

Vulnerable Consumer Fact Sheet

Sometimes people are described as vulnerable consumers because of their characteristics or demographics, including:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Level of education; or
- Race/ethnicity (Harrison and Chalmers, 2013).

However, other recent research has shown that consumers might also be vulnerable due to temporary and short term situations which might include:

- Grief;
- Stress; or
- Fatigue (Harrison and Chalmers, 2013).

Further, there might be other factors which can contribute to vulnerability, such as:

- Poor consumers being influenced by materialism they see in the media;
- Lack of access to things like healthcare or retail facilities

And these things can make some consumers' lives particularly difficult. (Harrison and Chalmers, 2013).

Sometimes stressful situations themselves are the reason the consumer is using your goods or services (for example, using a lawyer in relation to a divorce) so it is particularly important that you are prepared for potentially vulnerable consumers.

Your obligations

Some service providers are obliged to comply with some guidelines and regulations in order to protect vulnerable consumers, for example, the banking and energy industries. It is important to check the relevant guidelines which might relate to your industry.

Assessment and assistance

It is important to have an assessment process to ensure that you know whether your consumer is vulnerable or not, and therefore whether they need extra help. This might mean asking a few more questions when you first start dealing with a customer, for example, about whether:

- They have any special needs;
- They need an interpreter; or
- They have any current assistance.

When assisting these customers, whether through your initial contact with them or after they have made a complaint, it is important to keep in mind that sometimes a small change can make a big difference for them. For example, sending a short follow-up email summarising key points of a meeting