



### Why is this important?

Generally, an adult-at-risk is a person 18 years of age or older who is in need of care and support, is unable to protect themselves, and is at greater risk of abuse and harm. Archdiocesan workers are likely to interact with adults-at-risk through Church ministries and services and, depending on circumstances, they may have a duty to safeguard them. Actions to safeguard adults will depend on the decisions individuals make over their own lives and welfare. However, Church workers may also encounter adults with impaired decision-making ability.

### What should we be doing?

The following principles should guide efforts to safeguard adults:

- Adults are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Adults should be presumed to have decision-making ability (unless there is clear evidence otherwise).
- Adults must be consulted about actions to safeguard them and give their consent.
- Actions to safeguard adults should be the least intrusive.
- Adults have the right to decline support or services.

The key is to empower adults to assess risks and make their own decisions about what to do, and what is in their best interests. This is known as 'dignity of risk'. This may mean providing them with information and guidance on support and services available to them. Adults can obtain information and support from a range of government and community services if needed (see the Safeguarding Key Contacts sheet).

#### Impaired decision-making ability

Under the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, having decision-making ability means a person is able to:

1. understand the nature and consequences of a decision;
2. make the decision freely and voluntarily without being unduly influenced by another person; and
3. communicate the decision in some way.

If a person is unable to do one or more of these things, they may have impaired decision-making ability. There are a number of conditions that may affect a person's decision-making ability such as intellectual disability, mental illness, neurological disorders (e.g. dementia) or alcohol and drug misuse.

While not all people with these conditions will experience impaired decision-making ability, many will at some point in their lives. For some, impaired decision-making ability may be episodic or temporary, while for others it may be permanent.

In situations where an adult who clearly has impaired decision-making ability is at serious risk of abuse and harm, workers should immediately notify the person's family or guardian (if appropriate and contactable/available) or alternatively, government services such as an authorised mental health service, ambulance service, or the police.

If anyone is a risk of serious and imminent harm, workers should contact the police or dial triple zero '000' emergency.

All incidents involving adults-at-risk should be documented and reported to the Office for Safeguarding Services for recording in the Safeguarding Incident database.