Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 15
People experiencing social or economic hardship

Economic and social disadvantage adversely affects life opportunities for older people. Research consistently shows that people from lower socio-economic groups generally experience higher rates of illness, poorer physical and emotional health outcomes, lower life expectancy and higher rates of disability.

Steptoe and Zaninotto (2020) suggest that lower socio-economic status can accelerate the effects of ageing in all life domains regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, education and economic and social disadvantage in childhood.

Disadvantage also extends to communities where concentrations of disadvantage make it more difficult for older residents to achieve positive life outcomes.

Factors leading to economic disadvantage include reliance on the aged or disability support pension as the sole source of income; low rates of superannuation; rental accommodation particularly in the private market; lone person households; long-term health conditions; relationship breakdown; the effects of trauma, family and domestic violence and elder abuse; a history of incarceration; and lack of access to the internet and information technology. Limited purchasing power reduces access to goods, services, activities and resources. Depression is a common experience for people living in financial stress.

Factors contributing to social isolation include estrangement from family and friendship networks; lack of locally available support from family members; poor access to transport or health services; behaviours of concern; and self-isolation and neglect. Both family and friend relationships are associated with better happiness and overall health. At advanced ages, this link strengthens for older people able to maintain strong and supportive friendships.

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Some diverse groups also experience higher rates of social and economic disadvantage. These include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living in rural and remote areas, newly arrived migrants, homeless people and people living with disability and mental illness.

This can compound the complexity of disadvantage making it more difficult to successfully address access and engagement barriers.

General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

- Identify and discuss areas of financial stress and its impact as a routine part of assessment
- Implement a sliding scale of client contributions with the ability to waive fees for older people with crippling financial commitments to multiple creditors, providers and suppliers
- Know the local financial counseling services and no-interest loan scheme (NILS) providers
- Encourage clients to proactively maintain existing friendship networks. Support them to establish a regular pattern of contact rather than making it a special event to see friends
- Identify ways for social support group members to make contact with each other outside of group meetings in person, via the phone or though social media
- Teach older clients how to connect with others through the various social media channels
- Link clients to activities they enjoy outside aged care services (e.g. Men's Shed, local exercise, axctivity, interest and hobby groups).

For further information, see **Sheet 17: Resources – Resource Nos. 4, 7, 24, 40**