



ALLIANCE FOR GAMBLING REFORM



ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

The Alliance for Gambling Reform brings together organisations and local councils from across Australia to advocate for reform of the gambling industry. Latest figures show that Australia wide, almost \$25 Billion dollars is lost annually to gambling. Research shows that there are links between gambling harm, and other public health issues such as mental ill-health, family violence, homelessness and other chronic illnesses.

VICTORIAN LOSSES

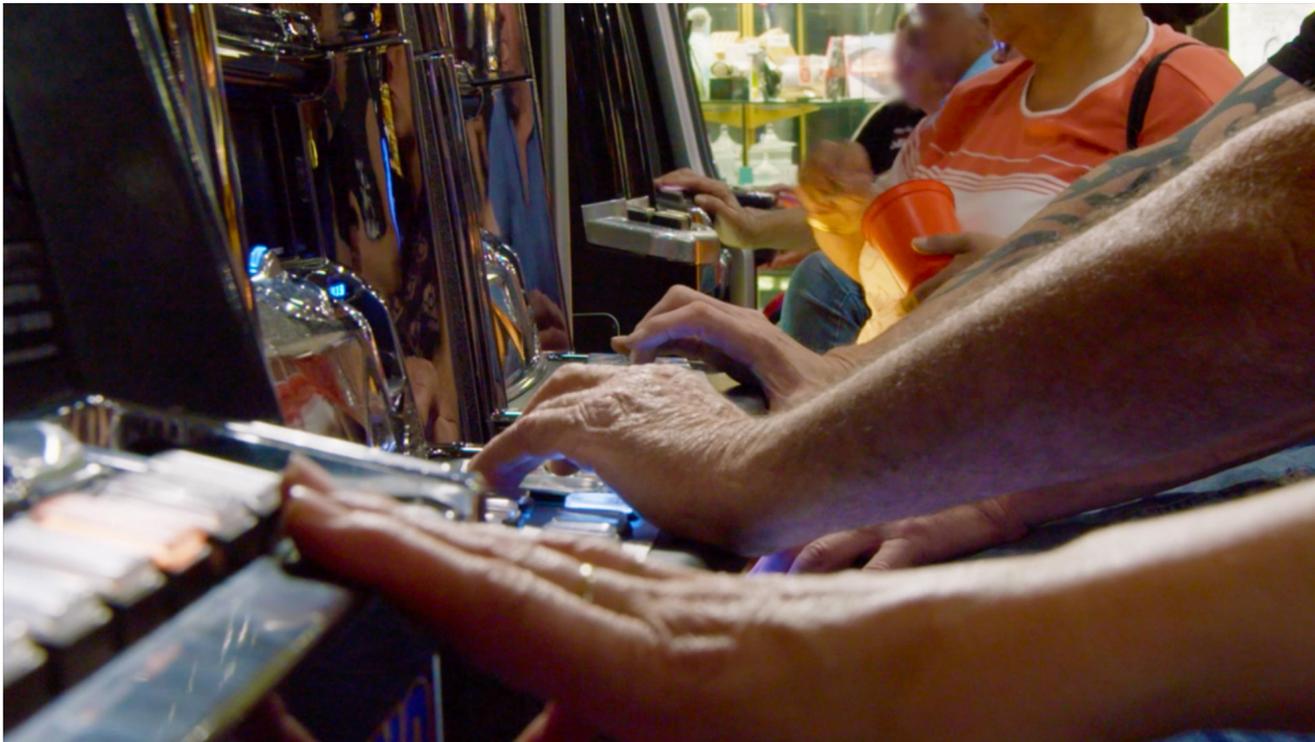
In 2019/2020 almost **\$2 billion almost \$2 billion** was lost via gaming machines across **26,000 machines** and about **500 venues**. On average, **\$7,474,400** was lost per day by Victorians in the time venues were open. **Since venues have closed in Victoria for COVID-19 restrictions, more than \$1.3 billion has been saved by the community.**

POKER MACHINES ARE DESIGNED TO MISLEAD AND MANIPULATE PEOPLE, LEADING THEM INTO VARIOUS TYPES OF HARM

Today's computer-programmed machines are designed to mislead users by weighting the virtual reels, or making them of unequal lengths, so that 'near misses' appear to occur more frequently than otherwise. These are designed to give users the impression that they almost won, triggering parts of the brain to make people feel they are close to winning .

Gambling harm is any negative consequence or side effect that comes from gambling. This can range from feelings of regret or loss smaller amounts of money, through to more serious effects such as mental ill-health or bankruptcy. A person can experience gambling harm as a result of their own gambling or someone else's. We know harm leads to poorer health and wellbeing of the individual gambling, along with their family, community and population as a whole.

In a 2018-19 study, gambling harm was measured alongside the risk of gambling issues for the first time. It found that 70 per cent of gambling harm in Victoria is experienced by people whose gambling is not classified as "problem gambling". Another study found that in 2014-2015, the residual costs of gambling in Victoria totalled \$7 billion, including \$1.7 billion from emotional and psychological issues.



SPORTS GAMBLING

End Gambling Ads

Sports gambling is the fastest growing form of gambling in Australia. More than half of those who gamble online are at risk, or already experiencing gambling-related harm. Gambling is increasingly being normalised to children through advertising, with one in three high school students reporting they have already gambled. The volume of gambling advertising has increased on television and radio by 50 per cent since 2016, and three-quarters of Australian parents are bothered by their children being exposed to gambling advertising.

Everyone should be able to enjoy sport free from gambling advertising, but sporting bosses continue to exploit the trust of fans by cutting deals that turn stadiums into billboards and spruik gambling to kids. It's unfair that a 12-year-old today has never even seen a game without gambling ads. We know the more gambling ads kids see, the more likely they are to gamble as they get older. To #EndGamblingAds we need sporting bosses to ensure our sports stars and stadiums are free of gambling ads, and we need our elected leaders to legislate to ensure the ads come off our screens and airwaves for good. Australia led the way by kicking tobacco ads out of sport, let's do it again for gambling!

Licensing and Planning

Currently it is the Victorian Commission for Gaming and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR) that approves of licensing applications for Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs.) Councils can chose to partake in this process and support or not support applications for EGMs.

The council process for planning permits also takes into account proposed EGMs in new establishments.

Typically both the VCGLR and Councils decide whether to approve or reject permits by taking into consideration the Net Social and Economic benefits and detrimental impact of the application on the community. The VCGLR refers to this as the 'no net detriment test', where applicants must show there is either a net neutral or net no detriment to the community from the approval of the license.



STORIES FROM THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED GAMBLING HARM



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Carolyn

"I was sent to prison in 2016 for 18 months at the age of 64 for stealing money from my employer, a total of \$400K over 7 years and every dollar went into the Pokies. I have since paid all the money back and am proud to say I am pokies-free. I did not realise I was addicted until my counsellor in prison explained how this product is made to addict people. I always thought that I was just silly and weak and could stop any time I wanted. I was under the illusion that a product which is so destructive would never have been allowed into this country. I had a saying that I was "just going to play the pokies to relax" and when I look back that was a stupid thing to say because really they were playing me and the only time I was relaxed was when I was in front of the machine and being harmed."



Shane

"Gambling started for me as a young 14yo boy whose family gambled a lot as it was very much the norm. Sadly this escalated when I turned 18 and I lost at least 80% of my pay every week to gambling on horses, sport and the pokies. I was so out of control I couldn't afford to attend work due to having no money to fill my ute with petrol, I had no control over my addiction and this was particularly hard as an apprentice plumber. This was a time of my life that should have been filled with exciting adventures but instead it was really embarrassing and sad. I remember people having really hurtful nicknames for me, as I would be forever borrowing money from them."



Anna

"I lost ten years of my life to poker machines, not only money, but time and every last shred of my self esteem. I had no idea that I was engaging with a dangerous product and once I was hooked it took years to get out from under the shame of that addiction. Gambling harm is real and deep, the costs are mammoth, both personally and more widely to our communities."

Mark

"I personally have saved a few thousand dollars over the months of lockdown. I am a disability support worker and I have a client that used to spend all his money on poker machines. He also has managed to save quite a substantial amount of money while poker machines have been switched off."

Libby

"I am 71 years old. I am an ex-teacher who also worked in government planning and commercial retail environments, before a severe gambling addiction to poker machines in the 1990's fractured my life. I lost everything including the sale proceeds of my home. Had it not been for the unfailing support and love of my children and my father who never gave up on me I would not be here now. I lost hundreds of thousands of dollars to gambling addiction, an addiction I never ever expected to have and certainly did not need. By the time I understood what was happening and finally faced it, my mental resources were so depleted that I took years to fight and overcome my gambling addiction."



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COUNCIL CANDIDATE POLICY GUIDE



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Between 2017 and 2018 \$5.8 billion were lost through gambling, with \$2.6 billion dollars of those being lost on poker machines.

\$7.4 million dollars is lost every day on poker machines in Victoria, across 485 venues with a combined total of 26,384 EGMs.

Local councils are well placed to promote and enhance community health and wellbeing across their municipalities, thanks to their responsibilities under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Local Government Act 1989.

HOW TO ADDRESS GAMBLING HARM AT A COUNCIL LEVEL

COUNCIL SOCIAL POLICY



A clear future vision to reduce gambling harm in a municipality and a commitment to treat gambling harm as a public health issue is required.

Measures can include:

- To not hold council events or activities at gambling venues
- To not make council grants available to venues or organisations that operate EGMs
- To not allow future poker machine on Council land, and plan and support the transition away from gambling use by existing venues
- To make organisations that operate EGMs ineligible for rates discounts.
- Discarding the phrases 'responsible gambling' and 'problem gambling' from council documents and discussions. These phrases reinforce stigma by placing responsibility for gambling harm and addiction on the individual instead of on the systems and structures in place that enable gambling harm
- Shift to the public health narrative of referring to 'gambling harm'



PLANNING & ENFORCEMENT



- Do an assessment of social and economic impacts of poker machine venue applications, and commit resources to opposing those that will negatively impact the community
- Maximise community awareness of and engagement with poker machine venue applications
- Ensure venues are compliant with planning and other requirements through active enforcement

ADVOCACY



- Advocate to state and federal governments for legislative reform to reduce and prevent gambling harm
- Create awareness in the local community by creating news stories around gambling harm and undertake other harm minimisation projects

1

State Government Advocacy Asks

1. Address gambling harm as a public health issue

Gambling harm impacts the entire community in a multitude of ways from emotional and financial, to family breakdown and mental ill-health. Harm is experienced by people who gamble and those close to them. State governments can holistically address the adverse impacts of gambling by taking a public health approach to policy interventions.

2. Ban inducements & loyalty schemes

Loyalty programs and inducements are commonly used by the gambling industry to recruit, retain and incentivise customers based on the amount of money they lose. They are particularly harmful because they encourage people to gamble longer and spend more than intended. State governments can reduce gambling harm by removing perverse incentives to gamble.

3. Reduce venue opening hours

Harm occurs in gambling pubs and clubs at all hours of the day, but especially after midnight. Existing shutdown requirements are ineffectual in addressing accessibility and harms as they apply in periods with very low demand. State governments can reduce gambling harm by extending shutdown periods and mandating closure of gambling rooms from midnight to 10am.

2

Federal Government Advocacy Asks

1. End gambling ads

Gambling advertising is known to encourage riskier betting, increase the amount of money bet, and elicit excitement that encourages people to bet even when they don't want to. Children are particularly vulnerable to this growing normalisation. The Federal Government can reduce harm by removing all forms of gambling advertising like it did with tobacco.

2. Close the loophole on credit

Gambling with borrowed money is well-established as a risk factor for harmful gambling. It doesn't make sense that credit restrictions placed on wagering firms and pay-day lenders do not also extend to banks. The Federal Government can reduce harm by prohibiting all forms of gambling with credit.

3. Federal oversight of wagering companies

The Northern Territory Racing Commission has become the primary regulator for sports gambling almost by default after 20 betting agencies established operations in Darwin for tax purposes. They are conflicted, and ill-equipped to effectively respond to gambling harm. The Federal Government can reduce harm by establishing a national gambling regulator with oversight and enforcement powers.

3

Local Government Advocacy Asks

1. Support gambling-free public space

Social isolation is a key risk factor to gambling harm, that's why communities need local, convenient and safe ways to connect with others that don't centre around gambling. Councils can play a crucial role in providing opportunities to socialise away from gambling through support for gambling-free public spaces and programs like Libraries After Dark.

2. Back gambling-free community sport

There is no place for gambling in community sport. Years of insufficient funding has seen a growing dependency on sponsors and grants funded through the profits of gambling harm. Councils can play an active role in supporting community clubs and codes to go gambling-free through business planning support and conditional access to public grants and facilities.

3. Stop the expansion of gambling in our suburbs & towns

Nobody wants to see more suburban-casinos. They are a drain on communities already exposed to more poker machines per person in the world. Councils can support their communities by opposing new venue applications where there is a "net detriment" to the community and committing resources to defending against negative impacts on the community.

