

Shifting Paradigms: Vision Workshop Summary 2007

As part of the GIS hosted seminar Shifting Paradigms: Towards A Public health Approach to Gambling a vision workshop was facilitated with participants to consider the strengths and weakness of the current approach to problem gambling in NSW and develop some proposals/suggestions for the future direction of policy developments and help services in the field. A full report from this activity along with presentations from the seminar will be made available online at www.gisnsw.org.au. GIS Chairperson Kate Roberts has summarised some of the main issues raised through this exercise and has collated the main comments/suggestions for future direction under relevant health promotion headings.

This exercise facilitated by John Stansfield, CEO of the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand, gave participants an opportunity to consider perceptions of the problem, and both the strength and weaknesses of the current situation with regards gambling and problem gambling in NSW. Participants were asked a series of questions and came up with ideas primarily focused on the following areas, summarised under thematic headings which emerged in collating the material.

Governance

There were many issues raised which related to the governance of problem gambling issues within NSW. Many participants felt that there was a direct conflict of interest between the government department with the responsibility for gambling and treatment services for problem gambling (Office of Liquor Gaming - OLGR) and the fact that this office is primarily responsible for regulation of the gambling industry. Comments such as, "there are vested interests within RGF", "There is a conflict of interest – govt, industry and help services".

There was a general perception that gambling harm was being minimised by vested interest "Not really acknowledging the harm done – minimising the problem" and a sense that government dependence on gambling revenue was restricting appropriate policy development. There was a general feeling of lack of transparency in governance, "Government is dependent on taxes and gambling revenue", "Government is not being transparent in its disbursements". Money is flowing but not transparent, therefore hard to get individual information and not allowing public to access".

In addition there was a general sense of weakness in the government's ability to respond appropriately to problem gambling issues from this particular office "OLGR capacity to respond is limited both by policy and the organisational culture". "OLGR as the primary agency – has an industry regulatory focus, this causes potential conflict of interest, and doesn't have a cultural fit with human service models", "OLGR organisational structure creates barriers".

Additionally, there was a belief that government and the gambling industry were trying to shift blame for gambling problems "There is an abdication of responsibility for problem gambling by gov't and the gambling industry – often shifting blame to individuals and help services"

Current Policy Direction & Funding

Whilst it was acknowledged that current NSW government policy was focusing on treatment for individuals and therefore developing services accordingly, it was felt that a significant weakness in this focus was to ignore those at risk of gambling problems and to pathologise the problem ‘Not looking at problem as a community issue only as an individual issue’. ‘Funding body restricts directly & indirectly the way we approach PG i.e. keeping it seen as an individual problem.’

It was held that this approach severely limited the effectiveness of service in building community capacity on this issues and restricted services, within in a competitive tendering environment, to work in isolation from each other and without regional strategies, ‘PG service working in ‘silos’ (isolation from each other) as opposed to integrated across regions.’, ‘Trying to work differently appears to be in conflict of the interests of the funding body and/or employer.’ ‘Vested interests in maintaining the status quo’. As a result, there was a perceived lack of coordination in:

- Funding
- Central vision
- Continuity
- Resources – skills & knowledge

There was a general perception that the current model was limiting, ‘the limits of focussing on traditional treatment model because it’s easily measured’, ‘model excludes a large number of clients’ and ‘the current approach excludes other major stakeholders e.g. local govt, counselling service, mental health services, community health, GIS, consumers etc.

Lack of Community Awareness

The participants raised concern about the general lack of community awareness about problem gambling and frustration in trying to get messages out to the broader der community ‘How do we get the knowledge of gambling harm out into the public arena? Along with its causal associations’ ‘The issue of shame, secrecy and need for client confidentiality maintains the inability of people to be self advocates’. ‘This tension also affects PG services - it may be a strength for PG services to be low profile but remaining low profile we don’t empower or advocate on behalf of our clients. This links strongly to gambling itself – winners & losers’ ‘Lack of understanding of the extent of harm, perspective of harm being only to the individual’.

Suggested Solutions/Strategies (Macro)

Build Healthy Public Policy

Commit to a public health model & get problem gambling out of OLGR and into NSW Health Dept.

Independent body to manage funding

Eliminate conflict of interest.

Develop openness and transparency

Review legislation/regulations & technical standards with a focus on product safety

Delegation/action plan with accountability to individuals

Transparency with where money goes.

Develop an Integrated targeted approach to the distribution of funding

Manage funding issues

More money to community projects/initiatives

Reorient Health Services

Develop a shared theory/vision

People developing big picture approach to PG – looking outside the square.

Develop a multifaceted PG sector including: treatment, early intervention, prevention, community capacity building etc

Put down barriers between organisations

Develop a holistic approach to PG

Develop a new policy framework which incorporates this multi focus

Strengthen Community Action

Build community capacity

Better awareness strategies

Integration of gambling services creates higher profile for PG and promotes community involvement

Increase community participation and empowerment

Develop advocacy and build strategies alliances

Increased dialogue between government and community/PGg sector, consumers and other stakeholders.

Create Supportive Environments

Raise community awareness:

Educate all stakeholders including Govt & industry

Newsletter

Develop a product safety & safe gambling practices focus:

Consider technical changes needed for EGM product safety and safe practices

Consider Smartcard technology

Receipt /invoice provided to gamblers

Promote non – gambling revenue streams in venues,
reward those venues who do this

Smoking policies

Develop Personal Skills

Build skills in health promotion, community advocacy & capacity building

Train counsellors, consumers, community members

Suggested Solutions/Strategies (Micro)

Reorient Health Services

Develop a unified approach which includes partnerships and a sense of joint ownership.

Counsellors/helpers need to consider new roles e.g. public speaking, community action, coaching to clients etc

Attending forums/workshops/meetings

Strengthen Community Action

School education

Public address to existing community groups/churches neighbourhood centre, sporting clubs etc

Find a celebrity gambler who can tell story with a public health/harm prevention focus

Facilitate problem gamblers and their families (clients) to develop activist skills

Motivate PG to empower themselves to become part of the reconstruction of their services.

Very important to empower problem gamblers and their families. A very important model from advocacy. The difficulty is it is

incremental.

Lobbying

Become a squeaky wheel

Writing letters to MP

Radio coverage with "plants" (ask other to call in and comment)

Networking and developing a united front

Lobby Gov't to be more transparent

Develop more political clout

Seek whistle blowers

Create Supportive Environments

Raise community awareness:

Actual problem gamblers telling their stories not just individually but on social network.

Consistent dissemination of information

Newsletter

Develop Personal Skills

Better quality support groups linked to PG services for:

Stress

Anger

Relaxation

Encourages strategies & coping skills, opens people up to services. Gives a break from gambling.

Also for family/support people.

Coordination of alternative activities for those affected:

Social activities

Outlets for emotional expression

Discussing Centrelink with community programs