

Supporting Vulnerable Customers Policy

1. OVERVIEW & APPLICATION

As a general insurance broker that holds an AFSL and subscribes to the National Insurance Brokers Code of Practice (NIBA Code), Acumen Insurance is committed to conducting its business in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations and codes, and in a way that meets Customer and community expectations.

This Supporting Vulnerable Customers Policy (Policy) sets out how Acumen Insurance identifies and supports vulnerable Customers.

For the purposes of this Policy, any reference to “Customers” includes customers of Acumen Insurance as well as any other individual entitled to support under the Code (for example a potential customer, third party beneficiary or an individual an insurer is seeking to recover money from) and whose ability or circumstances requires us to take extra care in the way we provide our services to ensure they are not disadvantaged in any way.

This policy applies to all staff employed by or acting on behalf of Acumen Insurance, including all staff working for Authorised Representatives of Acumen Insurance and general insurance distributors who are involved in arranging insurance under Acumen Insurance’s AFSL.

Acumen Insurance must ensure that all staff (including staff of Authorised Representatives) read and comply with the policy.

Please note, insurers that have binding authority agreements with Acumen Insurance may impose additional requirements for compliance with the vulnerable Customers policy they have in place to comply with the General Insurance Code of Practice. Those procedures must be applied as required under the agreement with the insurer. The NIBA Code does not apply to the services we perform for the insurer under binder whilst acting as an agent of the insurer (for example issuing contracts of insurance on behalf of the insurer or handling claims on behalf of the insurer).

2. PURPOSE

Acumen Insurance is committed to exercising greater care when dealing with vulnerable Customers to provide them with support. This purpose of this policy is to help Acumen Insurance and their staff:

- Understand and recognise vulnerable Customers;
- Have awareness of vulnerable Customer groups.
- Understand the support options available to vulnerable Customers and the extent to which Acumen Insurance can provide support;
- Take account of a Customer’s particular needs or vulnerabilities;
- Engage a Customer or potential Customer with sensitivity, dignity respect & compassion; and
- Seek further internal or external support for the Customer where required.

3. WHAT MAKES A CUSTOMER VULNERABLE?

Vulnerable Customers are customers who, as a result of socio-demographic characteristics, behavioural characteristics, personal situation or market environment are **especially susceptible to loss or harm**. A person may be vulnerable due to a range of factors, including:

1. age;
2. disability;
3. mental health conditions;
4. physical health conditions;
5. family or domestic violence;
6. culturally and linguistically diverse background;
7. remote location; or
8. low literacy, numeracy, technological or financial capability skills.

It is important to note that while a Customer may fall into one or more of the categories listed above, this does not mean that the Customer is necessarily experiencing vulnerability. Each staff member will need to assess their Customer's situations and vulnerabilities on a case by case basis and ensure that every Customer is treated with respect, dignity and empathy.

4. IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE CUSTOMERS

While vulnerable Customers are typically identified as specific groups of people, anyone can experience vulnerability at any stage in their life. Vulnerability can be permanent, long-term, temporary or even linked to a specific event such as a natural disaster or insurable event. The support we provide to vulnerable Customers may vary depending on their particular situation and the service they have sought from Acumen Insurance. Staff should make best efforts to identify any vulnerability during interactions with existing and prospective Customers. Where possible, you should not request a Customer to provide evidence or information to demonstrate that they are experiencing vulnerability.

Identifying vulnerable Customers should be an intrinsic part of the getting to know your Customer process. When engaging with Customers, Acumen Insurance requires all staff to use the CARE and BRUCE protocols to help them assess whether the Customer is or may be experiencing vulnerability.

The CARE Protocol

Comprehend: Is the Customer able to follow the conversation and understand what is being said?

Assess: Is the Customer able to weigh up the information being presented to them?

Retain: Is the Customer able to retain and remember information, and recall this at a later point?

Evaluate: Is the Customer able to properly express, explain or communicate their decisions?

The BRUCE Protocol

Behaviour & Talk – are there any clues in the Customer's speech and behaviour?

Remembering – are there any signs that the Customer has difficulty with recall?

Understanding – are there any signs that the Customer is having difficulty understanding the information you are giving them?

Communication- is the Customer able to communicate what they think, their decision and any questions?

Evaluation – is the Customer finding it difficult to weigh up all of the information?

Staff at Acumen Insurance should encourage Customers to communicate and let them know if they are experiencing conditions, concerns or events which are causing them greater vulnerability, as Acumen Insurance may not otherwise be able to identify their vulnerability or be aware of their circumstances.

Staff at Acumen Insurance may have multiple conversations with Customers where indicators of vulnerability may be identified, such as comments made by a Customer in relation to mental health struggles, grief related to the loss of a loved one or overwhelming debt. During these discussions, additional assistance or support should be offered but not forced.

Identifying vulnerable Customers can be more difficult when staff are unable to speak with them directly i.e., via a website portal or email. In these circumstances, staff should be alive to following, what may be indicators that a Customer is experiencing vulnerability. For example:

- Delayed response: Does the Customer take a long time to respond to communications?
- Repetition: Do you frequently repeat advice you have previously provided?
- Frequent late payments: Does the Customer regularly miss payment deadlines?

5. HOW TO RECORD & ESCALATE INFORMATION ONCE A VULNERABLE CUSTOMER IS IDENTIFIED

It is important that if a Customer self-identifies as experiencing vulnerability, they are made aware of how the information they share about their situation will be handled and how any personal or sensitive information will be recorded, used and stored. Staff should, where appropriate, use the below TEXAS framework to assist in communicating with Customers.

Thank them.

Explain how their information will be used.

explicit consent - Ask the individual for their permission to use their information in this way

Ask three key questions that will help you better understand the Customer's situation.

Signpost to internal or external help (where appropriate)

If due to a situation involving the Customer, or the Customer’s vulnerability, it is not possible to follow the above framework, please speak with your Sean Morriss on how to support the Customer in understanding how information about their vulnerable situation may be used.

Staff at Acumen Insurance will maintain accurate notes in relation to a Customer’s vulnerability and retain this information securely and confidentially, in accordance with Acumen Insurance privacy policies.

6. HOW Acumen Insurance WILL SUPPORT VULNERABLE CUSTOMERS

Staff at Acumen Insurance will employ a range of measures to support and accommodate vulnerable Customers where possible. These will vary from situation to situation but may include:

- Being flexible with allowing extra time to explain advice and answer questions;
- Arranging meetings in person or via teleconference;
- Allowing for an authorised third party (such as a consumer representative, interpreter, friend or family member) to attend meetings with the Customer.

The below table provides a list of possible actions Staff at Acumen Insurance may take:

Vulnerability Type	Possible actions to consider
Customers with communication difficulties (hearing impairment, language barriers, age related diseases)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask if they have a support person, independent person or family member that could help on the call. ● Do they require an interpreter? ● Ask the Customer to repeat the information you have provided and also advise you will provide it in a follow up email for them to read. ● Provide information for external resources who can provide support.
Customers with mental illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid confrontation. ● Confirm if they would prefer to have a support person, independent person or family member that could help on the call. ● Keep information simple and factual. ● Ask them what would help them. ● Consider if it would be more appropriate to reschedule the call. ● Provide information for external resources who can provide support. ● Escalate the call if required to the Branch Manager.
Personal Circumstances (traumatic event (flood – loss of property), bereavement, isolation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keep information simple and factual. ● Ask the Customer to repeat the information you have provided (where appropriate) and also advise you will provide it in a follow up email for them to read. ● Provide information for external resources who can provide support.
Personal Circumstances (financial difficulties)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Notify the insurer on the Customer’s behalf as soon as practicable after becoming aware that the Customer is experiencing financial hardship. ● Act on any insurer’s instructions to put any action to recover an amount from the Customer on hold pending the outcome of the application for financial hardship support. ● Provide information for external resources who can provide support.
Family or Domestic Violence – this can be particularly important if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Customers and the perpetrator are joint policy holders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being mindful of the environment the Customer is currently speaking from. ● Clearly articulate any process taking place either within broking or claims. ● Determine the best way to remain in contact with the Customer throughout the process. ● Recording clearly on systems any specific flags or communication requirements should any face to face visit occur.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The perpetrator has caused the claim – for example, damaging property under the policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek further support from your Branch Manager. • Provide information for external resources if appropriate. • If you believe the Customer is in immediate danger call 000.
Other vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees should contact their Branch Manager with any other questions regarding supporting vulnerable Customers.

7. SUPPORT SERVICES AND RESOURCES

The following list provides possible external resources Acumen Insurance staff can refer to when presented with a vulnerable Customer. Referrals to organisations such as Lifeline need to be handled with sensitivity, and should not occur prematurely, or simply because the Customer feels Acumen Insurance, or the insurer are not meeting their service expectations.

Service	Service Available	Phone / Website
1800 RESPECT	National 24-hour Domestic & Family violence and Sexual Assault Line	1800 737 732 1800respect.org.au
Beyond Blue	24/7 support to people experiencing anxiety or depression	1300 224 636 beyondblue.org.au
GriefLine	24/7 support to people experiencing grief	1300 845 745
Lifeline	24/7 counselling & referral service for people in a crisis situation	13 11 14 lifeline.org.au
MENSLINE	24/7 support, information and referral service for men with family and relations issues	1300 789 978 mensline.org.au
Mob Strong Debt Helpline	Free and confidential financial counselling to assist indigenous Australians.	1800 808 488
National Association of Community Legal Centres	An independent not-for-profit community organisation that provides legal and related services to the public, focusing on the disadvantaged and people with special needs	(02) 9264 9595 naclc.org.au
National Debt Hotline	Free and confidential financial counselling to assist people in financial difficulty	1800 007 007 ndh.org.au
National Relay Service	A phone service for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment	1300 555 727 SMS 0423 677 767
Relationships Australia	A leading provider of relationship support services for individuals, families and communities. It aims to support all people in Australia to achieve positive and respectful relationships.	1300 364 277 relationships.org.au
Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)	An interpreting service providing services to non-English speaking	Ph:131 450 www.tisnational.gov.au

	Australian citizens and permanent residents.	
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8. TRAINING & SUPPORT

Acumen Insurance understands the importance of continued training and support for staff servicing Customers experiencing vulnerability. It is important Acumen Insurance staff can reasonably identify whether a Customer is experiencing vulnerability and manage the relationship and service provided to the Customer.

To ensure our Acumen Insurance staff who deal with vulnerable Customers do so in a respectful and empathetic manner, we provide the following:

- Annual training on supporting vulnerable Customers and internal dispute resolution;
- Annual review of the Supporting Vulnerable Customers policy.

Acumen Insurance also recognises that staff members who engage with vulnerable Customers may also require additional support. In order to provide this support:

- Branch managers will be responsible for monitoring staff on a regular basis for any signs that they may require support
- All staff are provided with access to the Steadfast Access EAP for counselling. Access EAP (Employee Assistance Programs) partners with organisations to promote employees' well-being and assist them after critical incidents that may require staff counselling. Access EAP also offers education about conflict resolution and emotional well-being. Staff should refer to their manager or HR for details on how to access assistance.

9. REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed once per year or as required by updates to the NIBA Code.