

Submission to
Joint Select Committee on
Future Gaming Markets
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Authorised by

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Introduction

Relationships Australia Tasmania (RA Tas) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets and commends the Tasmanian Government for providing a platform for community members and organisations to provide views and feedback on this very important social issue.

RA Tas strongly supports a framework that sees problem gambling as a public health matter that should be addressed in the way that any other public health issue would be dealt with. RA Tas fully supports the submission provided by Anglicare Tasmania and as such wishes to provide some brief commentary on the experience of our clients in this submission.

Relationships Australia Tasmania

RA Tas has been a leading provider of specialist relationship and family support services for more than 65 years in Tasmania. We are committed to enhancing the lives of communities, families and individuals and supporting positive and respectful relationships.

RA Tas employs 150 staff across Tasmania and works with more than 8,000 clients each year providing counselling, dispute resolution, personal development and education, parenting skills training, men's and family relationships programs, early intervention services, child-focused programs and practices, and programs that specifically engage Aboriginal people, families and communities.

RA Tas has established a strong presence in the general Tasmanian community, delivering a range of services at a statewide level.

The following is a list of services we offer:

- Counselling
- Children's Contact Service
- Parenting Orders Program
- Just for Kids Supporting Children After Separation
- Family and Relationship Education
- Aboriginal Counselling and Community Support
- Reconnect - support for youth
- Gamblers Help
- Dispute Resolution and Mediation
- Family Law Pathways Network
- Employee Assistance and Professional Development
- Past Adoption Support Service
- Child and Adolescent Services Unit (CASU)
- Community Based Mental Health Services
- Find and Connect Support Services
- Young Aboriginal Support Services (yAsp)
- Family Relationship Centres
- Royal Commission Support Service
- Partners In Recovery
- Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Community Network

Our Experience

RA Tas has delivered individual counselling and group sessions under the Gamblers Help program in conjunction with Anglicare Tasmania for almost 10 years. In 2015, RA Tas counsellors worked with 147 individuals over 626 sessions.

Of those clients it is estimated that up to 80 per cent of them experience another co-existing issue alongside their gambling issue. This is often related to secure housing, alcohol and drug use, mental health issues and or other family issues. According to the Victorian Responsible Gaming Foundation, 50–70 per cent of problem gamblers have a co-occurring alcohol use disorder¹ with more than 25 per cent of problem gamblers experiencing both alcohol abuse and/or severe mental health disorders. Additionally, we also know that the strategies used to cope with triggers, manage cravings and prevent relapses are similar for people experiencing substance use issues and those with problem gambling issues. So too is the stigma, shame and feelings of being powerless to control the problem.

The impact of these issues on individuals, families and the community can be extreme. And we know that when they converge, it is even more substantial. The complexity of issues that many individuals present with is difficult to manage and often results in intensive case management and counselling support being provided to these individuals.

Case Studies

From the 147 clients that accessed gambling support services at RA Tas in 2015, here are a couple of case studies that highlight the multitude of impacts problem gambling has had on some of these clients.

Rob, 36

- Rob is in his thirties and was a CEO of a global business.
- He started gambling on pokies in his twenties and is now serving a 20 month prison sentence because he stole \$150 000 from his employer.
- His wife and three children now live with extended family because the family home was sold to pay his debts.
- Rob has been hospitalised as the result of suicide attempts.
- Rob is now seen at the Prison by our one of our counsellors.

¹ Miller & Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2014a.

Judy, 49

- Judy is a middle-aged woman, married, with four adult children and six grandchildren.
- Judy is a professional woman who works in the health industry in a senior management role.
- Judy secretly gambled tens of thousands of dollars on the pokies over a two year period.
- Judy had self-exclusions but she would gamble without being “caught”.
- However, she was once escorted from a poker machine venue by security whilst gambling with a friend.
- Judy’s friend had no idea of the full extent of her gambling problem and why security was called.
- Judy hasn’t gambled for years and attends RA for counselling and Gamblers Help support group.

Dawn, 82

- Her husband of 60 years died 18 months ago and her 44 year old son moved in to the family home (with his girlfriend) to look after his mother.
- He was given power of attorney so he could look after her financial affairs.
- Dawn went to take some money out of the bank and there didn’t seem to be much there.
- Her son had spent \$96 000 in that time, usually in \$500 cash advances from an ATM.
- He then used the money on the poker machines (and alcohol) at his local hotel.
- This money was the superannuation from Dawn’s husband.
- Dawn has now had to sell her home of 45 years and move interstate to live with her adult daughter.

*All names provided are pseudonym

Recommendations

Review the “Gamble Responsibly” campaign

The Government messaging aimed to reduce harm, “Gamble Responsibly”, should be reviewed to address the stigmatisation associated with gambling addiction and the message that there is, in fact, a safe level of gambling.

Community attitudes in relation to gambling are addressed by the government

As quoted by Anglicare Tasmania, in 2015 over 80 per cent of the 1, 000 Tasmanians surveyed agreed that the Tasmanian community had not benefitted from having poker machines in hotels and clubs.

Provide training for venue/gaming staff in relation to harm minimisation (self-exclusions, bet limits, etc)

In the absence of a policy decision to remove poker machines from clubs and pubs altogether, a public interest test should be applied to new and existing licences as they are renewed

This would provide communities with the opportunity to participate in the debate.

Parliament undertake to publicly debate the terms for any new deed including the value of the licence and its term, as well as taxation rates and licence fees for casino gambling and keno

This should include the imposition of the equivalent of the existing Community Support Levy on all machines in the casinos. It is well known that the negotiation of the deed in 2003 was done without community consultation and was found by the Public Accounts Committee to be inadequate.

Conclusion

RA Tas strongly supports a framework that sees gambling problems as a public health matter that should be addressed in the way that any other public health issue would be dealt with. In line with Anglicare’s comments, we agree that if a public health approach guides this important public policy issue then many of the compounding risk factors will be subsequently reduced.

As demonstrated above in the case studies provided by RA Tas counsellors, poker machines are damaging in their design and accessibility and historically, harm minimisation methods have not worked. Therefore, it is recommended that the State Government place restrictions on where poker machines are able to be located and operated from. RA Tas is strongly in support of the model that sees poker machines only operating in casinos.

RA Tas thanks the Joint Select Committee members for their commitment to consultation in providing interested stakeholders with the opportunity to feed into this process. This response is informed by the experience and expertise of RA Tas staff, in particular, specialists who provide services to clients with gambling issues.