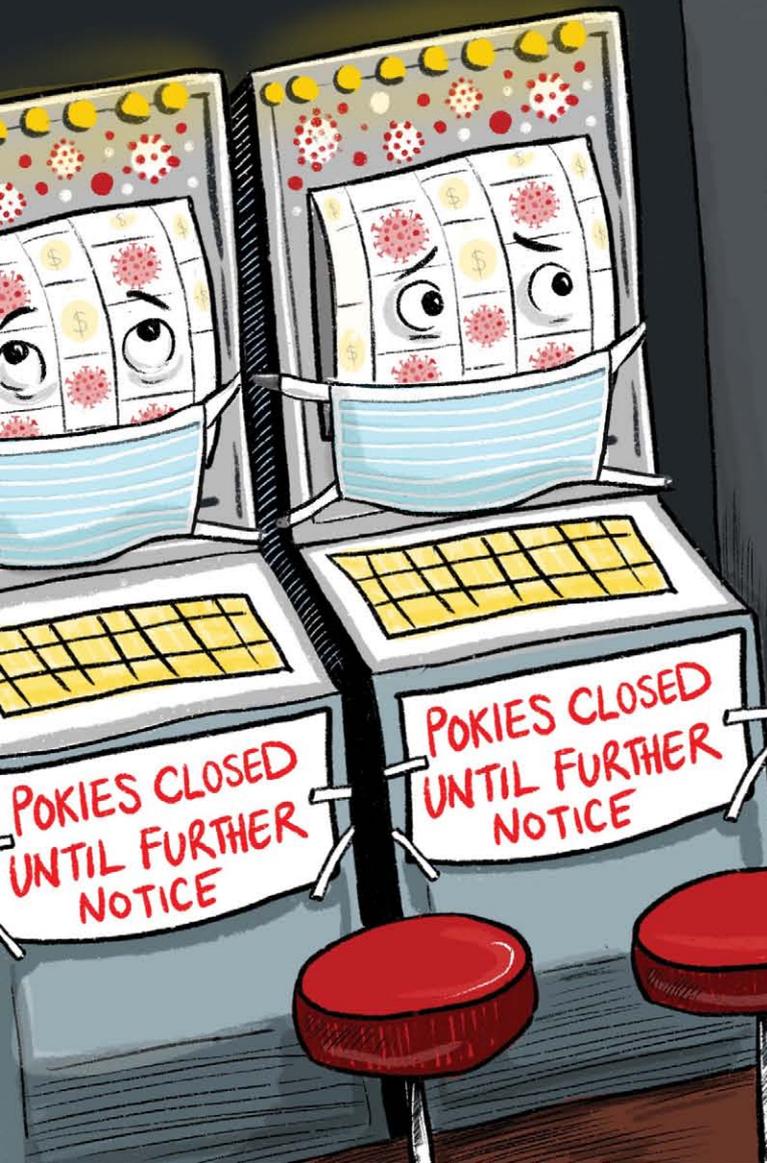




2020 - A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER.



Our Vision is to enjoy a just, healthy and prosperous Australia, where people can happily socialise together and flourish without the harm created by gambling. By working together, we can achieve an Australia where there is no longer a need for our organisation.

We are an Alliance of more than 60 local governments, organisations and individuals who share our vision. Together we advocate for public health reforms that prevent and reduce gambling harm. Many of us have personally experienced gambling harm in our lives, or via families, friends or workplaces.

We make change happen by:

1. Shifting how gambling harm is discussed, moving from individual responsibility to recognising this harm as a public health issue for which industry and governments have responsibility
2. Bringing people, local governments and organisations who share our vision together, centring those who have experienced gambling harm
3. Shining a light on the harm caused by the gambling industry, and contrasting this with examples of pubs, clubs, sports teams and communities free from such harm
4. Working together to advocate for reform to politicians and leaders who have the opportunity and responsibility to reduce gambling harm.

The Alliance is proudly independent. We do not, and will not accept money from any organisation or individual with a financial interest in any part of the gambling industry.

The Alliance for Gambling Reform Inc is a registered charity with the ACNC. All donations to the Alliance are tax deductible.

The Alliance respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are based. This Aboriginal land was stolen and sovereignty was never ceded. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging of the lands on which we work.

GENERAL INQUIRIES

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ABN 14 829 021 950

A message from Rev Tim Costello, the Alliance for Gambling Reform's Chief Advocate

I feel it is pretty obvious why we have named this year's Alliance for Gambling Reform annual report "A year like no other". 2020 truly was nothing short of an extraordinary year for us all, within our families, our communities, and our nation. It was also an amazing year for the Alliance's work.

In a year with so much suffering, loss, and even devastation for many, it was almost dreamlike having poker machines switched off around Australia for various lengths of time. It was the true silver lining in among the disappointment and frustration that was 2020. So many people told us how much easier life was without the thought of the machines pinging away somewhere. Billions of dollars were saved from being lost on the machines -- Victoria alone saved \$1.8 billion while they were off! And wasn't it great to know that people were paying their bills and spending money in their local economies while poker machines were shut down?

The word "pivot" got used a lot last year, and that was certainly the case with the Alliance's work. We always try to be flexible with our work plans to be able to capitalise on opportunities that come up throughout any year, but 2020 meant our staff, supported by our Board, had to have the flexibility of Olympic gymnasts. It was worth it to demonstrate to governments and communities how damaging poker machines are, and how much better life was for so many people with the machines off. We demonstrated it is possible to Build Back Better.

The always amazing [Champions for Change](#) went the extra mile in 2020 by [telling their stories](#), doing hundreds of media appearances and meeting with MPs to ensure they know exactly how harmful gambling can be. You can see a shift in the eyes of the people we meet with when they hear a story from someone with lived experience. It makes it so much harder to ignore gambling harm when you hear about it first hand. We also heard the impact on the community from these stories via talkback radio when people called through to offer their support. It's impossible to underestimate the contribution these incredible people make towards change whenever they speak their truth.

2020 CLEARLY ILLUSTRATED HOW DAMAGING POKER MACHINES ARE, AND HOW MUCH BETTER LIFE WAS WITH THEM OFF

One of the best examples of this impact has been in NSW. People meeting with NSW MPs and sharing their stories has resulted in real reform being on the table for the first time in decades. If passed into law, the [proposed cashless gambling card](#) and [other self-exclusion measures](#) will reduce gambling harm in NSW, and set a precedent for the rest of Australia. The industry are fighting back, so we'll be keeping the pressure up in 2021.

Many have described 2020 as a "dumpster fire" of a year, and it was hard not to experience some schadenfreude as we watched Crown Casino trying to put out the dumpster fires that were their [scandals](#) throughout the year. We rejoiced as the year rounded out with the announcement that a thorough [Victorian investigation into Crown](#) was finally underway. Too many people have been harmed by that venue for too long, and it is beyond time for them to be held to account.

Unfortunately it was almost impossible to avoid the spike in gambling advertising during the pandemic. [We rallied against](#) these ads, and launched our [End Gambling Ads](#) campaign this year. We're grateful to everyone who has joined us in this campaign, including some Leadership Councils and the [Save our SBS](#) group.

In another highlight, the year ended for gambling reform with even more [good news](#). In late December it was announced that the Templestowe RSL Club in Melbourne had been bought by its local council, Manningham, which will lease the site back to the club for the next 20 years -- on the proviso it has no poker machines. What a marvellous example to set for important community organisations to be pokies-free, and how local Councils can support them in this endeavour.

Of course, none of this important work was possible without our supporters, especially our Leadership Councils, funders and donors. We thank every person and organisation that played a role in supporting our work in 2020, and we honour their commitment to gambling reform.

And in a year that so many of us became more grateful than ever for what we have, I must say how thankful I am for the outstanding work done by the Alliance's [staff](#), led by Executive Director Tony Mohr, and ably supported by the remarkable Alliance [board](#), led by Board Chair Sharon Dickson. In reading through this document I'm sure you will marvel at how much was achieved by such a small, but mighty, organisation.

Unfortunately this is the last time I will be able to thank Tony for his work for the Alliance, as he will be moving on in March. Tony has been with the Alliance since its inception six years ago, and without him we would not be the strong and effective organisation we are today.

We will continue to build on Tony's tremendous work and that of his team in 2021 to achieve even more in reducing gambling harm in our communities. I hope this document will inspire you to work with us to help build a better Australia together, free from gambling harm.




REV TIM COSTELLO,
Chief Advocate, Alliance for Gambling Reform

Victorians Saved \$225 Million Every Month During Lockdown From The Pokies Being Shut

JESSICA LYNCH
Published 3:45, Friday 13 November 2020 GMT

GEELONG

Fears of more gambling losses as pokies switched back on around Geelong

Geelong poker machine losses hit record lows this year as coronavirus restrictions stopped gamblers losing \$82 million in six months.

Olivia Shying, Geelong Advertiser

Subscriber only | November 10, 2020 12:00am

NOVEMBER 13 2020 - 11:30AM

Seek help for gambling as pokies reopen

Alex Ford

Local News

Politics NOVEMBER 12, 2020 8:16 AM AEDT

COVID normal doesn't have to mean 'pokies normal' in Victoria

Poker machine curfew would cut gambling harm, help rebound from Covid-19

TIM COSTELLO



ClubsNSW tells members some venues can reopen with more than 500 patrons from Monday

ABC Investigations | By Kyle Taylor and Steve Cannane
Updated 29 May 2020, 6:58am

OPINION APRIL 7 2020 - 4:30AM

State premiers have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change course on gambling harm

Tim Costello

Latest News

OPINION

Why has shining a light on Crown's murky world taken so long?



Tim Costello
Chief advocate of the Alliance for Gambling Reform.

Pokie turnover higher in first week after lockdown than before COVID-19



10 News First Sydney @10NewsFirstSyd · Jun 1, 2020
NSW is switching the pokies back on following their #COVID19Aus shutdown, outraging welfare groups who say problem gamblers are at their most vulnerable.



Pandemic closures whack NSW pokie profits

Tiffany Turnbull | AAP
Wed, 30 September 2020 3:10PM



COVID AND 2020

The shutdown of poker machines around the nation was undoubtedly one of the greatest silver linings that could have come out of the coronavirus pandemic, with billions of dollars saved from going into the dreaded machines, and countless lives improved -- even saved -- with the machines off.

The Alliance sprang into action to capitalise on this amazing opportunity, forming new relationships, attracting new supporters and grants, and gaining enormous amounts of [media coverage](#) in an environment that was next to impossible in which to get cut-through.

We launched our "Build Back Better" campaign, which emphasised how good life could be for us all with limited or no access to poker machines. We knew people were searching for a positive during such challenging times and the thought of pokies-free communities had many people excited.

We told stories of people whose lives had improved with pokies off, people like the mother who could finally buy her children Easter eggs for the first time in years as she wasn't losing all her money on poker machines. Others told of the immense sense of relief they felt knowing the machines' siren call had been silenced by the coronavirus. Ross [told SBS](#) that when poker machines came back on in NSW on 1 June, it was like "the fairytale was over". Ross said he used the time and money he would have poured into poker machines to get his teeth fixed and get a hip replacement while they were shut down.

There were no doubt thousands of stories like these around Australia given how prevalent poker machines are here.

Billions were saved from being lost on poker machines while they were shut down. Lives were changed for the better. That shall not be forgotten.

We also won't forget how much the gambling industry tried to exploit the pandemic in its favour. The horse racing industry continued throughout the pandemic, claiming to be an essential industry. This was laughable given the industry's reason for being is gambling, and gambling is hardly an essential service. We even had the [appalling suggestion](#) that owners of horses could attend the Cox Plate while Victorians remained in lockdown. While that idea was soon rightly shouted down, it demonstrated just how influential the gambling lobby can be even in the middle of a declared State of Disaster.

The gambling industry also took advantage of falling ad spends by other industries to flood our screens with even more advertising than usual, at a time when we were watching our screens more than ever.

And in the ultimate hubris from the gambling industry, [Clubs NSW bragged](#) about pressuring the NSW Government to get poker machines back on as soon as possible.

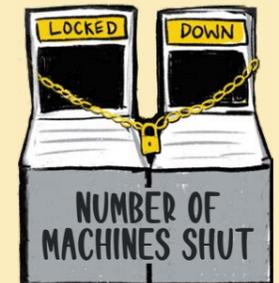
But what the gambling industry could do nothing about was the way the pandemic brought our communities together. They couldn't stop people from realising how much better our communities were without poker machines. We are grateful to the MPs who stood up and said the same thing in parliaments around Australia. And we know there are many more who would say the same thing behind closed doors.

The Alliance will not let the COVID silver lining of reduced gambling harm be left in 2020. That has built the foundation for so much of the work we have to come.

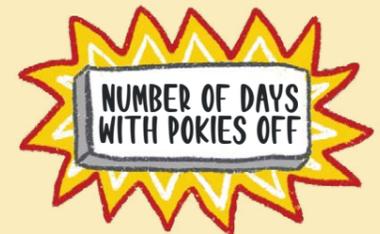
COVID IN NUMBERS



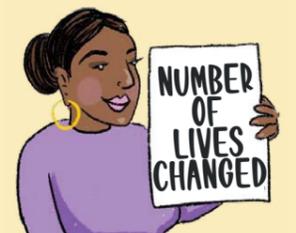
AUSTRALIA-WIDE
\$3.5 BILLION+
VICTORIA
\$1.8 BILLION



NUMBER OF MACHINES SHUT
AUSTRALIA-WIDE
200,000
VICTORIA
29,000



NUMBER OF DAYS WITH POKIES OFF
AUSTRALIA-WIDE
70 DAYS
VICTORIA
231 DAYS



NUMBER OF LIVES CHANGED
AUSTRALIA-WIDE*
25,671,900
VICTORIA*
6,359,000

*All our lives were better without pokies!

A COVID SILVER-LINING FOR VICTORIA

Victoria's COVID lockdown lasted 231 days and while it was the longest and toughest in the country, for many it was also a period of significant relief. For the first time in nearly three decades, 29,000 poker machines were switched off across Victoria and the community collectively saved \$1.8 billion from being lost to the machines of addiction.



On 9 November, poker machines reopened. We were disappointed the Victorian Government did not heed our call to use this moment to rethink and reset the role of gambling in our communities. However, we were grateful they did introduce some temporary harm reduction measures, including limits around venue operating hours, the number of people in gambling rooms and the amount of time machines could be used.

While these restrictions were in place, we saw a significant reduction in daily losses. That gave us a real time, real life experiment showing that gambling harm is reduced when opening hours are shortened. If only the Victorian Government had the real insight to make these measures permanent!

It was further demonstrated how effective these harm reduction measures were when they were removed in December 2020. Poker machine losses spiked that month, causing tremendous damage in some local government areas. For example, Brimbank recorded a leap of \$2.7 million in losses compared to December 2019 -- equalling 23 per cent worse losses in December 2020.

In 2021, we're focused on continuing to push for responsible reforms, including advocating for the temporary COVID measures around venue opening hours to be made permanent. It is simply outrageous that poker machines can once again operate in Victoria's suburbs and towns for as long as 20 hours a day -- the longest in the country. Reducing opening hours to 10am to midnight is a commonsense protective measure to keep our communities safe from harm.



COVID GAVE US A REAL LIFE EXPERIMENT SHOWING THAT GAMBLING HARM IS REDUCED WHEN OPENING HOURS ARE SHORTENED

ANOTHER TWO AFL CLUBS BECOME PROUDLY POKIES-FREE

In November, Geelong and the Western Bulldogs were added to the growing list of AFL Clubs to divest from poker machines, ending an era of profiting from harm and officially becoming proudly pokies-free.

This hard-fought win follows a tremendous effort over many years led by our lived experience advocates and supporters who worked tirelessly to hold their clubs to account. Together they signed petitions, showed up at games, wrote to club board members and in the case of Stuart McDonald, even ran for the Bulldogs' board! Less than nine months after Stuart's run, the Bulldogs announced they were getting out of pokies for good.

This is not just a moral win, it's a strategic win too. The more an industry is exposed for the damage it causes, the more it becomes socially unacceptable to be making money from an industry causing harm, and the easier it is for governments to tighten regulations. It is a powerful indicator of progress for our movement because every time clubs like the Bulldogs or businesses like Woolies decide to get out, they tacitly acknowledge that the damage done to their reputation by owning pokies outweighs the benefits of the cash they bring in. Every rejection of poker machines is done in recognition that the machines are devastating people's lives and are out of step with community standards.

Every person involved in advocating for this outcome should be immensely proud, particularly those personally harmed by gambling who continue to share their stories to help make the change necessary to ensure our clubs and pubs are safe for everyone to enjoy.

The Bulldogs and Geelong joined North Melbourne and Collingwood in being entirely divested from poker machines, while Melbourne has also committed to relinquishing ownership of its machines by 2022.

You may recall when the Alliance was formed in 2015, out of the ten Victorian Clubs only North Melbourne had taken a stand against gambling. Since then, more than half of all AFL clubs can now say they are proudly-pokies free. In the case of Geelong, their home ground is also the first AFL stadium in Australia to have banned all gambling advertising at home games.

Momentum is truly building and it's all thanks to people like you.



MAKING HEADWAY IN NSW



It was a tumultuous year in NSW for gambling reform, and not just because of COVID.

We had two record rulings against the Dee Why RSL Club and the Woolworths-owned ALH group; Crown Casino being told it was not permitted to open its controversial Barangaroo casino as planned due to money laundering and other shady dealings; and most importantly for gambling reform -- some real movement on self-exclusion regulations, and a proposed cashless gambling card, were put on the table.

PROPOSED SELF-EXCLUSION REFORMS

Much-anticipated improvements to poker machine [self-exclusion legislation](#) were finally released for consultation in September 2020.

Some of the package, called the "Gambling Harm Minimisation Bill", came as a welcome surprise and indicated how much the attitude and public discourse around gambling has changed since the Alliance formed.

The package will make it obligatory for venues to uphold self-exclusion deeds or face serious fines, which has not been the case until now. Additionally, after recommendations from a 2014 Parliamentary inquiry into gambling and the scandal surrounding Dee Why RSL, there is a planned pathway for families to apply to have a loved one excluded in a crisis.

Liquor and Gaming also included measures to improve the Responsible Conduct of Gambling (RCG) in venues, including the requirement to have a staff member with advanced RCG training on every shift.

The Alliance actively encouraged organisations in any sectors touched by gambling harm to put in submissions on the consultation draft. We were pleased to see strong submissions from peak bodies such as DVNSW, NCOSS, Suicide Prevention Australia, Public Health Network NSW and the Welfare Rights Centre.

[Our submission](#), while welcoming the overall draft, called for improvements in the family-led pathway, a more realistic design of the proposed venue gambling incident register, and suggested wording to ensure that venues must be obliged to undertake all reasonable steps to help keep people safe when they have self-excluded.

RECORD POKIES PENALTIES

In July the Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority (ILGA) released two bombshell disciplinary reports.

One found that [Woolworths/ALH pubs](#) had been illegally serving free alcohol to patrons as part of a wide ranging management plan to maximise gambling revenue. ILGA was at pains to point out that the legislation in NSW did not allow it to fine the senior manager or ultimate owners of the pubs.

The other disciplinary report was even more influential. The report changed the way gambling is discussed in NSW, and how clubs are regarded. [Dee Why RSL](#) was fined \$200,000 for offering inducements to some of its VIP high rollers in order to keep them gambling. Dee Why RSL was found to have done this with [Gary Van Duinen](#), despite knowing that his family were begging the club to not let Gary gamble there any more. ILGA ordered the club to introduce its own third-party exclusion scheme.

CROWN IN HOT WATER



In February, the so-called Bergin inquiry into Crown's fitness to hold a casino licence in NSW began. [Public hearings](#) shortly became essential viewing and Justice Bergin showed her intention to investigate thoroughly.

The inquiry revealed astonishing allegations of money-laundering on an industrial scale in Crown casinos in Australia. This reached a crescendo in November, with [Crown admitting](#) it may have facilitated illegal transactions.

With money-laundering in the news, the Alliance's supporters, allies and some unexpected friends began to draw links between money-laundering in casinos and the use of poker machines for the same purpose.



This helped support the case for a universal cashless gambling system in NSW, which can help prevent and reduce gambling harm, and as a bonus -- [stop money-laundering](#).

Our Chief Advocate, Rev Tim Costello, activated his network to help this campaign. In a significant step, Christian Church leaders, including the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, [sent a joint letter to every MP](#) urging them to back both self-exclusion reform and a universal cashless gambling system.

COMMUNITY IN ACTION

Three years of the Alliance working with Western Sydney community organisations to support gambling reform initiatives is bearing fruit.

More than 20 local organisations, led by the Fairfield Multicultural Interagency's gambling impact subcommittee, are campaigning to bring [Libraries after Dark](#) to Fairfield. Backed by the Mayor and the local MPs, with interest from the State Library, they are close to achieving funding. We look forward to this rolling out in 2021.

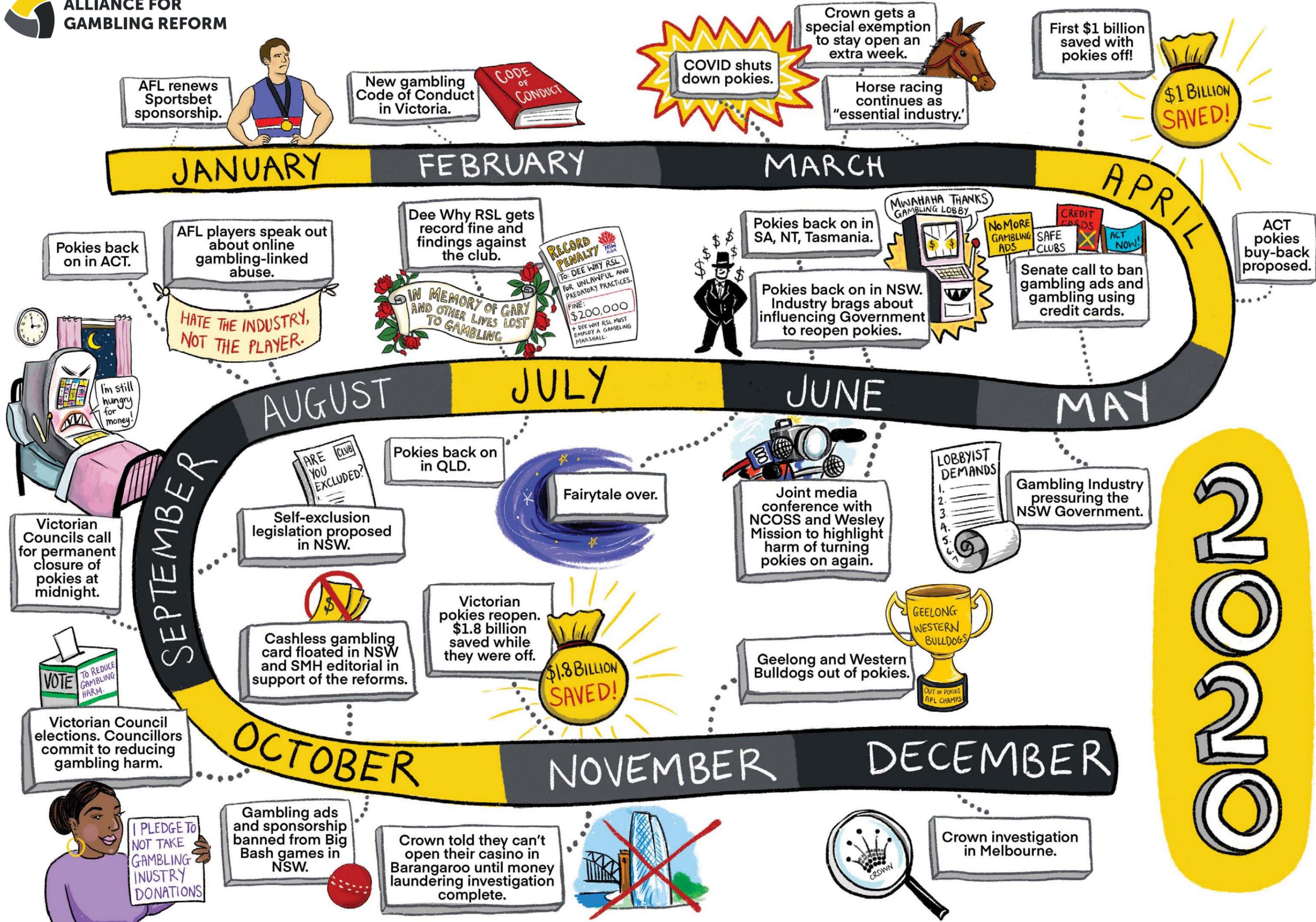
[A major research project](#), testing the feasibility of screening for gambling harm with community workers and GPs, also ran in Fairfield. The pilot study revealed alarming levels of gambling harm, but also improved referrals to counsellors.

The Alliance has also been a key behind-the-scenes advisor and supporter of a [new network in Blacktown](#), which is working to build awareness of gambling impacts and develop community responses to reducing harm

The Alliance also developed a joint campaign with the Uniting Church NSW/ACT to [call for reduced operating hours for poker machines](#). We want to see every machine turned off between midnight and 10am.

This campaign came about from a [video conversation](#) our Chief Advocate, Rev Tim Costello had with his colleagues Rev Keith Garner of Wesley Mission and the Moderator of the Uniting Church in NSW, Rev Simon Hansford. Rev Hansford has written to every congregation in NSW and the ACT urging them to take up the cause of gambling reform, starting with the reduced hours campaign.

THE ALLIANCE'S WORK WITH WESTERN SYDNEY
COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IS BEARING FRUIT



CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE PROGRAM

Empowering people with lived experience of gambling harm to advocate for reform.

The Champions for Change program continues to be central to the work of the Alliance, and was more important than ever in 2020. People with lived experience of gambling harm are involved at all levels of the Alliance's work. Personal stories of gambling harm are included in submissions to government, in meetings with MPs, on social media posts and in working with local councils. The Alliance simply could not do its work without the support and involvement of Champions for Change.

COVID AND CHAMPS

The pandemic forced us to think creatively about how we could continue the program effectively and supportively. For the first time, we invited lived experience advocates from across Australia to meet online when we switched to online Zoom calls in April.

Our weekly meetings had representatives from NSW, Victoria, SA and Tasmania discussing the shutdown across Australia and what this would mean for gambling.

The meetings also offered the opportunity to support each other with our ideas and any difficulties we were having while being in lockdown. There was lots of laughter and a few tears too.

It's important that the people who volunteer with us as Champions for Change get a lot from working with the Alliance. One of the ways the Alliance supports lived experience advocates is to offer training sessions to build skills and confidence. In 2020, 12 training sessions were conducted online on topics including writing letters to publications, meeting with MPs, writing your own story, and setting up a blog. Many of these sessions were peer-led.

A critical training session for those of us working closely with others affected by gambling harm was Vicarious Trauma Training, conducted by STARTTS (Survivors of Torture and Trauma).

MEDIA AND PUBLIC EVENTS



Our stories are told in many ways, including via media interviews and being out directly with the public, giving people the chance to ask questions and become better informed of what gambling harm is and how it impacts our communities.

On 1 June, NSW was the first state to reopen poker machines, and we made sure the public and the government knew how risky and damaging this would be. In our first major media event in NSW, the Alliance's Executive Director Tony Mohr was joined by lived experience advocate Ross, and representatives from the NSW Council for Social Services (NCOSS) and Wesley Mission, along with the pokies-free Petersham Bowls Club, to highlight gambling harm and what a relief the enforced shutdown had been for so many people. The event drew news coverage from all the television stations and ensured the human face of gambling harm was not forgotten.

In South Australia Shonica Guy, Andrew Robinson and other advocates for gambling reform held two events that got a lot of attention. The group held signs up outside an Adelaide venue on the day poker machines returned in SA in June, singing songs to passing pedestrians and motorists, including crowd favourite "Blow up the Pokies" by The Whitlams. The event received a lot of media coverage and public support, with motorists tooting and cyclists yelling their encouragement as they passed by.



The same group also filled a shopping trolley with \$85 worth of groceries -- the amount of money that can potentially be lost in just 60 seconds on poker machines in SA. The group deliberately chose to set up outside an Adelaide Woolworths with its stall to speak to people about gambling harm as the supermarket giant is lagging in fully divesting its poker machine interests.

When it was Melbourne's turn for poker machines to return we again highlighted how much better life was with the machines off with a media conference on 9 November, once more featuring people with lived experience. We highlighted how dangerous the return had been in other states, where losses had spiked by more than 30 per cent in the case of Queensland.

Gambling Harm Awareness (GHAW) week also saw some of our people taking part in the first ever online CroakeyGo. This event highlighted gambling harm as a public health



issue and focused, and featured those with lived experience sharing their stories to complement discussions by public health researchers. More about that on pages 18 and 19.

We must also acknowledge the important role lived experience stories have played in effecting

change in NSW. We have no doubt that MPs hearing directly from people about how gambling has impacted their lives has led to the self-exclusion legislation that we hope will pass in 2021.

A ONE MAN STAND AGAINST POKIES MAKES A MASSIVE DIFFERENCE

Stuart McDonald is a dedicated Western Bulldogs fan. As someone who has long dealt with a poker machine addiction, he felt it was wrong that the club he loved so much was profiting from harm via poker machines. So he did something about it.

Stuart [ran for the board of the Western Bulldogs](#) with the sole purpose of pressuring the club to get rid of its poker machines, standing up at the club's AGM and pleading with them to get out of the pokies. He was unsuccessful with gaining a seat on the board, but he was successful in his actual goal of highlighting how inappropriate it is for a community-based football club to be exploiting community members via poker machines.

STUART MADE IT CLEAR HOW WRONG IT IS FOR CLUBS TO EXPLOIT COMMUNITY MEMBERS VIA POKIES

Stuart was delighted when in November 2020 the Bulldogs announced they had sold off their poker machine interests.

"They promised to do it for some time, it was quite the process, so it felt really good when they finally made the announcement about the sale. There's a part of me that wishes they'd just smashed the machines up, but at least the football club that I love is no longer involved in pokies," Stuart said.



COUNCILS UNITED TO REDUCE GAMBLING HARM

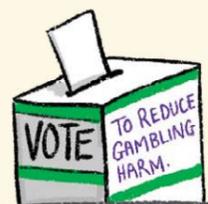
Throughout a tumultuous 2020, our network of more than 20 Leadership Councils continued to stand up for their communities and take strong action to reduce harm from gambling locally.

Around Victoria, local government areas were benefiting from having poker machines off. Their communities had more money to spend buying coffees and pizzas, going to local bookstores and buying jigsaw puzzles as they found ways to entertain and engage themselves and their families during the seemingly endless lockdowns. These savings made a massive difference in communities as local businesses struggled through the recession.

As the savings in Victoria reached an astounding \$1.8 billion, 13 Councils wrote to the Victorian Minister for Liquor and Gambling Regulation and to the Federal Minister for Media and Communications, asking them to enact measures to reduce harm from gambling throughout the COVID-19 period and as we emerge from the pandemic.

When machines were switched back on in Victoria there were initial restrictions around opening hours, limits on the time people could use the machines in one stint and spacing requirements that saw every second machine turned off. We were disappointed these measures were temporary, but it was heartening to see the Victorian Government respond to the pressure from the community and Councils to enact these measures, proving that it can be done!

Victorian Councils call for permanent closure of pokies at midnight.



Victorian Council elections. Councillors commit to reducing gambling harm.

VICTORIAN COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Victoria had its local government elections in October 2020. The Alliance conducted a campaign to create awareness among candidates about what they could do to help advocate for gambling reform, and minimise harm in their communities.

We had 600 candidates respond to our survey where:



Our campaign also spread information to voters about which of their candidates cared about gambling harm in their area. Many survey respondents went on to be elected to represent their communities across Victoria, and we conducted an introductory briefing event for councillors online in December. We look forward to another term of working to reduce gambling harm in local communities with councils.

I PLEDGE TO NOT TAKE GAMBLING INDUSTRY DONATIONS

20 HOURS A DAY IS TOO LONG

In September 2020, 13 Victorian Councils wrote to Premier Daniel Andrews to ask him to reduce the operating hours of poker machines from their current horrendously long 20 hours per day, the worst in Australia.

An excerpt from this [letter](#) is below.

Dear Premier Andrews,

We write this open letter to you as Victorian councils deeply concerned about gambling harm in our respective communities, and the urgent need for reforms to reduce these harms.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis you have consistently listened to the advice of public health experts in relation to protecting the health of Victorians and our economy. We applaud you for being so considered in this approach. We ask that you apply the same consideration in enacting change to reduce gambling harm when poker machines are switched back on in Victoria.

Currently, Victorian poker machine venues are legally allowed to open up to 20 hours per day, with many operating for these maximum hours. These opening hours are incredibly long, even longer than in the notoriously pokies-intensive New South Wales, where venues may open for up to 18 hours. COVID-19 has presented us with tremendous opportunities to rethink the way we do things in Victoria, and in doing so improve our way of life post this pandemic. It makes sense to look at the way poker machines operate, and especially the hours they run to help the hundreds of thousands of Victorians who experience gambling harm, either directly or indirectly. Harm is occurring in poker machine venues at all times of day, but especially past midnight.

We urge you to modify licensing conditions to have them close at this time and reopen at 10am. This change will undoubtedly result in reduced gambling harm -- saving and improving lives, and helping keep families together.

In 2014-15, the cost of gambling in Victoria totalled \$7 billion when the co-occurring conditions of mental ill-health, homelessness and domestic violence were considered. We cannot afford to ignore these costs from economic, health and social standpoints.

We urge you to enact reform to have poker machine venues closed at midnight around Victoria before poker machines are switched back on, for the health and economic benefit of all our communities.

With our very best wishes for gambling reform...



23,000 AUSTRALIANS WANT AN END TO GAMBLING ADS

2020 saw the official launch of our community campaign to remove gambling ads entirely from our screens. Australians have simply had enough of the barrage of this offensive and exploitative marketing at all hours of the day, and modest restrictions introduced in 2018 have proven grossly inadequate.

Reform became even more urgent this year, given families were confined to their homes and 3 in 4 school-aged children dramatically increased their time spent on screens. We already knew children were high consumers of TV's 374 daily gambling ads, but saw shocking new tactics deployed by the industry on social media platforms, including Snapchat filters promoting and normalising harmful messages to young people.

Not even a global pandemic shutting down (almost) all sport could stop the gambling industry from plastering our television screens and news feeds with wall-to-wall ads, pushing markets on everything from the weather to the colour of Scott Morrison's tie in an effort to keep people gambling at any cost. We now know that

wagering companies spent more money on advertising and inducements this year, and it worked - the amount gambled online significantly increased, particularly among young men, and foreign bookmakers were one of the few industries to emerge from this crisis with millions in profit.

However this year we also saw a growing number of politicians, community and sporting leaders taking a stand, including passing a motion in Federal Parliament calling for a moratorium on gambling ads, and AFL players like Allen Christensen and Easton Wood actively speaking out -- even going so far as to propose a player pay cut to reduce community exposure to gambling.



#ENDGAMBLINGADS
We stamped out smoking ads, now it's time to kick gambling out of sport.



ALLIANCE FOR
GAMBLING REFORM

@JessHarwoodArt

CRICKET'S BIG BASH LEADS WHILE AFL DISAPPOINTS

While AFL Players and clubs have shown extraordinary leadership when it comes to reducing their role in this harmful industry, the AFL showed itself to be manifestly out of step with community expectations by renewing its sponsorship deal with corporate bookmaker SportsBet for another five years. This was particularly disappointing given the torrent of death threats and abuse players reported receiving as a result of failed bets, a culture of gambling normalisation, and the well-reported gambling harm within AFL player ranks.

Despite this, momentum is undoubtedly building with Geelong Stadium being the first AFL venue in the country to have implemented a gambling ad blackout in 2019, and gambling advertisements banned from Big Bash League matches in NSW from November 2020. Internationally, restrictions and bans on gambling ads have already been introduced in Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. The writing is undoubtedly on the wall when it comes to 'family friendly' brands continuing to profit from harm, and it's up to all of us to keep holding them to account.

SBS PRESSURED TO TAKE AN ETHICAL STAND

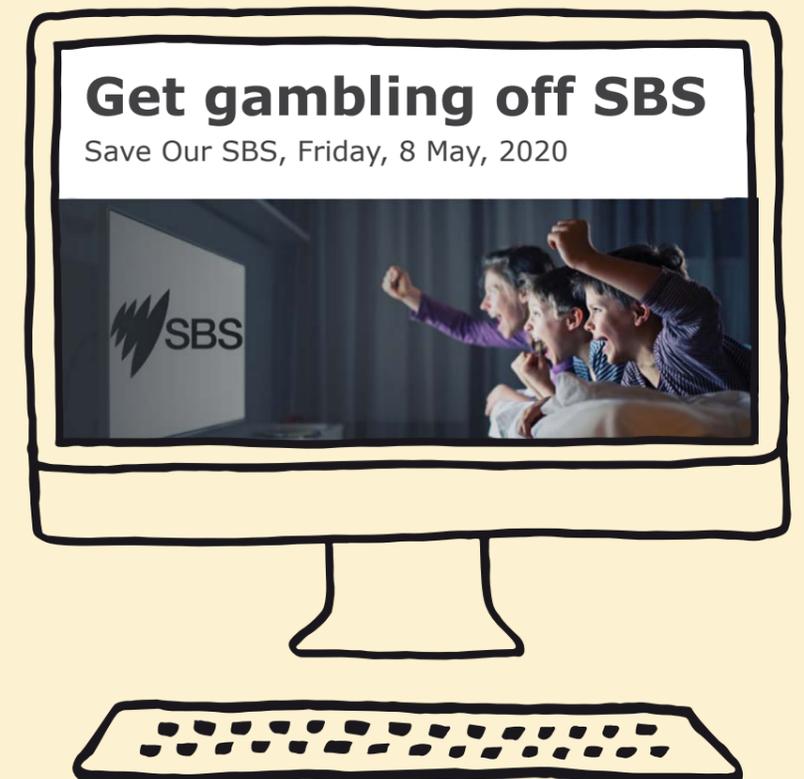
In 2020 we turned our attention to the culpability of broadcasters, and in particular SBS, who continued to air gambling ads throughout the pandemic despite the known and disproportionate harms to multicultural communities.

Partnering with our friends at Save Our SBS, more than 10,000 people signed a petition and sent more than 1,000 emails to the SBS Chair and Federal Communications Minister calling on our public broadcaster to take a stand against harmful advertising.

But it is stories from people personally impacted that bring the very real implications of gambling harm into sharp focus. Our community advocates who have been hurt by gambling were supported to write to the SBS Chair, to make their concerns known. Like Jenny* (name changed to protect privacy) who wrote:

As a migrant born in Zambia, gambling was just not part of our culture growing up. Gambling may seem a harmless activity to those who know little, but my son has been to hell and back and he took his family with him. It has taken years for him to resurrect his life and we all live with the scars. As a pioneer viewer of SBS, having been a keen watcher since the early eighties, I get knots in my stomach when I see these ads, knowing how much harm it has caused.

Exerting pressure on SBS has been a significant rallying point for attracting new supporters to our campaign given the majority publicly-funded broadcaster is clearly failing to meet community expectations. We have the right to demand more from our SBS.



GAMBLING HARM AWARENESS WEEK



SHARING STORIES OF RECOVERY, PURPOSE AND ACTION

For the first time, Gambling Harm Awareness Week was held simultaneously in Victoria and NSW. This presented the Alliance with the opportunity to work across the states to highlight gambling harm.

Throughout the week, Alliance lived experience advocates and staff were asked to speak and present at online forums and discussions about gambling harm, and do many media interviews, ensuring the week was the busiest of what was an already overwhelming year.

A particular highlight was the first ever virtual CroakeyGO, highlighting #GamblingHarms as a public health issue. The Alliance sponsored this online event, which was brilliantly hosted by our very own Anna Bardsley. Academic speakers and lived experience advocates explored and shared their experiences on the connections between gambling harm, mental ill-health and family violence. People joined from around Australia via Zoom.

This CroakeyGO was an incredibly powerful two hours, with fantastic questions and conversations. The event resulted in more than one million Twitter impressions, and in-depth [preview](#) and [summary articles](#) on Croakey, the most respected public health blog in Australia.

The concept of this online CroakeyGO was also presented at a virtual international conference.

**YOU CAN SEE A SHIFT IN THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE
WE MEET WITH WHEN THEY HEAR A STORY
FROM SOMEONE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE**

Below is an excerpt from the CroakeyGO summary, by Cate Carrigan:

ENDING THE SILENCE ON GAMBLING HARMS: PERSONAL STORIES RING THE BELL FOR CHANGE

The stories of lived experience are vital to the work of the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC), according to the Director of Monitoring and Reform, Dr Alex Hains.

“The insight that people with lived experience generously bring to this work is critical to making sure what we do actually works or is effective.”

Hains, speaking from Dharawal Country, said the NMHC has been working with the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW) on Australia’s first ever Suicide and Self Harm monitoring system.

Available through AIHW website, the first instalment of data was recently released, bringing together statistics from all states and territories, Australian Bureau of Statistics, government health departments, emergency services, and coronial offices.

Though not specific to gambling, the data includes psycho-social risk factors particularly relevant to gambling: separation and divorce, relationship problems, legal and financial problems.

Hains believes the relationship between gambling and mental illness is complex but undeniable.

“Three out of every four people who are seeking treatment for gambling also have a co-existing psychological disorder,” he said.

Of those, 12 percent have PTSD, 17 percent have anxiety disorder, 30 percent have major depressive disorder, and over 20 percent have an alcohol use disorder.

“Like our relationship with alcohol, maybe gambling is seen as ‘just a bit of fun’ or even a natural part of social interactions in Australia,” says Hains.

But we need to recognise that gambling can be an avoidance behaviour; a way of numbing difficult emotions or ignoring dealing with other problems in your life.

And of course, there’s a whole industry designed to keep you gambling, so that “it’s a very slippery slope between ‘just a bit of fun’ and gambling addiction”.

People who experience gambling harms are at increased risk of suicidal thoughts and attempting suicide, he says.

With the current uncertainty due to COVID-19 and bushfire trauma, Hains says there has been an increase in people reaching out for help and accessing services.

One thing he welcomes is the increasing awareness that mental health is connected to our life circumstances.

“And it helps us to look at what we need to do beyond just clinical interventions what we could do in our communities to help people cope when things are not going so well.”

The AMHC is also working on a 2030 blueprint for change, shifting the perspective of gambling problems and mental health issues being a cost, to seeing the mental health of the country as something to invest in.

Join us on this virtual walk – talking about #GamblingHarms
From 11am AEDT on Monday, 19 October

#GamblingHarms

Please join us from 11am AEDT on Monday, 19 October for the inaugural virtual #CroakeyGO with a focus on the public health impacts of gambling, including family violence and mental ill-health.

This is the map of our “virtual walk”.

The event is sponsored by the Alliance for Gambling Reform and will provide a platform for hearing the stories of people with lived experience of the harms of gambling.

#CroakeyGO is walking journalism – where we bring people together to walk and talk in place, to connect with Country and pay respect to Indigenous knowledges, and to discuss health issues and to produce stories, tweets and other social media content.

Join the conversation on Twitter at #GamblingHarms and follow the coverage at Croakey.org

We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the country where we live, work and travel upon, and to Elders, past, present and future.



If you or someone you know needs support please contact:

Gambler's Help on 1800 858 858 gamblinghelponline.org.au

Lifeline on 13 11 14 lifeline.org.au