Position Statement

Gambling and gambling harm

Gambling has become increasingly embedded in everyday life in Australia. Betting advertisements are constant during live sport, poker machines are a fixture in pubs and clubs, and lottery tickets are widely available at supermarkets and post offices.

This widespread accessibility has normalised gambling and driven high participation. Nearly three in four Australians gamble at least once each year, and almost half of those who gamble experience some level of risk of harm. At the same time, Australians lose more money per person to gambling than people in any other country.

Gambling harm is not just about individual behaviour. It is driven by the design of gambling products, the environments in which they are offered, and the regulatory settings that allow highly addictive forms of gambling to proliferate. Addressing gambling harm therefore requires structural reform.

Our Experience

The Anglicare Australia Network works with people experiencing financial hardship, housing stress, family violence and other forms of disadvantage in communities across the country. Through emergency relief, financial counselling and community services, our members regularly see the impacts of gambling harm on individuals, families and communities.

Gambling losses can push people into severe financial hardship, leaving them unable to pay rent, utility bills or other essential expenses. In many cases, people seek help only after significant debts have accumulated or when their financial situation has reached crisis point.

Our members also report that gambling harm can intensify other forms of disadvantage. Financial stress linked to gambling losses can contribute to relationship breakdown, family violence and housing instability. For people already experiencing poverty or financial insecurity, gambling harm can quickly escalate into a cycle of debt and crisis.

These experiences demonstrate that gambling harm is not an isolated issue. It is closely connected to broader social and economic inequalities and requires a public health response.

Key Issues

Australia has high levels of gambling harm

It is hard not to notice the increasing influence of gambling on everyday life. Ads for betting websites are constant during live sport, pokie machines remain a staple of pubs and clubs across the country, and lottery tickets can be bought at basically every post office. The widespread accessibility of gambling has led to an increase in the number of Australians who participate, with nearly three in four Australians gambling at least once a year.[1]

It is not simply that these numbers are inflated by Australians who put a yearly punt on the Melbourne Cup, 46 percent of people who gambled are at some level of risk of gambling harm.[2] Per capita, Australians are the biggest online gambling losers in the world.[3]

Much of the focus on gambling harm has centred on the rise in accessibility through online gambling, but the most common form of gambling that Australians participate in is lotteries or 'scratchies'.[4] Additionally, the biggest financial losses sustained through gambling occur in physical locations, such as clubs with pokie machines. In 2022-23, Australians collectively suffered a net loss on pokie machines of $15.76 billion, over 50 percent of total gambling losses.[5]

In 2019, there was at least one electronic gaming machine for every 131 Australians. This makes Australia one of the worst countries in the world for electronic machine density, with only Japan and casino destination countries like Macao placing ahead.[6] Not only do we have a greater concentration of pokie machines, Australian pokie machines are high-intensity, with high stakes and a fast rate of play. Used at their maximum rate, the expected loss is about $1,200 an hour.[7] In most other countries, pokie machines like Australia's are limited to casinos, but in Australia 93 percent of machines are located outside of casinos.[8] Research suggests that despite only having 0.3 percent of the global population, Australia is home to 76 percent of all pokie machines in the world outside of casinos.[9]

Gambling advertising is widespread and normalised

Despite some tightening of advertising rules by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) regarding gambling in 2018, the industry spent $238.6 million on gambling advertising on free-to-air television, metropolitan radio, and online platforms between 2022 and 2023.[10] This saw over one million ads aired on free-to-air television and radio, with 50 percent of these ads promoted online gambling services.[11] The Parliamentary Inquiry into Gambling Harm found that Australians are increasingly frustrated with the intensity and prevalence of gambling advertising.[12]

Gambling in sports has become increasingly pervasive. Gambling companies spend big on professional sporting codes in Australia, and there is plenty of financial incentive for the codes to cooperate. In fact, reporting by the ABC revealed that many of Australia's top sporting bodies, such as the NRL, AFL, Football Australia and Cricket Australia, have deals with major bookmakers to receive a commission on gambling profits. Further, the clubs themselves have a financial incentive to sign sponsorships with gambling companies, with ten of the 16 NRL clubs having a gambling sponsor. The problem is further compounded by the fact that many venues owned by clubs and leagues operate pokie machines. Reporting from the ABC found that Australians lost more than $110 million to pokie machines in venues owned by Victorian football clubs, including AFL teams like Carlton and Essendon, and VFL clubs like the Werribee Tigers. While there have been moves by governments and some sporting codes to reduce the presence of gambling in professional sport, the financial incentive still remains high.

Gambling harm is linked to broader social harms

Suffering from gambling harm leads to a higher risk of perpetrating domestic and family violence (DFV). Research suggests that nearly 20 percent of problem/moderate risk gamblers reported being a perpetrator of DFV in the past 12 months, compared to just nine percent for non-problem gamblers.[13] Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that women suffering from gambling harm increases their risk of being a victim of DFV.[14]

Recently released research from the Australian National University showed that there was a strong correlation between electronic gaming machines and rates of domestic violence. It found that domestic violence incidents increased by more than 30 percent in areas that had a higher density of electronic gaming machines than average, and where coverage of GambleAware services is sparce.[15]

Taking action to minimise gambling harm can be undertaken through a number of measures. First and foremost, the Federal Government should act on the recommendations handed to it by the Inquiry into Online Gambling chaired by Peta Murphy. These recommendations include a comprehensive ban on advertising for online gambling, stronger regulations and consumer protections, a more powerful watchdog,

and banning inducements like referral bonuses. Other harm reduction measures include cashless gaming cards, such as those proposed by Anglicare Tasmania.[16] Despite previously having been committed to such a reform, the Tasmanian government has since walked back their support due to a lack of a national approach. The Victorian and New South Wales governments have been trialling schemes to push towards a fully cashless approach, but progress has been slow.

Recommended Actions

Anglicare Australia calls for:

- Full implementation of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Online Gambling, including a phased ban on gambling advertising.
- Stronger regulation of online gambling, including bans on inducements such as sign-up bonuses and referral promotions.
- The creation of a national gambling regulator with stronger enforcement powers and responsibility for reducing gambling harm.
- The expansion of funding for gambling harm support services, including financial counselling, family support and community education.
- Federal Government leadership on the introduction of mandatory cashless gaming systems for poker machines, allowing people to set spending limits and track losses.

1 Australian Gambling Research Centre (2023) Gambling participation and experience of harm in Australia.
2 Ibid.
3 Alliance for Gambling Reform (2022) Supplementary submission to Inquiry into Online Gambling and Its Impacts on Those Experiencing Gambling Harm.
4 Ibid.
5 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025) Gambling.
6 Grattan Institute (2024) A better bet: How Australia should prevent gambling harm.
7 Ibid.
8 Queensland Government Statistician's Office (2023) Australian Gambling Statistics. 38th edition.
9 Australia Institute (2017) Pokies pub test.
10 Australian Communications and media Authority (2023) Gambling advertising in Australia: placement and spending.
11 Ibid.
12 Parliament of Australia (2023) You win some, you lose more: Online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm.
13 Dowling N.A., et al (2018) Problem gambling and family violence: Findings from a population-representative study.
14 National Library of Medicine (2022) An integrative review of research on gambling and domestic and family violence: Fresh perspectives to guide future research.
15 ANU Centre for Gambling Research (2025) Family and domestic violence and gambling harm in NSW: developing the evidence base.
16 Anglicare Tasmania (2023) The poker machine card. Simple as.

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