



Baptcare

Bringing care to life

Baptcare Position Paper

Social inclusion
Social exclusion
Disadvantage

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Social Inclusion / Exclusion

Why does it matter to Baptcare?

Disadvantage threatens social cohesion and economic prosperity and can perpetuate social exclusion and marginalise diverse voices and experiences. Disadvantage is a problem for everyone, not just those directly affected.

Baptcare as the 'welfare agency' of the Baptist Union of Churches in Victoria is embedded within a Judeo-Christian theology that - expressed in sacred text called the Gospels - is at its centre 'good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18).

Baptcare recognises that as a Christian agency 'being good news to the poor' is a difficult and often conflicted responsibility given the world within which we exist, and a dominant evangelical theological discourse that decentralises this Christian imperative. Despite the challenges, Baptcare is committed to a set of values that clearly foregrounds 'justice' and 'equity' for those disadvantaged in our society as central to Baptcare's mission, vision and the type of services we provide.

Baptcare has a critical stake in current philosophical and political debate and related public and policy discourse that directly affect disadvantaged people in Australia - in particular Victoria and Tasmania . Baptcare recognises that the manner in which governments, the community sector, churches and communities understand disadvantage is crucial in determining solutions.

Baptcare also recognises that public policy and government legislation can itself create disadvantage. This is apparent with regard to the experience of asylum seekers who make an on-shore application for refuge and protection. Baptcare's response has been Sanctuary – an integrated service of support for male asylum seekers living lawfully in the community at high risk of social exclusion, poverty and disadvantage.

This position paper articulates why socially inclusive activities and services that directly respond and seek to alleviate disadvantage and social exclusion matter to Baptcare. This position paper also articulates what responding to social exclusion and disadvantage means for Baptcare in practice.

Understanding and responding to disadvantage and social exclusion

Key elements in framing Baptcare's response

Over the past ten to fifteen years, the terms 'social inclusion' and 'social exclusion' have emerged as useful ways to understand disadvantage. These terms have not always been defined uniformly and have been used to justify different political agendas locally and internationally.

Research and policy development to understand and address disadvantage has undergone a series of conceptual shifts during recent decades from a focus on income poverty, to deprivation and, more recently, to social inclusion / exclusion. These shifts are explored in more detail in the *Baptcare Discussion Paper On Social Inclusion*.

In brief these major shifts are explained through the following definitions:

Poverty is a situation in which someone's income is so inadequate as to preclude them from having an acceptable standard of living. It exists when people's actual income is below a poverty line.

Deprivation exists when a lack of resources prevents people from accessing the goods and activities (items) that are consensually regarded as essential in a particular society. It is generally defined in terms of an enforced lack of these socially perceived essentials.

Social exclusion exists when people do not participate in key activities in society. Whereas deprivation focuses on what people cannot afford, what matters for exclusion is what people do not do. Crucially, the concept draws attention to the relational aspects of a process whereby people are excluded by the acts of others. Researchers are increasingly attentive to the processes which lead to people becoming excluded, and which prevent their escape.

Social inclusion is the other end of the same dimension as social exclusion. Although variously defined, Baptcare adopts the following definition: *Social inclusion describes a series of positive actions to achieve equality of access to goods and services, to assist all individuals to participate in community and society, to encourage the contribution of all persons to social and cultural life and*

to be aware of and to challenge all forms of discrimination. Social inclusion by its very nature provides those who are marginalised and disadvantaged with the opportunity for greater participation in decision-making that affects their lives.

Key Internal Elements Framing Baptcare's Response

The 2009-2011 Baptcare Strategic Plan challenged Baptcare to articulate and define a social inclusion strategy that:

- demonstrates social inclusion in all our programs,
- specifically provides access for disadvantaged people to all our services, and
- provides further access to Baptcare's aged care programs for disadvantaged individuals.

Within the broader context of social policy and public discourse *Baptcare* is challenged to articulate and define a position and subsequent social inclusion strategy and response to disadvantage. This suggests that rather than merely coopt government definitions and strategies or other agency's approaches, Baptcare, informed and educated by what others are doing, is required to articulate and define its own strategy to ensure clarity, and mission and values alignment.

Central to the consideration of Baptcare's position regarding social inclusion and disadvantage are Baptcare's values [encapsulated in The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) and The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)]. Baptcare's values are:

1. Respect:

We value the inherent dignity and equality of all people regardless of their circumstances.

2. Justice:

We value equality of opportunity and consistency of outcome for all.

3. Commitment:

We value dedication to meet the challenges of our Mission.

4. Integrity:

We value consistency between word and deed.

5. Accountability

We value the acceptance of personal responsibility.

6. Co-operation:

We value working together towards our goals.

Baptcare's position and response to social exclusion is consequently driven by values that foreground the inherent dignity and equality of all people regardless of their circumstances, the equality of opportunity and consistency of outcome for all and consistency between word and deed.

Key External Elements Framing Baptcare's Response

The Australian Social Inclusion Board established in May 2008 states that: to be **socially included**, people must be given the opportunity to:

- secure a job;
- access services;
- connect with family, friends, work, personal interests and local community;
- deal with personal crisis; and
- have their voice heard. (Social Inclusion Board, 2008, p.1)

The extensive work of Professor Tony Vinson (Vinson, 2009a, 2009b) has significantly informed policy and consideration of approaches to disadvantage and social exclusion, including an agreed set of set of indicators or drivers of social exclusion. Briefly stated these indicators are:

- **Poverty and low income** — refers to the lack of resources needed to participate in the activities, living conditions and amenities that are generally

available to most people in society. People in these circumstances are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns and social activities.

- **Lack of access to the job market** — Most obviously those lacking work-related skills have difficulty entering or re-entering the job market, with implications for income. However, there is another perspective besides remuneration: work provides social interaction and networks for which there are few matching opportunities elsewhere as well as contact with relatively powerful institutions.
- **Limited social supports and networks** — ‘Network poverty’ is a barrier to social support and informal help that people need to take part in community life. Some networks help people to get by on a day-to-day basis (filling gaps in childcare, looking after someone when that person is ill, providing small amounts of cash to make ends meet, or celebrating family or life landmarks). Other networks are important in terms of social influence, opportunities for social engagement and meaningful social roles as well as access to resources.
- **The effect of the local neighbourhood** — When poor conditions persist over years, and generations, the social climate of an area can exercise an influence over and beyond the sum of individual and household disadvantage. People can become resigned to their limited life opportunities, be preoccupied with simply getting through each day, and lack the confidence and will to try and improve their collective situation. Locality, then, can be an important and enduring locus of social exclusion.
- **Exclusion from services** — There are often barriers to obtaining a range of in-home and out-of-home services which are beyond the ability of individuals to overcome. These services include the span of all generations from childcare to aged care and can have a compounding effect upon other forms of exclusion.

In addition to the identification of social exclusion and disadvantage by postcode or location (Vinson 2004c) is the identification of social exclusion by cohorts or groupings of people. The Australian Social Inclusion Board has been requested by the Federal government to focus on the following:

- children at risk of disadvantage;
- disengaged young people;
- jobless families; and
- vocational disadvantage

Other groupings of people suffering or at risk of social exclusion have been identified and include:

- Indigenous Australians
- Early school leavers
- Older people living alone
- Homeless persons
- People with a disability
- Single parents
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- Unemployed persons, especially the long term unemployed
- Victims of domestic violence

A further key external element framing Baptcare's position with regard to disadvantage and social exclusion is Baptcare as a *contracted provider of government funded 'community services'*.

'Community services' are provided by government, non-profit and for-profit organisations. The vast majority of 'community services' are funded all or in part by governments - local, state or Federal. Accordingly, the identified priorities of governments and the provision of government funding set parameters around the work of 'community services', and shape to a large degree the nature of services provided.

Baptcare is substantially funded by government to deliver particular 'community services'. Government initiatives are more or less based on political solutions to perceived needs. The most disadvantaged and socially excluded however generally have no political power to lobby for services. Accordingly, it can be argued, the identified priorities of governments and the provision of government funding (to a significant degree politically motivated) set parameters around the work of 'community services'. The challenge recognised by Baptcare is that a response to social exclusion and disadvantage cannot be determined simply by the availability of government funds, as certain sectors of the Australian community

who are at high risk of social exclusion and disadvantage may not be considered government priorities. Asylum seekers are just one example of such a cohort.

Understanding and Responding to Disadvantage

What does this mean in practice?

Baptcare believes that the key components of a response to social disadvantage and exclusion are:

- adequate income
- affordable and sustainable housing
- equitable access to education
- participation in employment
- opportunities for social connections.

Baptcare recognises that articulating a position and subsequent response to social exclusion and disadvantage, given the key internal and external elements framing such a response identified above, includes resolving the following issues:

a) to what extent Baptcare will apply resources from its surplus to fund projects that provide socially inclusive activities for disadvantaged and marginalised groups for which there is inadequate government funds and for whom governments may have no concern for political reasons; and,

b) to what extent Baptcare will apply those resources outside its existing service-streams?

Baptcare's position and response to social exclusion and disadvantage, aligned with Baptcare's mission and values, is articulated through the following commitments:

1. To continually review Baptcare's strategic directions, service delivery, programs and activities in order to ensure that no one is excluded from access to Baptcare's services because of race, age, political views or association, sexual preference or religious belief

2. To continually review policy and public discourse relevant to social exclusion and disadvantage in order to remain socially engaged with Australian society and current emerging areas of human need.

3. To respond to evidence-based social exclusion and disadvantage within its existing service delivery, programs and activities by identifying opportunities to demonstrate social inclusion in all its programs and deliberately providing access for such disadvantaged people to all its services. Examples of such deliberate action will include providing further access to Baptistcare's aged care programs for disadvantaged individuals by:

- Exceeding mandated concessional and supported resident targets in all our aged care facilities;
- Seeking to provide for a minimum of 10% of all existing and proposed Independent Living Units to entrants without payment of a capital ingoing (by either lump sum or periodic payment); and,
- Actively setting fee remission levels in packaged community aged care programs that meet or exceed industry benchmarks of other, charitable providers.

4. To respond to evidence based social exclusion and disadvantage where there are no substantive government funds available by underwriting at least one significant service-delivery initiative at all times, for example asylum seeker services

5. To actively advocate on behalf of those who have limited power or voice in the political and economic dimensions of Australian society and to invest organisational resources commensurate with that commitment

6. To engage with the churches of the Baptist Unions of Victoria and Tasmania through consultancy, education and grants that are focused directly on the alleviation of disadvantage and programs and projects that demonstrate social inclusion.

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www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare

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Appendix 1

Baptcare's Current Response to Social Inclusion and Disadvantage

At the time of writing the following programs are directly funded or subsidized by Baptcare. Baptcare funds are supplemented by income from donations and trusts and foundations. These programs would all fit within a framework of a social inclusion activities.

- Sanctuary: Transitional Supported Accommodation for male Asylum Seekers (\$300K p.a.)
- Home Based Care: Bendigo Home Start Service (\$100K p.a.)
- Early Years Program: Learn, Play, Talk (funding ceased 2009)
- Primary Health Care Homeless Persons' Program (\$55K p.a.)
- Community Ministry/ Seeding Grants (\$300K over past three years)

Additionally subsidy for older Australians in ILUs at Westhaven, Strahalan and Hedley Sutton, and forgone income from clients is a further contribution for disadvantaged people at risk of social exclusion.

Baptcare also exceeds government mandated concessional beds in all aged care facilities.

In broad terms socially inclusive programs totally funded or subsidised by Baptcare, without contracted government funds or proscribed concessions for disadvantaged people, appears to be in the vicinity of 1% of current total turnover. As a percentage of surplus in the current financial year it appears to be in the vicinity of 5.9%.

