

Submission
No 9

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF GAMBLING

Organisation: UnitingCare Mental Health

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Mental Health

UnitingCare Mental Health

**Submissions to the NSW Select Committee on the Impact of
Gambling**

UnitingCare Mental Health (UCMH) is an experienced provider of a broad range of mental health and associated services. Amongst its various services, UCMH provides specialised counselling services that target problem gambling behaviours and it also employs financial counsellors to assist people with associated financial concerns. These services are funded by the NSW Government through the Responsible Gambling Fund. UCMH also provides general counselling and associated services (e.g. Lifeline Western Sydney, headspace Parramatta, headspace Mt Druitt and headspace Penrith) where counsellors and clinicians assist people to cope with the complications that arise from problem gambling behaviours.

UCMH commends the NSW Parliament in instituting an enquiry into the effect of problem gambling upon individuals and families within New South Wales. It welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the enquiry.

Our submissions follow the format of the enquiry's Terms of Reference.

Item A

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

- Guides like "Inside the Pokies" (developed by Victoria's Government Initiative), with a simple explanation of probability and Random Numbers Generator etc., could be required to be available at gambling venues. If such publications are made readily available, people might be more likely or willing to challenge their beliefs about poker machines after a loss and will be more educated around the games they are playing.
- Assess and, where necessary, require the modification of design features aimed at falsely or misleadingly bringing the patron to think the machine they are using is a 'lucky' machine. Eg Chinese symbols of austerity, seductive female eyes that move.
- Limit intensity of play by:
 - 1) Reducing spin rate
 - 2) Reducing maximum bet per spin
 - 3) Reducing number of lines on machines
 - 4) Periodically blocking play and asking player if they wish to continue.
 - 5) Having more smaller prizes and fewer larger prizes
 - 6) Limiting size of note that note acceptor takes
 - 7) Designing machine to accept coins only
 - 8) Banning any future technology that allows customers to pay for poker machine bets via smart phones.
- Limit the perception of 'near misses'
- Examine the impact of having a progressive jackpot size on customers' motivation to keep playing and their misunderstanding of the random and independent nature of poker machines

Item B

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

- In areas with a high SEIFA index (disadvantaged areas) there needs to be less machines and minimal numbers of high intensity machines. Disadvantaged LGAs have a higher number of poker machines and/or more applications to increase the number of poker machines in those areas.

Item C

Voluntary pre-commitment technology and operational guidelines

- Allow players to set a maximum balance on gaming machines, so that when they reach that balance on a machine they have to cash it out and receive a cheque. This is to discourage players to continue to gamble once they reach their target winning amount (e.g. \$200) as they will almost always re-gamble those winnings and then put in more of their own money once they have lost it.

Item D

Access to cash and credit in and around gambling venues, and the form and delivery of cash prizes

- Such access needs to be limited. The inducement of cash prizes very late at night encourages patrons to spend more time and money at the venue in the hope to win a hundred dollars which is ultimately gambled to try to recoup their losses.

Item E

The role and capacity of gambling industry staff to address problems caused by gambling

- Responsible gambling managers should be necessary in particularly larger venues. They could be responsible for identifying regular patrons who are having problems with gambling and assisting them to get support. In this way it is not the responsibility of all gaming staff to address patrons; they instead report cases to the responsible gambling manager. If there was a dedicated person in larger venues this would also make it easier for gambling support services to liaise with venues.
- Education of the gaming or duty manager needs to be standardised so that there is consistency in the content and standard of learning.
- Ensure a collaborative working relationship between the venue and the gambling support services in all areas.

Item G

The regulation of gambling advertising

- Industry should have the right to advertise their products, but it needs to be done in a responsible way so that it does not normalise gambling or make gambling more accessible for youth. There needs to be tighter measures to prevent gambling advertising from being displayed on social media websites or being viewable for young people. Similar considerations apply in respect of “in-app” advertising in sporting or gaming smartphone and tablet apps.

Item I

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

- It is submitted that there needs to be more education in schools around gambling. Gambling needs to be given the same exposure as other addictive substances such as alcohol and drugs. There is a lot of research which shows that problem gambling rates are higher in young people than adults, yet there is no education carried out in schools. The scattered education that is carried out in NSW is conducted by problem gambling counsellors, with no consistency in content or message. Children and young people need to be taught the advantages and, in particular, the disadvantages of gambling as well as setting the foundation for healthy beliefs around their chances of winning in various gambling activities. It would be almost impossible to reduce exposure of gambling to children and young people as gambling is a very natural human concept that often represents itself as schoolyard games.

Item J

The adequacy and effectiveness of problem gambling help services and programs, including service standards, qualifications and funding of chaplaincy, counselling and treatment services

- In NSW there needs to be more funding for gambling help services and programs as funding currently only comes from the Star Casino. The majority of revenue from gambling comes from gaming machines, in which the casino only operates 1.5% (http://www.olgr.nsw.gov.au/industry_stats.asp) of the total gaming machines in NSW. The very limited funding of gambling help services means that funding is spread very thinly, with most of the concentration in Sydney. In an attempt to offer a wider variety of counselling services for the general public to choose from, a lot of services only operate with one staff member and very little operational support. This makes it very difficult for services to provide a quality service that caters to as many people as possible. On top of this services are also expected to promote responsible gambling awareness to the community which, due to lack of resources, means that the message often does not reach the general public. With more funding there can be larger and more regular advertising campaigns to promote responsible gambling and treatment services to the whole state.
- The Gambling Hangover campaign was proven to be effective, with the number of calls to Gambling Help increasing, which had a flow on effect to many more people wanting to access gambling help services.
- Given their limited resources, it is submitted that most gambling treatment services are effective in treating problem gambling. In accordance with the above point, more widespread promotion will increase the number of people seeking help for gambling problems and will allow services to reach the large percentage of people not currently seeking support.
- There is a good amount of training being offered for problem gambling help services to increase service standards and effectiveness of treatment. However, as in point 1, the funding for counselling staff is spread very thin, meaning it is very difficult to attract or retain counsellors with higher qualifications or experience. Given the large number of co-morbid mental health problems associated with problem gambling, it is very important to have appropriately qualified and experienced mental health professionals to provide a holistic service.

Item K

The effectiveness of public health measures to reduce risk of gambling harm, including prevention and early intervention strategies

- There needs to be more education in schools around gambling. Gambling needs to be given the same exposure as other addictive substances like alcohol and drugs. Currently there is a lot of stigma around gambling. This results in the majority of people who are affected by problem gambling feel too ashamed to speak up and seek help. Most health professionals do not know about problem gambling or the risks of gambling, so it often goes unnoticed in people seeking help for other problems like depression.
- There needs to be larger and more regular advertising campaigns to promote responsible gambling and treatment services to the whole state. With regular widespread media campaigns the stigma around gambling can be reduced and it will be seen as more acceptable to talk about.

Stephen Zammit
Registered Psychologist
Manager
UCMH Counselling Services
UnitingCare Mental Health

Malcolm Choat
Registered Psychologist
Service Development Manager
UnitingCare Mental Health