

NSW RECOGNIZES GAMBLING HARM

The NSW Upper House today supported a proposal to call on the Minister responsible for gambling to rename the awareness week to Gambling Harm Awareness Week, in line with other states and New Zealand.

The week is currently called Responsible Gambling Awareness Week and was held in September this year.

The motion was put by the Greens, and supported by the ALP and other cross-benchers. The government spoke against change, while acknowledging the level of harm gambling causes in NSW.

Alliance for Gambling Reform Chief Advocate, the Rev Tim Costello, applauded the move by the Upper House MPs, who also noted the impact that gambling has in NSW on individuals, families and the community.

“Australia has 76 per cent of the world’s pub and club poker machines, and half of those are in NSW. In Western Australia poker machines are only allowed in the casino, providing a clear example for a business model for clubs and pubs that doesn’t involve a gambling dependency,” Rev Costello said.

“NSW is not normal. This call from the Upper House is a small but important step to addressing gambling as a public health issue.

“We call on the relevant minister, Victor Dominello, to act and ensure the week’s name is changed for 2020. We also call on him to ensure that there is significantly more resourcing for the week – this year, the Office of Responsible Gambling recycled the theme from 2018. We don’t think that is the mark of a government that takes gambling harm seriously.”

Rev Costello said language mattered at all times, but especially when discussing gambling harm.

“The industry likes to refer to ‘responsible gambling’ quite deliberately, as it pushes all responsibility for gambling issues on to the person who is gambling. That’s simply unfair and untrue when you consider how deliberately addictive poker machines are by design, with complex psychology incorporated into their makeup,” he said.

“The entire system in NSW, in particular – with mini-casinos on nearly every street corner – is unlike anywhere else in the world. On top of that, the burgeoning online gambling sector, which bombards adults and children alike with inducements and advertising, presents new challenges.

“We also ask that the term ‘problem gambler’ is avoided. While gambling may create significant difficulties and even severe harm for some people, it is the industry that is the problem, not the individual.

“The Problem Gambling Severity Index measures behaviour, not the individual. Furthermore, as noted by the NSW Upper House in this move, 85% of the harm caused by gambling is experienced by those considered at low or medium risk, and 5 – 10 other people are impacted for each individual gambler.”

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