

Minimising the harm caused by gambling

We are seeking:

For the State Government to build on their significant Pokies reforms, to be introduced by mid-2024, to:

1. Expand the mandatory closure periods from 4am-10am to midnight to 10am.
2. With reference to the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003*, introduce tighter controls on what constitutes a reportable and auditable 'community benefit' to ensure funds are directed to genuine community development activities.
3. Introduce a sinking cap on the number of EGM's in Banyule.
4. Implement a comprehensive ban on all forms of advertising for online gambling, to be introduced in four phases, over three years, commencing immediately.



Break down of Gambling Harm

Background

There are at least 30,000 people in Victoria with a serious gambling problem and about 80% are associated with the use of pokies.¹

There are 635 poker machines located in nine venues in the City of Banyule. In 2022-23, this cost Banyule residents over \$57 million.

Gambling-related harm is any adverse consequence due to gambling that negatively impacts on the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community or population. The problematic use of pokies costs our communities. The social costs are clear – financial, emotional and psychological costs, relationship and family impacts, loss of workplace productivity. Financially, gambling has cost the Victorian community an estimated \$7 billion.²

People affected by someone else's gambling account for around 14 per cent of total harm. Evidence shows that gambling harm is not evenly distributed.

Gamblers on higher incomes spend more money than those on lower incomes – something reflected in Banyule's gambling losses – but in relative terms it is people on lower incomes who lose the most.

More vulnerable and disadvantaged groups also tend to have more issues with gambling.

This includes multi-cultural, multi-faith communities, people experiencing homelessness, unemployed people, people experiencing mental health issues, alcohol and drug users, and people with lower incomes and socio-economic status generally. Therefore, when addressing gambling we are dealing with issues of social justice.

Evidence for reform

Successive State Governments have introduced a range of reforms to address gambling harm. These include reducing the maximum bet, removing ATM's from gambling venues, and restricting smoking and trading hours. These gambling reforms work. In the twenty years from 2002 to 2022, gambling losses in Banyule have trended steadily downwards.

Council recognises that gambling is a legal activity, stronger regulation is required to further reduce gambling harm. These strategies need to focus on reducing the number of Electronic Gambling Machines in Banyule, reducing operating hours, addressing advertising and promotion, and encouraging venues to act as responsible corporate citizens.

Gambling is a public health issue

Gambling-related harm impacts health and wellbeing³

- Problem gambling has a comparable effect to having bipolar disorder or migraine
- Moderate-risk gambling is as harmful as mild alcohol use disorder
- Low-risk gambling is comparable to having hearing loss or moderate anxiety disorders.

Poker machine reform needs a public health approach

The focus on individual responsibility is flawed

Most gambling related regulations and policies focus on individual responsibility rather than industry regulation.

This approach has failed to protect those most vulnerable to the harmful effects of gaming and is compounded by the location and density of gaming venues in areas of social and economic disadvantage.

Losses are coming from communities that can least afford it. An approach that focusses on individuals and 'problem gamblers' fails to recognise that gaming machines as a product are harmful and misleading and need reform – along with the legislative framework around which

Long term impacts of gambling harm⁴

Gambling harms irrevocably affect an individual's life course. For example, the impacts of bankruptcy and relationship breakdown may cause homelessness and disrupt career development.

Intergenerational harms are legacy harms that go beyond the gambler's life course and transfer to the next generation. Parental poverty as a result of gambling could impact on children throughout their lifespan.

We need to break the cycle of harm⁵

The 2020-21 *Ten to Men: The Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health* found that more than 2 in 5 men gamble and most men who gamble spend money on multiple gambling activities.

Further research shows that men are significantly more likely to play higher denomination EGM's and to bet more than one credit per line.

Men are also significantly more likely to gamble for social reasons or general entertainment and moderate risk. Yet men are far less likely to seek help for problem gambling.

they operate. Legislative reform will have the most impact on reducing the harm from gambling – not more programs aimed at 'problem gamblers'.

A public health approach

The health and wellbeing of Victorians must be put ahead of gambling and this can only be achieved through a comprehensive public health approach. Public health based regulatory reforms and policies have led to significant social outcomes in Australia.

The positive outcomes from road safety and anti-smoking initiatives are two examples. A similar public health approach should be taken on gambling.



Banyule
City Council

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Michele Purtle
Advocacy Lead
Banyule City Council

 Michele.Purtle@
banyule.vic.gov.au

 0419 397 290

 banyule.vic.gov.au

¹ www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/gambling-2010/report

² Browne, M., Langham, E., Rawat, V., Greer, N., Li, E., Rose, J. et al. (2016). *Assessing gambling-related harm in Victoria: A public health perspective*. Melbourne: Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (Online).

³ Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/167/Harm-study-Fact-sheet-3-Affect-on-health-and-wellbeing.pdf>

⁴ <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/165/Harm-study-Fact-sheet-1-Conceptual-framework-of-harm.pdf>

⁵ <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/76/Research-report-comparative-study-of-men-and-women-gamblers.pdf>