



### *Inside Gambling Reform*

Friend,

To say the year so far has had its challenges is the understatement of the millennium, but I am immensely proud of the work that Alliance staff have continued to do in the middle of a global pandemic and a declared State of Disaster -- as has been the case for our Victorian staff.

The shutdown of poker machines around the nation was undoubtedly one of the greatest silver linings that could have come out of this awful 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 [media coverage](#) in an environment that was next to impossible in which to get cut-through.

On top of all this COVID-prompted work, the Alliance had its usual business to achieve, including the launch of our much-anticipated campaign to End Gambling Ads.

I thank each and every one of you who has shown support for the Alliance during these trying times, and congratulate Tony and his staff on not only keeping the Alliance ship sailing, but on heading in new directions to achieve gambling reform for us all.

I hope you are keeping safe and healthy wherever you are.

*Rev Tim Costello*

Chief Advocate, Alliance for Gambling Reform

**COVID19 and its impact on the work of the Alliance**



As Tim referenced above, the Alliance quickly pivoted its regular campaign work to capitalise on the opportunities for gambling reform presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We quickly developed the #BuildBackBetter campaign, complete with commissioned artwork by Jess Harwood (link). We approached Jess to work with us following her creation of this [artwork](#), inspired by her reading of this powerful [article](#) by the ABC's Steve Cannane.

We rejoiced as the [ACT Government implemented a poker machine buyback scheme](#), offering pubs and clubs \$15,000 per machine on the condition the money was used to keep staff employed and supported. We contacted state governments to encourage them to introduce similar measures, and used the ACT as an [exemplar](#) in our media coverage.

Throughout this campaign, which is ongoing in Victoria due to the continued shutdown of poker machines, we have called for machines to be the last things switched back on, and for them to be turned back on only with reforms in place to prevent gambling harm.

Our most recent action on this was yesterday, with an open letter signed by 11 Victorian councils calling for poker machines rooms to be closed between midnight and 10am to reduce gambling harm.

The Alliance's first ever major media event in NSW was held in Sydney on 1 June, the day machines were switched back on. This event was a collaborative [media call](#) with NCOSS and the Wesley Mission, along with former gambler and Champion for Change [Ross](#), and the Petersham Bowlo President. We [highlighted](#) the financial, social and health damage poker machines do and offered the Petersham Bowlo as an example of a club thriving without poker machines. Ross's story of the powerful effect having a break from pokies resonated strongly and brought home the real impact having the pokies off was having on lives across the country.

In South Australia, Shonica, Andrew and their fellow advocates for gambling reform stood outside an Adelaide venue on 29 June, the day poker machines went back on in the state. Their signs got both public and [media attention](#), and their performances of anti-pokies songs including, [The Whitlams' iconic Blow Up The Pokies](#), were well-received.

In Tasmania, the angst around machines returning was entirely justified with data showing a [massive spike](#) in pokies losses for the first full month of them being back on. Independent Meg Webb continues to raise the issue of gambling reform in the island state.

In Queensland, Tim did a number of media interviews, including this [one with the ABC](#), and Champs Coordinator Anna Bardsley took part in an online forum about gambling harm out of Townsville.

## **Councils update**

Victorian Leadership Councils continue to support our campaigns including writing to Ministers and the Premier about ensuring that when venues do reopen, they ensure that the amount of harm from gaming is minimised.

We were grateful for the support of 11 councils in signing on to an Open Letter to Premier Daniel Andrews asking to reduce the opening hours of venues, sent yesterday.

Councils have also undertaken work in their own areas to help minimise harm: Kingston are updating their council policy; Hobsons Bay, Mornington Peninsula and Brimbank are undertaking their own harm minimisation programs and several councils are partaking in venue applications for planning, licensing and VCAT appeals.

Several councils also created awareness about the savings their community had throughout the period in which venues have been closed due to restrictions, and this resulted in multiple local media stories.

Local Government Elections across Victoria are also next month. We will be creating awareness in candidates and community members about gambling harm during this time as the election period also coincides with Gambling Harm Awareness Week 19-25 October.

## **Victorian poker machine reform update**

While COVID has been incredibly challenging for our state, and we eagerly await news of when restrictions will ease, one of the few positives to emerge from this crisis has been the 165 days Victorians have enjoyed without poker machines being a drain on our communities.

As of today, we have saved a whopping **\$1.25 billion** from lining the pockets of rent-seeking poker machine barons. That's money going back into the local community, invested in shops and restaurants, buying gifts for grandkids in isolation and money saved for families doing it tough. We've heard from supporters young and old of the relief they've experienced by simply having the machines turned off, which has strengthened our resolve to keep fighting to reduce harm.

Yesterday you may have seen an [open letter](#) signed by 11 Councils calling on Premier Daniel Andrews and the new Gambling Minister Melissa Horne to [shut pokie dens from midnight to 10am](#). Throughout the crisis we have advocated across the board that gambling is not essential, it should be the last industry to reopen and certainly shouldn't receive any handouts. But when this industry

does reemerge, we can't go back to business as usual - it must be conditional on reducing gambling harm. Because if data from [NSW](#) and [Tasmania](#) is anything to go by, we can expect people will be more vulnerable than ever, and the cost to the community will be significant.

One of the most effective ways to reduce harm is to reduce the hours that venues are permitted to operate poker machines. Victoria currently allows poker machines to operate up to 20 hours per day, representing some of the longest opening hours in the country. Of course, harm is occurring at all times of day, but we know this is particularly acute after midnight. Public health experts have consistently recommended a minimum of a 6 hour break. Just as we (rightly) listened to the public health experts when it came to managing COVID, we must do the same for gambling. We'll continue advocating for tangible policy outcomes on the other side of this crisis and if you haven't already, please [sign the petition](#) or [email the Minister](#) to ensure reduced operating hours are considered as part of a COVID-safe Victoria.

### **NSW poker machine reform update**

The 23 March COVID shutdown of pokies pushed us into a big pivot in NSW. While we shifted our focus to 'building back better' and sharing our vision of a safer NSW, with more hospitality and entertainment staff, the gambling industry was stalking the [corridors of power](#) with misleading employment statistics.

Our supporters across the country, in particular NSW, peppered local MPs, the Gambling Minister and the Premier with emails and calls around the industry-organised reopening date of 1 June. After machines turned back on, the shocking figures of losses in the first weeks prompted you to write to the Premier telling her she should cut the numbers in NSW, and we wrote an [open letter to the Premier](#) with NCOSS, Wesley Mission and Western Sydney Community Forum. All of this occurred against a steady background of [media stories](#) sympathetic to gambling reform.

There were some big wins with record-breaking prosecutions by the gambling regulator against venues offering free drinks and other incentives to people to gamble, including [Woolworths-controlled venues](#). An especially important and poignant result was against the [DeeWhy RSL](#) for offering high-roller perks to Gary Van Duinen, leading to his death by suicide. His widow Sonia [called for](#) significant gambling reform after the decision, as did [Tim Costello](#).

It takes time to build a power base of ordinary citizens who can challenge a powerful, cashed up industry that's had it all their own way for more than 60 years. We're building a coalition with the Uniting and Wesley communities to kick off a campaign to reduce the hours poker machines can operate, aiming to shut them down from midnight to 10am, every day, no exceptions. We know this will reduce harm, and the campaign welcomes all support - look out for a late September launch.

We expect legislation to stop the farce of self-exclusion schemes in NSW. Venues happily welcome people they know are trying to stay safe, letting them gamble until they run out of money. While the flagged laws will impose fines on clubs for letting self-excluded people in, our aim is to have pubs included as well - every poker machine in a pub is taking more than double a club pokie in losses.

Here's a simple ask - get two friends to sign up to the Alliance so we can start to snowball this. We know we will win in the end - the tobacco campaigns of the 80s and 90s show how enough people can topple the biggest corporations.

## **Sports gambling reform update**

It's been a big year in the effort to [#EndGamblingAds](#). Not even a global pandemic shutting down (almost) all sports could stop the gambling industry from plastering our television screens and news feeds with wall-to-wall ads.

COVID saw unprecedented spikes in [online gambling losses](#), as physical venues closed and Australians were confined to their homes. In March, our Chief Advocate Rev Tim Costello wrote to Communications Minister Paul Fletcher MP seeking greater intervention by the Federal Government around the rise in marketing of online gambling products and risk of children's increased exposure while in isolation and accessing distance education online.

Following a [similar move in the UK](#), we called for a moratorium on gambling advertising, later supported by a [motion](#) in the Federal Senate. Fortunately we've seen [ACMA](#) move to block more illegal gambling websites, as [momentum](#) continues to build across the board.

Our Chief Advocate Tim Costello continues to [elevate this issue](#) in the media, writing an [op-ed](#) at the restart of the AFL season, publishing [another](#) for the AFL Fans Association and [recently](#) being covered on the back page of the Herald Sun following revelations of player death threats in connection to gambling. Our Campaigns Director Margaret Quixley has also engaged in a number of public facing engagement opportunities including a [webinar](#) exploring 'Gambling in the time of coronavirus', a [podcast](#) discussing the role of gambling in women's sport and an op-ed [recently](#) published by the AFL Fans Association.

In recent weeks our attention has now turned to the responsibility of broadcasters, and in particular the SBS, who continue to peddle gambling ads during this time of crisis. We've teamed up with our friends at Save Our SBS to launch a petition, garnering over 9,500 signatures so far! **If you haven't already [please sign and share the petition here](#).**

## **Time for a ban on loyalty programs**

We're launching our Ban Gambling Loyalty Programs campaign in April. Gambling related loyalty programs include giving membership points or rewards based on gambling spend, or where people are encouraged to stay in a venue longer to get extra tickets, spending more on pokies while they're waiting. Both schemes act as inducements to get people to gamble more than they planned. We know venues will never end this by themselves, so we're aiming for a state-wide ban, across all clubs and pubs. If you know of a loyalty program, please give us the details through this form on our website.

## Champions for Change



The Champs program continues to strengthen, with more people joining and a new Thursday night training program underway. Training has included the topics of Telling your Story and Keeping Safe, Social Media, Media and Campaigns, Political and Council Actions finally Actions -- Radical and Peaceful.

A warm congratulations to Shonica and the South Australian crew for their action the day of poker machines being switched back on in the state. They emphasised the dangers of turning pokies back on while a global pandemic still raged. They allowed plenty of room for social distancing outside the venue, which was on a busy intersection with lots of traffic passing and honking support for them and giving thumbs-up as they drove by. A special highlight was musician, Andrea Dawson, who came along and helped sing [Blow up the Pokies](#).

The Alliance has also launched a new [Stories for Change](#) page on our website, featuring tales from people who've experienced gambling harm. These stories are a powerful vehicle for influencing social change. We are asking people to share their story with other people who have experienced gambling harm. We will be able to include them in submissions to all levels of government, so that those in positions of power can never again say that gambling is not an issue in their communities.

If you would like to share your story please have a look.

In Solidarity,

Tony Mohr

Executive Director

Alliance for Gambling Reform

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is a collaboration of organisations with a shared concern about the deeply harmful and unfair impacts of gambling.

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