



Victorian Government needs to protect the community from online betting businesses greed

September 2018

“Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” Luke 12:15

In our Christian faith we understand that greed is malevolent because greed obtains unneeded wealth for one’s self at the expense of another. Thomas Aquinas put it this way, greed “is a sin directly against one’s neighbour, since one man cannot over-abound in external riches, without another man lacking them.” Online betting businesses have shown they are happy to pursue maximising profits for their owners at the expense of people gambling more than they can afford to lose, leaving in their wake marriage breakdowns, family violence and mental health problems.

The owners of online betting businesses have been allowed to act on their greed and inflict this harm on our communities to the extent that Australian Governments have allowed them to do so.

On 8 September 2017 the government ministers from across Australia responsible for regulating gambling agreed to a National Consumer Protection Framework over online betting businesses. The framework had the following requirements:

- A national Self-Exclusion Register for online betting businesses, so that people can ban themselves from betting with any of the Australian-based online betting companies;
- A system that will invite people to set themselves a limit on how much they can afford to lose to the online betting businesses;
- A ban on online betting businesses being able to offer inducements for people to open a betting account with. State Governments that wish to may ban all forms of inducements from online betting businesses targeted at getting people to lose more money;
- Provision of gambling activity statements on demand and on a regular basis so people gambling know how much they are losing;
- That messaging around the risks of gambling be implemented with a nationally consistent set of standards, based on evidence for gambling messaging relevant to online betting.
- That staff of online betting businesses be trained in the responsible conduct of gambling; and
- Make it easier for people gambling to close their online betting account when they wish to do so.

In the middle of this year the Victorian Parliament passed a law that allows the Victorian gambling minister, Marlene Kairouz, to issue the regulations that implement the details of the above measures. One issue of significant concern is that the Victorian Government does not ban all forms of inducements from online betting businesses that seek to get people to gamble more. Inducements come in many forms, such as offering ‘free’ money to bet with or offering bonus bets if you place bets. There is a significant risk that the Victorian Government will only ban inducements from the businesses that are targeted at getting people to open a betting account. However, inducements targeted at people that are already losing more money gambling than they can afford do far more harm and should be banned.

Recent research commissioned by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation found that online wagering companies are using direct marketing channels, like SMS, to advertise inducements to people gambling regularly on sports and racing that effectively encourage them to gamble more frequently and with larger amounts of money, thereby increasing their risk of harm.

The pushing of advertisements and inducements is relentless, as one person who was suffering harm from gambling told the researchers:

Well they just hammer you with unlimited amounts of texts and emails about different offers or money back things or put money in and we'll give you free bets and all that sort of thing. So that never stops, you just get hammered with that all the time which, you know what I mean. Yeah, well I don't know what to say about it, but yeah, it's full on and never stops.

The research found that:

- people targeted with inducements placed more bets, impulsive bets, riskier bets and larger bets;
- wagering advertisements and inducements lower the perception of risk of people gambling and increase their betting spend;
- advertisements carrying inducements bring about physical reactions of excitement in vulnerable people, changing their heart rate and eye movement;
- inducements may pay for themselves through increased gambling losses by the people who access them; and
- inducement information in advertisements overrides attention of the person gambling to gambling warning messages.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters and e-mails to:

The Hon Marlene Kairouz MP
Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming & Liquor
Regulation
Level 26, 121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3001

The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP
Premier
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, VIC 3002

E-mail: daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

Salutation: Dear Minister

Salutation: Dear Premier

E-mail: marlene.kairouz@parliament.vic.gov.au

Points to make in your letters or e-mails:

- Express deep concern at the level of harm that online betting businesses are causing in the community, including suicides, family violence and mental health problems.
- Welcome the commitment of the Victorian Government to the National Consumer Protection Framework for online wagering businesses and the passage of the *Liquor and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2018* to give the Minister the power to implement the Framework.
- Ask that the Minister exercise her power to ban all forms of inducements offered by online wagering businesses and not just those offered to get someone to open a betting account. Point out that inducements targeted at people who are already gambling heavily are likely to cause them to lose significantly more than they can afford.