

A Fact Sheet on **Supported Decision Making and Support Networks**

What is the Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act?

On October 4, 1996, *The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act* came into force in Manitoba.

The Act was developed to promote and protect the rights of adults living with a mental disability who need assistance to meet their basic needs. The legislation recognizes those Manitobans as "vulnerable persons".

The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act reflects the right of all people to make their own decisions and have help, where necessary, in a manner that respects their independence, privacy and dignity.

What is supported decision making?

Like many Manitobans, vulnerable persons sometimes rely on the advice and assistance of others when making decisions. They may call upon their support network - that is, their parents, other family members or friends - to help them understand their choices. The members of the support network can provide information, ideas and advice that help vulnerable persons to make their own decisions. This is what supported decision making means: vulnerable persons making their own decisions, with support and advice from family and friends, if desired.

What is a support network and who can participate?

A support network is one or more persons who, over the short or long-term, provide advice, support or assistance at the request of, or in response to the needs of a vulnerable person. A support network may be made up of family members, friends, service providers and others chosen by the vulnerable person. Most often, it comprises people who have a personal connection to the vulnerable person. Typically, they are the people with whom the vulnerable person lives, works and socializes.

What is the role of a support network?

This depends largely on the wishes and needs of the vulnerable person. The following are just a few examples of the support and assistance that support network members may provide:

- being involved in the individual planning process;
- supporting the person in making choices and decisions;
- helping the person to carry out functions that they may not be able to do alone;
- helping the person to understand and communicate; and
- linking the person to the larger community to strengthen the circle of support.

How much time is involved?

This depends on the needs and wishes of the vulnerable person and the time that support network members can give. The actual time involved depends on what the support network does and why it came together.

Must a vulnerable person have a support network?

No. The decision to have a support network ultimately rests with the vulnerable person. The Act encourages the involvement of support networks because they offer the greatest potential for the self-determination, independence and dignity of vulnerable persons.

Other fact sheets in this series:

- Support Services
- Individual Planning
- Protection
- Substitute Decision Making

Additional information:

For more information about *The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act*, contact your nearest regional office of The Department of Family Services and Consumer Affairs or the Office of the Vulnerable Persons' Commissioner:

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Flin Flon	(204) 687-1700
The Pas	(204) 627-8311

Parkland

Dauphin	(204) 622-2035
Swan River	(204) 734-3491

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