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Mental Health Royal Commission fails to address gambling harm in its final report

A major contributor to mental ill-health has been all but ignored in the [Final Report](#) handed down today by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Alliance for Gambling Reform Chief Advocate, the Rev Tim Costello, said he was astounded that gambling harm barely received a cursory mention in the Final Report.

"We raised gambling harm as a significant contributor and connector to mental ill-health in [our submission to the Royal Commission](#) seeking for gambling harm to be addressed in the Terms of Reference for the Commission," Rev Costello said. "We also [raised concerns when the Interim Report](#) was handed down in November 2019, but it seems it was to no avail.

"It's a massive failing to have neglected to address gambling harm in such an important report. It is an appalling oversight of a major public health issue inextricably intertwined with mental ill-health.

"The link between gambling harm and mental ill-health is well-known, and it sadly extends well beyond financial losses. We know people experiencing gambling harm suffer higher rates of mental-ill health, and people suffering mental ill-health are also more vulnerable to gambling harm.

"Not addressing gambling harm in this Final Report is effectively ignoring an issue that is a contributor to homelessness, family violence, mental ill-health and even some deaths by suicide."

An opportunity for gambling reform that could have led to improved mental health for many people was also missed by failing to consider gambling harm in this Royal Commission, Rev Costello said.

"We saw that during COVID while poker machines were shutdown many people were happier and less stressed. They weren't losing money and could pay bills. \$1.8 billion was saved from being lost on poker machines during the shutdown, which says a lot about how big of a problem gambling harm is in our communities," Rev Costello said.

"Then when [machines came back on](#) there were still measures in place that reduced harm, such as shorter opening hours and less machines available. This really helped our communities. If gambling harm had been considered in this Royal Commission then sensible measures such as [closing poker machine venues at midnight](#) could have been recommended to improve mental health.

"Many of the mental health issues associated with gambling harm are fundamentally preventable if concerted action is taken. This Final Report has many recommendations for early interventions to reduce the risk of mental ill-health. It's a shameful missed opportunity that addressing gambling harm is not among these recommendations that will be adopted."

Despite the lack of consideration of gambling harm in the Final Report, Rev Costello said he was encouraged that the Victorian Government had committed to adopt the report's recommendations.

"There is no point holding a Royal Commission into an issue if you then just read the report and put it on a shelf. These are important, expensive and time consuming processes and heeding the recommendations of a Royal Commission is imperative to their effectiveness," he said.

"That's why with the [recently-announced Royal Commission into Crown Resorts](#) it's important that the Victorian Government commits to implementing its recommendations.

"We need to have faith that the very serious issues that will undoubtedly be raised through the Crown Royal Commission will be addressed effectively and without interference from big business."

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See [here](#) for a gambling language guide for journalists.