



Social Inclusion

A BRIEF OVERVIEW



Loddon's Commitment to Supporting Families

Our shared core competencies

Definitions

Social inclusion comes about through having opportunities to:

- participate in society through employment and access to services
- connect with family, friends and the local community
- deal with personal crises (such as ill health)
- be heard.¹

This competency is about making sure people have access to good health, affordable housing, education, training, employment and other services, the skills and support they need to work and connect with the community, and a say in what services they need and how these are delivered. Despite Australia's overall wealth as a nation, many people continue to experience multiple and entrenched disadvantage which prevents them from participating fully in their communities.²

Social exclusion has emerged as one of the key concepts used to analyse multidimensional disadvantage. This signals a move away from the traditional tendency to measure disadvantage purely in terms of poverty or income inequality. The International Labour Organisation defines social exclusion as:

A state of poverty in which individuals cannot access the living conditions which would enable them to both satisfy their essential needs (food, education health etc.) and participate in the development of the society in which they live. The analysis of social exclusion is concerned with the causes of poverty, the specific nature of the essential needs in different societies, access to the services and opportunities which would make it possible to meet these needs and the civil and political rights of individuals.³

It should be noted that poverty is not the same as social exclusion; for example, a high-income earner may experience social exclusion for reasons relating to their ethnicity or

sexuality. Social exclusion is fundamentally about a lack of connectedness and participation.⁴

Research strongly suggests that experiences of adversity, poverty and disadvantage in early childhood can have lifelong consequences for social, emotional and physical health and development, and for preparing children for success in school and later in the workplace and community.⁵ To reduce disadvantage and increase social, civil and economic participation, the Commonwealth government has adopted a joined-up and whole-of-government approach to social inclusion⁶

Applying social inclusion to service delivery and practice

Australia's Social Inclusion Board (SIB) has produced a range of research and other publications relating to social inclusion. The SIB emphasises that when creating pathways out of chronic social exclusion and poverty, continuity of support is crucial and structural barriers to full participation must be addressed.⁷

The Australian government has developed a set of principles 'to guide individuals, business and community organisations, and government on how to take a socially inclusive approach to their activities'. These include:

- Building on individual and community strengths
- Building partnerships with key stakeholders
- Developing tailored services
- Giving high priority to early intervention and prevention
- Building joined-up services and whole of government solutions
- Using evidence and integrated data to inform policy
- Using locational approaches
- Planning for sustainability.⁸

¹ Social Inclusion Board, 2010, 'Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia is faring', Canberra: Australian Government

² Social Inclusion Board, p. 5.

³ In Smelser, N. and Baltes, P. (Eds.) 2001, International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences. Elsevier. Oxford Science Ltd.

⁴ McDonald, M. 2011, 'What role can child and family services play in enhancing opportunities for parents and families: Exploring the concepts of social exclusion and social inclusion', CAFCA Practice Sheet, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁵ Center on the Developing Child, 2016, *Applying the Science of Child Development in Child Welfare Systems*, Harvard University; Currie, J., & Rossin-Slater, M. 2014, Early-Life Origins of Lifecycle Wellbeing: Research and Policy Implications. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 2015, Winter; 34(1), pp. 208-42.

⁶ Australian Government, 2008. 'Social inclusion principles for Australia'.

⁷ Social Inclusion Board, 2011, 'Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage', Canberra: Australian Government.

⁸ Australian Government, 2008.



Social Inclusion A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The government's approach to social inclusion recognises the importance of making sure people have access to good health, education and other services; that they have the skills and support they need to connect with the community, and that they have a voice in the development and delivery of services that are designed to meet their needs.⁹

It is also important to consider how staff can support clients to strengthen their social networks and family and community ties, and establish respectful relationships with clients.

Recent literature emphasises the role of a strengths based approach to social inclusion, such as recognising the positive contributions of people from diverse backgrounds. Staff should be supported to identify and build on of the capacities, talents, values and strengths of children, young people and their families. Indeed, professional development in relation to working with families who are experiencing social exclusion and/or multiple disadvantages, should include strategies to actively involve family members in decision-making. Family group meetings and care teams are important to ensure a holistic, family-centred approach to working with vulnerable families.¹⁰

Practitioners need to adopt flexible and tailored responses to families experiencing multiple levels of disadvantage and social exclusion. Competency in the context of social inclusion means being able to perform tasks to an accepted standard in a variety of conditions and contexts.¹¹

Challenges

Yoshikawa et al. assert that the knowledge and skills related to targeting multiple interventions on multiple risk factors are largely unknown. Identifying how to effectively coordinate these multiple strategies remains a challenge.¹²

Given that the solutions to social exclusion and poverty are multiple and complex, a shift is needed to ensure that competency development is more collaborative and integrated across the service system.¹³ Practitioners have a strong role to play in the community and have an opportunity to support the 'no wrong door' approach.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bromfield et al. 2012, 'Families with multiple and complex needs: Best interests case practice model, Specialist practice resource', Department of Human Services, Melbourne, p. 24.

¹¹ Brownie, S., Bahnisch, M. & Thomas, J. 2011.

¹² Yoshikawa, H., Aber, J. & Beardslee, W. 2012, 'The effects of poverty on the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of children and youth: Implications for prevention', *American Psychologist*, 67(4), pp. 272–284.

¹³ Razack, S. 2009, 'Vulnerable and marginalized children: Who are they and how can we help?', *Paediatric Child Health*, 14(5), pp. 287–289.

¹⁴ Caruana, C. & McDonald, M. 2011, 'Social inclusion in the family support sector', Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, Briefing No. 19.