

SUBMISSION

**PREPARED BY THE ABORIGINAL HEALTH & MEDICAL
RESEARCH COUNCIL OF NSW**

**FOR: THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY ON
THE GAMBLING INDUSTRY**

March 2009

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW (AH&MRC) welcomes the decision of the Council of Australian Governments to conduct an inquiry on Australia's gambling industry. The AH&MRC has been involved over several years with developing and implementing responses to gambling-related issues for Aboriginal people and communities in NSW. This submission draws on this work to provide information relevant to the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

The submission starts by providing some relevant background information about the AH&MRC and its work, in Section 2. Section 3 outlines key findings of the AH&MRC Gambling Research Project. This project explored the issue of gambling for NSW Aboriginal communities in 2005-2007, including identifying possible strategies to address gambling related problems. The research was funded by the Responsible Gambling Fund, of the NSW Government's Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, and involved a comprehensive literature review, interviews and a survey. Informants included Aboriginal community members, ACCHS staff, gambling treatment providers, and other stakeholders. Findings and their implications are summarised in Section 3, and have been published in a research report and a community report "Pressing Problems" – these publications are attached to this submission, and are available for download from the AH&MRC website – www.ahmrc.org.au.

The findings of the AH&MRC Gambling Research Project has been used to inform the development and implementation of an ongoing program at the AH&MRC that aims to address gambling issues for Aboriginal communities in NSW. The activities and achievements of this program are described in Section 4.

2. BACKGROUND

The AH&MRC is the peak organisation for Aboriginal Community Controlled health organisations in NSW, and represents more than 50 member organisations. These include Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs), Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Committees, and Aboriginal Health Related Services.

All Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations are governed by Aboriginal community members. Core business for ACCHSs is to deliver comprehensive primary health care to Aboriginal people and their communities. Comprehensive primary health care can include a wide range of services, and is premised on a holistic definition of Aboriginal health, which has been defined in the National Aboriginal Health Strategy:

"Aboriginal health is not just the physical well being of an individual but is the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential thereby bringing about the total well being of their community. It is a whole-of-life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life"¹

The AH&MRC undertakes a range of activities, including: supporting and representing member services; developing and implementing statewide public health programs; workforce development through education and training; undertaking, supporting and reviewing research; and working with government and non-government partners. The AH&MRC has a Partnership Agreement with the NSW Government renewed in April 2008 that commits both parties to work together to improve

¹ National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party 1989, *A National Aboriginal Health Strategy*, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra.

Aboriginal health, and a research partnership – the Coalition for Research to Improve Aboriginal Health (CRIA) – with the Sax Institute. The AH&MRC Ethics Committee is accredited by the NHMRC, and conducts ethical review of Aboriginal health research conducted in NSW. The Aboriginal Health College is part of the AH&MRC, is a Registered Training Organisation, and delivers a range of education and training programs to Aboriginal people and health professionals working with Aboriginal people.

3 PRESSING PROBLEMS – THE FINDINGS OF THE AH&MRC GAMBLING RESEARCH PROJECT

3.1 Introduction

Gambling is a significant issue for many Aboriginal people. However, when the AH&MRC initiated a gambling research project in 2005, there had been scant coverage or consideration of the views and needs of Aboriginal people in national and NSW gambling policy documents. In addition, research focussed on the views and experiences about gambling of NSW Aboriginal people had been very limited.

The AH&MRC Gambling Research Project was undertaken over the years 2005-2007, and aimed to explore the issue of gambling in a NSW Aboriginal community context, to identify and characterise existing responses, with the aim of informing the development of future directions and ways forward for action to prevent and alleviate gambling related problems and harms for Aboriginal people in NSW.

3.2 Gambling in Aboriginal communities:

Aboriginal community members consulted during the project universally identified gambling as a common activity within NSW Aboriginal communities, as well as consistently identifying gambling as a source of significant problems for individuals, families and communities. Commonly cited problems associated with gambling in Aboriginal communities included financial hardship, the needs of children being overlooked, family discord and contact with the criminal justice system.

While gambling-related problems were freely discussed in the context of project consultations, it was noted by those consulted that gambling problems could often be a source of shame and stigma within Aboriginal communities, resulting in people being reluctant to discuss openly the gambling problems experienced by themselves or their families. Shame and stigma were also seen as significant barriers to Aboriginal people seeking assistance for gambling related problems.

The need to raise community awareness and encourage the discussion and acknowledgement of gambling and related problems as significant issues within NSW Aboriginal communities was clearly identified during consultations. Acknowledging the potential for associated stigma to hamper efforts to raise community awareness, one model was for the inclusion of coverage of gambling issues in general Aboriginal health promotion and wellbeing initiatives, such as men's and women's groups and family camps.

In rural areas, the limited opportunities for alternative recreational activities accessible to Aboriginal people were seen as a significant contributing factor to high levels of problem gambling. The development of sporting facilities and the promotion and development of alternative recreational activities were identified as preventive strategies for gambling related harms for Aboriginal people.

One avenue for facilitating this development within the gambling industry sector is to ensure Aboriginal communities and organisations are aware of funding opportunities available through local club's community support schemes, and to encourage clubs allocate funds to Aboriginal

community organisations, particularly in locations where Aboriginal people are a significant proportion of their customer or membership group.

3.3 Gambling treatment services and Aboriginal people

Both Aboriginal community members and gambling treatment providers consistently reported that existing mainstream gambling treatment services were often not well utilized by Aboriginal people. Available routinely collected data was of limited value in determining the extent to which NSW gambling treatment services were accessible to, and utilized by, Aboriginal people with gambling-related problems.

The limited capacity mainstream gambling treatment services have to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people and community were prominent in discussions with both Aboriginal community members and gambling treatment service providers. A few gambling treatment service providers described long term efforts to engage with Aboriginal communities, with varying levels of success. Several small-scale local projects were identified that specifically responded to gambling issues for Aboriginal people in NSW.

Potentially useful strategies identified that could build capacity in mainstream gambling treatment services to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people and communities included: the development and delivery of cross cultural training to staff, employing Aboriginal people as counsellors, and facilitating and supporting engagement with local Aboriginal communities and their organisations, through the development of resources, documentation of case studies and models of good practice, and providing networking and information-sharing opportunities.

During the course of the project, no Aboriginal-specific gambling centres or support services were identified in NSW. At the time the project was completed, an Aboriginal-specific gambling service based at Nunkuwarrin Yunti, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service in South Australia, appeared well established, and was identified as providing a valuable model on which the development of a statewide Aboriginal-specific gambling service could be based in NSW. However, subsequent to the project's completion, in 2008, funding support for this program was ceased. Also subsequent to the project, another Aboriginal-specific gambling services – Victorian Aboriginal Gambling Awareness Service (VAGAS) commenced operations.

Specific models of treatment and support service delivery identified by those consulted during the course of the project that were considered appropriate, or potentially appropriate, for Aboriginal people in NSW were:

- working with financial institutions to provide structured assistance with budgeting
- financial literacy training
- regional models for the delivery of gambling and financial counselling services
- Aboriginal-specific telephone counselling services
- family financial counselling
- case-management and conferencing for individuals and families with serious gambling-related problems, with the possibility of residential rehabilitation being explored, based on existing models for Aboriginal people with drug and alcohol problems

It was considered useful to further explore, develop, trial and evaluate these models.

A general principle identified during consultations was the need to ensure that associated issues were considered and addressed when delivering gambling treatment services to Aboriginal people, including grief and loss; co-existing depression and other mental health disorders; stress and anxiety; family crises; substance misuse; and future educational and employment opportunities.

3.4 Identifying and referring Aboriginal people with gambling associated problems

Confidentiality was raised as a key issue for service providers enquiring about and responding to gambling issues for Aboriginal people during project consultations.

Tools and systems to better identify and assist Aboriginal people experiencing, or affected by, problems associated with gambling were identified as an area of need. Specific measures to respond to this need include:

- the development and validation of a problem gambling screening tool for use with NSW Aboriginal populations, including in ACCHS settings
- including screening for gambling-related problems in primary health care programs, including as part of assessment for entry into drug and alcohol, and mental health programs, and Adult Health Check and similar health screening initiatives
- developing, documenting and promoting local referral pathways for Aboriginal people identified by service providers as having gambling related problems, and for members of their families
- ensuring ACCHS staff and others involved in delivering primary health and community services to Aboriginal people were aware of gambling issues, and knew how to respond and refer appropriately if problems are identified.

Developing and trialing a culturally-specific brief intervention for delivery by health and community service providers to Aboriginal people, similar to that in common use for tobacco, was also suggested, and considered an idea worthy of further exploration.

3.5 Workforce issues

The limited availability of qualified financial and gambling counsellors, particularly in rural areas, was identified by gambling service providers as a limiting factor in efforts to increase gambling-related counselling services for Aboriginal people.

Gambling treatment services, and others consulted, reported that in the context of a widespread shortage of gambling and financial counsellors, there were even fewer counsellors with specific expertise in Aboriginal gambling issues, and noted that only a handful of Aboriginal people had been trained in financial or gambling counselling.

Potential strategies to increase the numbers and develop the skills of service providers who are able to deliver financial counselling and other gambling treatment services to Aboriginal people and communities include the development and delivery of:

- training for financial and gambling counsellors about Aboriginal social and cultural issues and about how to work in a culturally competent manner with Aboriginal people. These modules could be delivered as part of an initial counselling qualification or as continuing professional development for counsellors that are already trained
- a specific Aboriginal gambling-related counselling training qualification for Aboriginal Health Workers and others to work specifically with Aboriginal people experiencing gambling-associated problems
- training modules about Aboriginal gambling issues for health and community service professionals, including Aboriginal Health Workers, who work in clinical, drug and alcohol, and mental health settings, as well as other health and community workers with an Aboriginal client base

Another approach to increasing the number of Aboriginal people trained in gambling-related service delivery would be to better promote existing gambling and related counselling training to Aboriginal people, and to facilitate their access to, and uptake of, this training.

The ongoing work of the AH&MRC to develop and deliver cultural safety training for gambling treatment counsellors and to develop and deliver a gambling counselling course for Aboriginal people is described below.

3.6 Data and research

Quantitative data reporting on gambling participation and the prevalence of gambling-related problems for Aboriginal people in NSW or other jurisdictions was limited at the time the literature review for this project was completed, and continues to be scant. While there are methodological challenges relating to small numbers, as well as selection and measurement issues, the feasibility of including data collection about gambling issues and analysis of Aboriginal population groups in large scale population-based surveys could be explored.

Several specific gambling-related issues identified during the project were considered worthy of further investigation through research to inform the development of appropriate prevention and treatment interventions. These are:

- Aboriginal people's experiences of shame and stigma associated with gambling
- links between gambling and grief and loss issues, life and family stressors, and social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal people
- gambling views and experiences of Aboriginal youth

In addition, the development and use of culturally-appropriate methodologies was identified as important to appropriately evaluate the impact and effectiveness of Aboriginal-specific and mainstream gambling activities and services for Aboriginal population groups.

3.7 Policy development

At the time the research was undertaken, Aboriginal people and their organisations appeared to have had a minimal role in the development of gambling related policy and strategy in NSW. Ensuring Aboriginal people and organisations, particularly those that are community controlled, are included in the development and implementation of policy and programs that affect them is a key component of self-determination, a core principle in Aboriginal affairs, endorsed by both national and NSW state governments.

3.8 Other conclusions and ways forward

At the time the AH&MRC gambling research project was completed, responses, services and interventions aimed at reducing gambling-related harms in NSW Aboriginal community settings did not appear to be well matched to the reported frequency and severity of gambling related problems. Following on from this project, the AH&MRC has been provided with annually negotiated funding by the NSW Office of Liquor Gaming and Racing through the Responsible Gambling Fund to respond to issues identified in this research. The activities undertaken to date, and planned, are described in Section 4.

4. AH&MRC GAMBLING PROGRAM

Since 2007, the AH&MRC has been developing and implementing a program to respond to gambling issues for NSW Aboriginal communities. Core elements of this program are:

1. Community awareness raising activities: to encourage the discussion and acknowledgement of gambling and related problems as an important issue within Aboriginal community settings

2. Workforce development: to build workforce trained to deliver gambling related counselling and screening, early intervention and referral services to Aboriginal communities, through the AH&MRC Aboriginal Health College
3. Service capacity development: of both Aboriginal health and community services, and gambling treatment support services
4. Partnership: facilitation and support at a local level, and developing links with other Aboriginal gambling services nationally

The program has an Advisory Committee with membership drawn from NSW Aboriginal communities and gambling treatment services, and reports regularly to the AH&MRC Board of Directors, who represent Aboriginal communities and their health services around NSW.

4.1 Community awareness raising activities

To raise community awareness, the AH&MRC is facilitating gambling information sessions, that involve local Aboriginal community organisations, Aboriginal staff from mainstream health and community services, and gambling treatment and financial counselling services. These sessions include presentations about gambling and problem gambling, with a focus on any available Aboriginal data and resources, and facilitated discussions about local responses to gambling issues for Aboriginal people. To date, sessions have been run in 13 different locations around NSW, with most being in rural and remote regions. The sessions have been well received, and positively evaluated. In many cases, prior to the sessions, Aboriginal community members and organisations had not been aware of local gambling related services. The sessions have had a significant and positive impact on building relationships between local Aboriginal people and gambling related services, with enduring partnerships resulting in some cases.

The AH&MRC is developing Aboriginal-specific resources to raise awareness of gambling as an issue, and of where to access help. These resources have been developed with the input of Aboriginal people at every stage of the process, use Aboriginal art work and terms, and include several posters as well as a brochure that is focused specifically on poker machines. Gambling treatment services are being encouraged and supported to use these resources to work with their local Aboriginal communities to develop Aboriginal specific activities during Responsible Gambling Awareness Week in 2009. The AH&MRC is also developing other mechanisms to raise Aboriginal community awareness, including a range of media such as web-pages, DVDs and radio.

4.2 Workforce development

The AH&MRC through the Aboriginal Health College is aiming to increase the size of the workforce trained to deliver gambling related counselling and other services to Aboriginal communities, and improve support and cultural competence for counsellors and others delivering gambling treatment services to Aboriginal people. To date, the College has developed a cultural competence training package and is delivering this to NSW gambling treatment counsellors. Plans are well underway for the delivery of an accredited training package for a Diploma of Counselling with a focus on problem gambling, with the first intake for this course being planned for mid 2009.

4.3 Service development

The AH&MRC is developing a tool to assist with the identification of Aboriginal people who would benefit from further information, assessment and referrals related to gambling issues. Work to assist mainstream gambling treatment services to re-orientate their services to be more accessible to Aboriginal people.

4.4 Partnership

The AH&MRC Gambling Program has developed links with a large range of key stakeholders in gambling services, research, government around NSW, as well as organisations and individuals

involved in Aboriginal gambling activity. At a local level, the AH&MRC has also encouraged and facilitated the development of local partnerships between gambling treatment services and Aboriginal organisations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Aboriginal community control is embedded in all aspects of the AH&MRC involvement in responding to gambling issues for Aboriginal people in NSW, and the resulting program is multi-faceted and draws on a public health, holistic approach. The program's elements and activities are based on research findings, including extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities which have also been ongoing since the completion of the AH&MRC Gambling Research Project. This combination of approaches has been critical to the success of the program to date, and provides evidence to support Aboriginal community controlled organisations with interest and capacity in getting involved in gambling related work being funded and supported to do this work in an ongoing way.