

BCH POSITION STATEMENTS

Date: April 2018



Gambling Harm

BCH Role

Ballarat Community Health (BCH) recognises that gambling harm impacts many within our community and is a significant cause of inequality and hardship. BCH is working to reduce the harms caused by gambling by:

- i. Raising awareness of gambling harms
- ii. Challenging the normalisation of gambling
- iii. Advocating for effective reform of the gambling industry
- iv. Leading and facilitating the Ballarat Interagency Taskforce on Gambling

BCH, together with the Ballarat Interagency Taskforce on Gambling, is a supporter of the national organisation, *Alliance for Gambling Reform*¹.

Key Messages - Gambling

- Australians spend more per person on gambling than any other country in the world - almost double the rate of New Zealand.
- Australians spend more money gambling than on other activities that can be addictive and dangerous including alcohol, tobacco and all illegal drugs. It is a major driver of household debt, and family and personal dysfunction.



- For every person directly harmed by gambling, between five and ten friends, family and others, including employers are also affected.
- Relationship breakdown, stress, depression, family violence, child neglect, crime, suicidal thoughts and suicide are some of the impacts of gambling.
- There has been a rapid growth in online gambling and sports betting in recent years, however poker machines remain the number one cause of gambling losses and gambling harm – 3 in 4 problem gamblers have problems with poker machines.

- Prolific advertising means children and young people may be repeatedly exposed to positive messages about gambling: (TV, print media, billboards, social media and through sponsorship of sporting events/teams). Advertisements often use humour, normalise gambling and imply winning is easy.
- Governments are conflicted – they are responsible for regulation of gambling and preventing harm but are also reliant on gambling as a major source of taxation revenue.
- Key messages from governments and industry focus on responsible gambling and emphasise individual responsibility, however, when it has been shown that poker machines are designed for addiction, this is counterproductive.

Key Messages - Poker Machines

- Poker machines remain the leading cause of gambling losses and gambling related harm.
- Australia has more poker machines per head of population than anywhere else in the world.
- Poker machines are engineered to cause addiction. They account for \$11 billion of Australia's total gambling losses in clubs and pubs alone.
- The Victorian government draws \$1.1 billion in annual pokies tax revenue.
- Some of our largest companies, sporting clubs and investment funds have a vested interest in poker machine gambling including Woolworths and many AFL clubs.
- Poker machine gambling venues often market themselves to families with playrooms and family friendly dining options. Research suggests this early exposure of children and young people to poker machine gambling normalises gambling and increases their intent to gamble.
- Ballarat data² (2016/17):
 - 663 poker machines spread over 15 venues.
 - \$54.5 million lost on poker machines – that's \$149,500 per day
 - Ranked 21 out of 70 LGAs for poker machine losses in Victoria
- BCH supports the regulatory controls recommended by the Productivity Commission³ and the Alliance for Gambling Reform¹. Broadly these aim to:
 - a) Make the machines less dangerous (maximum bets of \$1 - currently \$5, remove deceptive features such as 'near misses' and 'losses disguised as wins'. Give all gamblers control over their spending through pre-commitment).
 - b) Restrict access (by reducing poker machine numbers and trading hours).

Ballarat Community Health provides advocacy in this area. For more information contact:

- Ms Louise Feery, Manager Health promotion, 5338 4518
- Dr Deborah Greenslade, Research Coordinator, 5338 4569

References

1. Alliance for Gambling Reform <http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/>
2. Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation <https://www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au>
3. Productivity Commission Inquiry Report 2010 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/gambling-2009/report>

Process for approval of Position Statements:

- Review/approval by Team Leader
- Review/approval by Management Group
- Register of statements is maintained by the CEO's office, along with master copies
- Once finalised, Position Statements are made available on the shared drive, included in the Thursday Update and provided to the Board of Directors.