

**Submission
No 12**

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF GAMBLING

Organisation: YMCA NSW (Youth & Government Department)

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YMCA Think Tank Parliamentary Inquiry Submission

Impact of Gambling

YMCA NSW

The YMCA NSW is a vibrant, self-funding, not-for-profit charity delivering contemporary programs focused on family, healthy living, developing young people and those less fortunate.

YMCA Youth & Government

YMCA Youth & Government (Y&G) is a suite of programs that nurtures the potential of young people to lead, connect to their community and be advocates for causes they are passionate about. Y&G programs are more than just “youth leadership programs” – by connecting to real life government and policy processes, Y&G empowers young people to engage with legislation and make a tangible difference to the issues affecting their communities and New South Wales. The YMCA Think Tank is a Y&G program.

YMCA Think Tank

The YMCA Think Tank is a collection of youth-led events that give young people, aged 15 – 24, the opportunity to make a direct impact on issues in NSW through direct submissions to Parliamentary and Government inquiries and consultations and through small-scale action projects. The YMCA Think Tank hosts two types of events: Policy Working Days and Action Days.

YMCA Youth & Government recently held two regional Policy Working Days to respond to the call for public submissions by the Select Committee on the Impact of Gambling. The details of the two regional Policy Working Days are listed below:

Date	Location	No. of attendees
Friday, 21 February 2014	Erina, NSW	24
Monday, 24 February 2014	Wollongong, NSW	23

Due to time constraints, a metropolitan Think Tank could not be organised.

Each of the Policy Working Days was run in a workshop-style forum, whereby different issues in relation to the Terms of Reference were addressed. Draft notes were taken throughout the course of the workshops and a draft submission was written based on the viewpoints expressed. The draft submission was re-sent back to the participants for comments and also made available on the YMCA Youth & Government webpage for viewing and comments before a final version of the submission was written.

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The YMCA Think Tank – Submission introduction

Young people at the Think Tank readily identified a wide range of negative impacts of gambling, indicative of a generation who are exposed, from a young age, to the gambling industry and gambling practices in its many forms. It was pointed out at both Policy Working Day events that the gambling industry can contribute positively back to the community through community programs and job creation; however, the tendency of the young people across both Policy Working Days was to highlight the commonly known negative impacts of gambling including addiction, breakdown of the family unit, social isolation and significant financial loss.

The heavy emphasis on the negative impacts of gambling on families and individuals indicates that young people generally view gambling in a highly pessimistic light. Given this, it was reiterated that education of young people does have a role to play and stronger Government regulation may be necessary, especially in relation to gambling advertising and poker machines.

The YMCA Think Tank – Submission background

The following submission details what young people who attended the YMCA Think Tank think about the impact of gambling on families and individuals in NSW. In particular, this submission focuses on the following Terms of Reference:

- a) The design and accessibility of electronic gaming machines and new and emerging gambling products and services
- b) The regulation of the number and location of electronic and high intensity gaming machines
- g) The regulation of gambling advertising
- i) Gambling education including school-based programs, and measures to reduce the exposure of children and young people to gambling activity

The YMCA NSW commends the Committee for the interest and initiative they have shown in relation to the impact of gambling that is identified as an issue not only by adult citizens across the State but also, importantly, by the young people of NSW.



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a) The design and accessibility of electronic gaming machines and new and emerging gambling products and services

DESIGN

Participants at the YMCA NSW Think Tanks expressed and articulated clear views on the design and accessibility of electronic gaming machines and new and emerging gambling products and services. In relation to design, the participants made specific reference to the attractive sensory devices that the gambling industry tends to use, particularly on pokies. With the bright lights and the “fun” sounds/music, they highlighted the fact that these features made the gambling machines more noticeable and attractive to young people and adult citizens alike. Furthermore, the participants made reference to the simplistic design of the machines and games, thus making intellectual capacity a non-issue with individuals stating that the games are portrayed in such a way that makes it difficult to think about losing. Interestingly, other participants commented on the colourful and interesting game-like design of the instant scratchies, noting that if it didn't look like so much fun they wouldn't be enticed to buy them.

The participants also mentioned and discussed the observation that most gambling areas do not have any clocks, this compounding the problem-gambling by making problem gamblers unaware of the time spent on gambling. This is especially relevant for casinos and with pokies. Furthermore, references to the “classy” nature of gambling that is often portrayed in pop culture and movies were discussed at length. Casinos were considered and often portrayed as “sexy”, “chic” and glamorous, whereas the actual act of gambling is not.

A possible solution to the design issue which was discussed was the ‘plain-packaging’ of gambling machines to make gambling appear less attractive and also to potentially discourage gamblers from spending substantial amounts of time in front of attractive machines. Many of the participants expressed an agreement that this would be an interesting solution to explore; however, there is uncertainty as to whether this would be as effective as the plain packaging for smoking.

ACCESSIBILITY

Most participants agreed that technology has made gambling much more accessible. It was widely agreed that due to the proliferation of mobile phones, laptops and tablet devices, an individual can now access gambling via a click of a button from anywhere. It was widely agreed that technology is now a facilitator of gambling. In addition, there are now many apps, games and toys which now introduce and expose young people to gambling, for example, ‘Neopets’ and popular smartphone apps that allow individuals to play ‘slots’, BlackJack or poker.

b) The regulation of the number and location of electronic and high intensity gaming machines

It was generally agreed that government regulation in the gambling industry would be beneficial, especially in relation to problem gambling which should be seen as any other health condition. Many participants commented that, in today's society, it seems that gaming machines were everywhere, especially in reference to pokies in RSL and workers' clubs. There was a perception that such venues are in every suburb. Importantly, the participants made mention that in many of these pubs and clubs, the gambling areas are not only highly visible (due to their bright lights and sounds) but the gaming machines are often located at the front of the club / not very well concealed. This means that families wishing to just go to their local pub or club for a meal must walk their children through the gambling section of the venue. It was suggested that these gambling sections should be better concealed and located at the back of the venue (i.e. low traffic areas).

g) The regulation of gambling advertising

Participants also expressed strong views in relation to gambling advertising. With the advent of the Internet and the ease with which it is accessed, online advertising means that exposure is literally 24/7, both for young people and older citizens alike. It may be fair to add that exposure is increased for young people given the amount of time young people spend on electronic devices with Internet access. In addition to online advertising, TV adverts are also very common, for example, the recent Tom Waterhouse ad in relation to his new online betting agency as well as Samuel L Jackson's endorsement of Bet365. Not only do these ads use celebrity endorsement but they



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are repeated very frequently during sports telecasts when children and young people are watching sports. This was identified as an area which required stronger regulation.

In addition, there is also a strong link in today's society between sports and gambling, which young people are easily exposed to. With the proliferation of smartphones, young people are gambling at an early age, placing bets on a range of sports. This can also create an environment of peer pressure and can ultimately lead to addiction. This is exacerbated by the fact that sports commentators regularly talk about "odds" during live telecasts of sports.

The nature of gambling advertising also amplifies the "fun" aspect of gambling. In particular, a lot of gambling advertising focuses specifically on the euphoria of winning as opposed to the actual act of gambling itself. A lot of gambling advertising also doesn't use the exact word "gambling" as this word automatically has a negative association attached to it. The large number of gambling adverts also means that different ads appeal to different sections of the population and overall exposure and coverage is quite high.

Participants also noted that there are currently not many anti-gambling ads. Though it was noted that people generally do not like to be told what not to do, there still are not many ads which effectively show the effects of problem gambling or even how regular betting may lead to problem gambling in the future. It was also mentioned that many anti-gambling ads or campaigns are crowd-funded and therefore may represent a potential for Government intervention / involvement in funding.

i) Gambling education including school-based programs, and measures to reduce the exposure of children and young people to gambling activity

Throughout the Policy Working Day forums, participants did agree that gambling education is important, especially given the fact that accessibility and exposure to gambling is very prevalent and widespread. Like with responsible alcohol education, there is scope to address what is gambling and what is problem gambling at school. This is important as it was recognised that some gambling (for example, a once-a-year punt at the Melbourne Cup) is often inadvertently marketed as part of the Australian culture. This type of education could be integrated into the PD/H/PE curriculum or the Crossroads course. It was agreed that an approach that highlights what is socially acceptable gambling and responsible gambling would be much more effective than a zero tolerance approach (i.e. young people don't like to be told what they cannot do). School-based programs such as "Healthy Harold" was recognised as a success and it was noted that there could be potential to do a campaign/program similar to that focused on alcohol and gambling. However, there was no clear agreement as to when to commence gambling education (i.e. before or during high school).