults and people with a disability as having a negative connotation and adds to the stigma against these groups.

Consultation Questions

1. Is the term 'vulnerable' the most suitable term to describe adults more susceptible to abuse or neglect? Would 'at-risk' be more appropriate?
2. What are the factors that make an adult vulnerable to abuse and how could vulnerability be better defined?
3. Should the definition of 'vulnerable adult' have a greater focus on the abilities and capabilities of that person, rather than their characteristics?

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