

**BreakEven-Western
Problem Gambling Service**

submission to

The Productivity Commission

Australia's Gambling Industries

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The Australian Gambling Industries

What are the characteristics of gambling that call for community or government action that is different to that for other activities?

Gambling unlike other activities has a capacity to impact on the most vulnerable sections of the community. Low income people with limited opportunities for change in their lives are enticed by the hope that gambling provides.

The long term financial impacts from problem gambling affects not just the individual; but partners, families and ultimately the activity of the whole Australian economy.

Use of savings for gambling also creates an unstable financial future for Australia and reduces the capacity for the population to survive periods of recession and depression of the economy.

Regulation

Are current regulations governing gambling appropriate? If not, what changes should be made, and how should they be introduced?

Self regulatory Codes of Practice for the delivery of responsible gambling are not effective. These should be made a part of legislation to ensure that implementation and harm minimisation is effective. See attached review of Codes of Practise.

What is the appropriate role for government, if any, in the promotion and advertising of gambling?

State governments are becoming increasingly dependent on gambling taxes to meet the shortfall of Federal taxes they therefore have a conflict of interest not only in benefiting directly from any promotion of gambling but in caring for the community. Research and reference materials from the US provide further evidence of the link between governments and gambling.

Is information disclosure adequate, and if not, what is the appropriate nature and extent of disclosure? Are regulatory decisions transparent and accountable?

The research component of the regulatory body, the VCGA in Victoria should be separated from the compliance component. A level of mistrust and conflict of interest exist with the existing system. An independent body similar to the Victorian Health Foundation could be established to oversee research and expenditure of the Community Support Fund.

Taxation

Should part of the revenue for gambling be earmarked for particular uses, and if so, for what uses?

Is the current process of distributing earmarked funds appropriate and effective? Are the mechanisms suitably open, well-understood and subject to sufficient accountability requirements? Are they an improvement on normal government budget processes?

Revenue from gambling should be used to address poverty issues in areas of disadvantage. The distribution of funds should consider the areas of highest gambling usage and hence contribution to taxation ie. Low-income areas. Through our community education activities we hear a common request that these funds should be directed back into these communities, which ultimately contribute the most funds. This would not only counter the impact of gambling in specific communities but generate new opportunities for improved community well being.

These funds could not only be used to provide direct community support services but be used to:

- generate employment and education opportunities on a local scale,
- identify specific needs at a neighbourhood level for individual, family, household, neighbourhood and broader community, and
- deliver programs and services which meet these needs.

Who gambles and why?

What research and information in this area is most instructive? What additional research would be warranted? Are there any additional factors that could assist our understanding of the participation profile of gamblers in Australia?

The data from Melbourne University Problem Gambling Research Program provides an indication of problem gamblers it does not give a full understanding of all gamblers or others who have difficulties with gambling but do not seek help. Further research, which is not telephone based but completed on a localised interactive scale, would be the most instructive.

Assessing the costs and benefits

What tools are useful? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different methodologies? How robust are different approaches?

Professor David Hawkes, Curtin University.WA., presented at the Gambling Away our Community Conference organised by the Interchurch Gambling Taskforce and the Victorian Local Governance Association in Melbourne. He suggested some measures that have been used with alcohol which could be equally applied to measuring the impact of gambling. These considered harm factors such as drink driving, road accidents, drowning, sick leave, medical and legal costs which could be attributed to alcohol. Similar tools could be established by including gambling as a consideration on data collection by a range of professionals. Some examples have already been established which could be further adapted Australia wide.

- General Practitioners-Health Summary Record – AMA NSW
- Police –Charge Record Sheet –QLD
- Courts – Code for Magistrates Courts, Search of County Court Transcripts NSW &VIC
- CentreLink, Emergency Relief Agencies, Health & Community Organisation both government and non-government funded organisations could also be asked to include a category in information collection.

We support problem gambling being addressed from a public health model which considers the issue in social context. The Public Health Association of Australia (PHA) has developed a policy which was accepted at its 1997 Annual General Meeting *{See Appendix}*. It recommends that

“The PHA and other professional bodies adopt a public health model for problem gambling, which emphasises the general protection and promotion of well being in the community, and includes the central premise of harm reduction. This model would take into account the interaction of the individual, gaming opportunity, gaming environment and the community. Harm reduction allows for a range of interventions to be developed along a continuum of gambling activity and behaviours.”

Benefits and costs to individuals

Costs to individuals

Problem gambling

What is problem gambling and how big a problem is it? How many Australians are problem gamblers? How enduring is the problem for an affected gambler? What are the cost and other impacts for the problem gambler?

Problem gambling occurs when the gambler or their family experiences significant problems arising from the gambling.

Problem gambling can be an “ordinary habit” or a “compulsive habit”.

Problem gambling becomes more likely or more established each time the gambler is shocked by some event arising from their gambling and then denies this shock to continue their growing fascination with gambling.

Compulsive gambling is driven by an unconscious self-reinforcing feedback loop of dread, fascination and shock. The gambling reduces the gambler’s consciousness of the dread - but the gambling shocks reinforce the dread.

This destructive cycle of behaviour can occur in an individual or a family. Cycles of behaviour like this are features of many other systems, e.g. the atmosphere generates tornadoes and sound systems generate that shriek called feedback.

How many others are affected by problem gambling? What are the effects on the problem gambler’s family or the community more generally? How should we go about measuring these costs in a meaningful way and are there useful existing estimates in Australia or overseas?

That problem gambling is a major community social issue and not just the problem of a few individuals is becoming clear. The proportion of people currently having problems associated with gambling may not seem high but the impacts of an individual gambler can have far reaching affects. The Victorian Council on Problem Gambling estimates that an individual problem gambler can have a further impact on between 7 to 10 people. Whether it be family and friends who are asked to provide loans that are rarely repaid, or employers who notice frequent and lengthy absences from work, or indeed support and welfare services who are asked for financial, legal or material aid, problem gambling touches the whole community.

The impact on the individual can also be devastating as they experience increased levels of stress, loss of self esteem, employment and even bankruptcy. Personal relationships fail, as gamblers who turn to crime to fund their habit-some eventually choosing suicide as the last resort erode lives. The financial strain on families can also have a long lasting impact. The unpaid debts incurred due to one partner gambling can result in many years of loan repayment for the whole family, ultimately having an adverse effect on the functioning of the family.

The BreakEven-Western Service operating in Melbourne's Western suburbs, reported that 68% of registered clients gambled on gaming machines. Women represented 53% of people seen by the Service, suggesting that gambling is a new entertainment option for women. Many hotels and clubs, which never fully catered for the needs of women, have improved their surrounds and services making them comfortable non-threatening environments for women. Men on the other hand while taking up the 'pokies' option to some extent, have continued to maintain an interest in the traditional gambling fields of horse racing and the TAB.¹

The age of clients seen by Break Even-Western showed that 70% of people were in the 25 to 50 age bracket. Forty-five percent had an income less than \$20,000 with 65% employed, indicating that part time or low paid workers were having the most difficulties. The factors that seem to increase the prevalence of problem gambling according to Break Even-Western are the concentration of gaming machines, income, and age distribution characteristics, relative isolation from alternative recreation outlets, and perhaps extent of employment opportunities.²

What is the nature of the problems affecting people at different points along this continuum?

The role of gambling in people's lives is as varied as the people that gamble. The current range of gambling available means that more and more people are having a gamble in some form or another. The Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority's recent Positive and Negative Perception of Gambling Study (July 1996) showed that 87% of adults had gambled at some stage over the past 12 months. Gambling is increasingly perceived as a legitimate form of recreation and entertainment, which in itself is a shift from past attitudes. A night at the pokies or a bet on the Melbourne Cup becomes just another form of fun entertainment. The interest for most people is not in winning but in having a good night out like when they go to the movies or theatre.

However, for some people gambling means much more than this. People who gamble can be thought of as laying somewhere along a spectrum from the casual gambler, like the once a year Melbourne Cup punter, to those where the urge to gamble is uncontrollable, dominating their lives. To the latter, gambling is a way of life, as the gambler chases losses and dreams of the big win. Some gamblers may be classified as serious social gamblers who gamble with intense concentration. Some may gamble to escape from feelings of stress, using gambling as an analgesic to treat their pain. Others may be habitual gamblers who no longer see themselves as anything else but a gambler first and foremost. This gambler is frequently a systems player who dreams of becoming a professional.³

At what point then does gambling become a problem? Problem gamblers are variously referred to as compulsive, pathological, addictive or excessive. The varying terminology reflects the differing views on the nature of the problem, and consequently different models and approaches that are used in treatment. The Victorian Department of Human Services uses the term "problem gambler" as a means to recognise the range of terminology used to describe the impact of gambling on people's behaviour. Some people may stay at a particular point on this continuum. Others may move along it.

BreakEven Services in Victoria define problem gambling as:

Problem Gambling refers to the situation where gambling in our society gives rise to harm to the individual player, and/or his/her family and extends into the community.

¹ Break Even Western Times, Newsletter February 1995

² Pfeiffer.W. It's A Gamble! Community Quarterly No. 42 March 1997 p15-22

³ Custer R. & Milt H. When Luck Runs Out, 1985 Facts on File Publications, USA

What is the nature of people's transitions from one state of problem gambling to another? Is it possible to identify those on the path to chronic and severe problem gambling from those who are not?

It is very limiting to think in terms of clear transitions from one state to another as a person may be introduced to gambling for one reason from a range of entry points and maintain their gambling for another reason and not follow a linear continuum. It may help to consider the behaviour in terms of spirals.⁴ This concept has been developed by one of our counsellors and helps understand how gambling can become enmeshed in a whole range of aspects of a person life.

To what extent do people with a gambling problem suffer from deeper underlying problems, of which gambling is only a symptom? To what extent is problem gambling associated with other problems (alcoholism, depressive disorders etc) and how are these linked?

“Ordinary habit problem gambling” develops as the gambler comes to regard gambling as right and necessary. The gambling can become an important part of the gambler's family or social life. Ordinary habits, like putting butter on your bread, can be hard to control. This is where social factors are important:

- Culture of gamblers social group.
- Government policy - government sponsorship of gambling
- Inadequate recreation
- Family culture

Problem gambling can become an out of control cancer when the gambler uses gambling to block out something they regard as dreadful in their life. Compulsive gambling develops when the gambler uses gambling to become oblivious to expected developmental life crises

- Leaving home
- Establishing sexuality
- Finding a partner
- Becoming parents
- Allowing the children to leave home
- Menopause
- Retirement
- Death of partner

Compulsive gambling also develops when the gambler uses gambling to become oblivious to unexpected life crises

- Relationship breakdown
- Death / grief
- Immigration
- Physical illness
- Mental illness / personality disorder
- Abuse / isolation / trauma

⁴ Gunner. A. “The spirals of problem gambling and recovery” NAGS Conference Melbourne 1997

Does problem gambling affect some groups more than others? What is the evidence for this?

Problematic Gambling Patterns in NESB Communities

Migrants that have a command of English and who have had the opportunity to assimilate into the Victorian mainstream are using existing services. We know that non-English speakers are not using the existing Problem Gambling Services to any significant extent (Client Services Analysis Report 1. University of Melbourne) although the early indications are that the recently appointed multicultural counsellor positions are making inroads into shortfall.

Accessibility is a common issue facing most mainstream services where counselling is not yet fully accepted by many multicultural groups as a useful way to address personal or family issues. This situation is further complicated when attempting to address problem gambling as this single issue is consistently, across all groups, difficult to engage the community in reflecting upon thoughtfully and non-judgementally.

Whilst the nature of problems varies from group to group, evidence is mounting that supports the view that gambling related problems exist broadly across ethnicities (Gambling In Ethnic Communities: Break Even-Western Research 1996). We are hearing from many sources that ethno-specific and multicultural service organisations are seeing the impact of problem gambling on families and their workers are asking for training and other support in dealing with these often complex cases. Many workers would rather receive relevant training and maintain their contact with their clients rather than refer out.

The use of interpreters in cross-cultural counselling consultations has a place in opening up mainstream services but is not likely to be a significant solution to multicultural community needs. Clients' preference about whom they see and where they are seen for counselling often varies case-by-case and culture-by-culture. In some instances it is preferable to have counsellors from the same cultural background as this congruence assists rapport. In other instances clients feel compromised in seeing members of their own community and would only present to independent and highly discreet services.

Research

Our service has seen the impact of gambling affect a broad range of different communities and groups within our region. Research was carried out through interview and workshop with a range of workers from the Kurdish, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese communities.⁵

	Female	Male	Total
Spanish	4	4	8
Turkish	7	3	10
Kurdish	1	5	6
Vietnamese	1	2	3
Total	13	14	27

This research indicated that regardless of socio-economic, gender and cultural backgrounds of individuals, gambling problems remain a silent issue and a very damaging social and financial issue within each of the targeted ethnic communities.

⁵ **Gambling and its impact on ethnic communities.** Aynur Canbolat, Iris Guarsh, Zehra Yalcin, BreakEven-Western VUT Student Placement Project October 1996

The community workers have anecdotal evidence of individuals who are having gambling problems, but the individuals that are perhaps in most need of the support of welfare agencies are unable or unwilling to approach the welfare agencies for support. Fear of being victimised within their own communities because of their gambling or of being labelled as a known gambler may inhibit people from seeking help.

Some workers also showed a low level of awareness and understanding of problem gambling which may also result in the problem remaining undetected within ethnic communities.

Increased availability of written materials on problem gambling in community languages and on going support and education from gambling support services may be part of the solution.

It is envisaged that networking with and between individual ethnic community workers is extremely important for BreakEven-Western to acknowledge the range of issues and for the development of further strategies.

Consequently, enormous social and financial problems of individuals were the main anxiety of individual ethnic community workers. As a result the community workers were struggling to approach their own clients and provide adequate services in terms of gambling problems. It is believed that BreakEven-Western should be given every opportunity to provide priority services to the targeted ethnic communities.

All the targeted ethnic community workers that were interviewed showed similar commitments and responsibilities in terms of addressing needs and problems within their communities. Given the increase in workloads and limitations because of the lack of available resources, however, it was very difficult for the agencies to fully meet the needs of their own communities. In addition, the workers interviewed illustrated that they were concerned by the “invasion of poker machines”, especially within the socio-economic disadvantaged regions and the twenty-four hour accessibility of Crown Casino. Government regulation is also needed to restrict gaming venues advertising gambling on all forms of media which may help to safeguard individuals in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major outcome from the research and the facilitated workshop with the Vietnamese, Turkish, Spanish and Kurdish community workers is the recommendation for more community workers and for more community education.

The workshop highlighted new ideas for community education, which considered cultural differences and acknowledged gambling issues within the broader community. Recommendations for community education are as follows:

INTERVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

- Realistic and shocking bilingual information on TV and Radio commercials.
 - Advertisements in ethnic community newspapers about gambling support services
 - Education programs at schools about gambling, gambling industries and support services especially for the year 10, 11 and 12 students.
 - Provide talk back shows on ethnic community radio about gambling issues.
 - Culturally appropriate materials eg. pamphlets, poster and articles about gambling issues being made available at all community centres.
-

- Culturally appropriate articles in ethnic newspaper that should depict the impact of gambling on individuals and communities.
- Information sessions about the gambling industry, gambling problems and support services for community workers.
- Networking with different individual ethnic community workers to develop appropriate strategies.

Workshop Recommendations

Vietnamese, Turkish and Kurdish community workers strongly recommended a more realistic and shocking approach to bilingual information on SBS TV and radio commercials before and after each ethnic group program. On the other hand, Spanish speaking workers felt that the advertising in the media should be realistic but not shocking, as they believe that people with gambling problems would feel stigmatised by others, and ultimately feel guilty and powerless about their problems.

- Increase regulation of the television advertising produced by the gambling industry. To diminish the glamour surrounding gambling and present a more accurate picture.
 - Provide talk back shows on ethnic community radio about gambling issues which will give individuals the opportunity to express their own feelings about their gambling problems
 - Establish a network between Break Even-Western, and the individual ethnic community workers from each community including religious leaders to develop appropriate strategies, which emphasis the impact of gambling issues in the community.
 - Culturally appropriate information must be produced for display for each ethnic community. Turkish, Vietnamese and Kurdish translation of the word describes gambling very strongly. The Spanish language translation of the word however uses the term game, which means a particular sort of conflict in which individuals, or groups participate. Therefore it is interpreted to be a more playful word, which may minimise the significance of gambling issues amongst this community.
 - Spanish community workers recommended the development of campaign using promoted displays, brochures etc. at different ethnic community events ie. Soccer, dinner dance, festivals and social clubs.
 - Organise alternative recreational community activities and facilities.
 - Community workers present agreed to assist in the development of programs within their individual ethnic communities which would help to break the silence about gambling problems.
 - Develop educational programs for parents and for children from a primary school level.
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Is it more difficult to detect or treat problem gambling within particular groups (for example, by age, gender or ethnicity)?

It is difficult to provide an accessible service to all groups within society particularly as the methods and approaches used are limited. Counselling is seen as the main tool for use with people but this is a foreign concept for many ethnic communities and possibly older groups within our society. Further research is needed to investigate other approaches, which perhaps take a lifestyle approach, providing skills in the development and use of leisure, coping strategies, relationships skills etc.

What implications would any differences between groups of problem gamblers have for the design or implementation of policies aimed at the prevention or management of problem gambling?

Some factors that impact on the successful outcomes of current counselling practices include

- . Language difficulties.
- . Intellectual disability
- . Mental illness
- . Acute life crisis.
- . Involuntary clients
- . Gambling embedded in client's life style and social like
- . Hopeless situation
- . Limited alternative recreation
- . Limited voluntary work
- . Gambling is a central part of family culture e.g. father owes a racehorse.

Other costs to individuals

Are there consumer issues — such as gamblers' understanding of the odds they face, pressure selling, misleading advertising, or other practices — which may produce costs for individuals?

Research carried out in 1997 with gaming venue staff, problem gamblers, and the general public indicate some of the measures that could be used to reduce the costs associated with gambling.⁶

Interpretation of findings

The results from this research overwhelmingly support the view that more can to be done by government, the gaming industry and the broader community to help prevent problem gambling. Even though 39% of all respondents said they thought the general public did not see gambling as a problem, most went on to recognise it as such and suggested ways of minimising the harm

This view is supported by the findings in the Community Gambling Patterns Survey (C.G.P.S.) commissioned by the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority in January 1995, where participants were asked similar questions about the effect gambling had on the community. Their results show that 36% disagreed with the statement that 'Gambling does more good than harm' and 33% strongly disagreed with this statement. The statement 'Gambling is a serious social problem' was agreed to by 36% and strongly agreed to by 27% of the respondents. When asked whether 'Gambling related problems have got worse in the last 3 years' 34% agreed and 30% strongly agreed (DBM Consultants, 1995, figure 22a).

⁶ Saliba. K. **Gambling. Everyone could be a winner! A harm minimisation study on problem gambling.** National Association Gambling Studies Conference 1997.

Why is this so? It is curious that on one hand the literature suggests that most people gamble (87%) and most think it is an acceptable pastime (77%), and on the other, many recognise that it is harmful to society (DBM Consultants, 1995). A number of questions must be asked to determine the reasons behind this discrepancy described above. These questions are: Is it because of the image created by the pro-gambling publicity, or is it the legitimacy the Victorian Government bestows on the gaming industry as suggested by Wootton (1997), or is that people recognise the problems, but think it can't happen to them?

Whatever the answer to these questions, it is clear that many in the community feel strongly about gambling related issues. This can be seen by the results of the C.G.P.S. described above and by the time taken and the quality of the answers given by respondents to this research. The sixty-four participants yielded a total of over six hundred responses to the open-ended questions alone, with only a very small number of these mentioning the benefits to the community from gambling. While no questions specifically asked respondents for positive feedback, it is interesting that only sixteen (3%) responses could be regarded as favourable to the industry.

The questions relating specifically to the gaming industry drew a slightly different response particularly from venue staff. In most cases venue staff were less inclined to favour harm minimisation changes to their industry than other groups who participated in the research. It seems that venue operators and staff are somewhat sensitive and protective about their industry. Similar findings were obtained by Pfeiffer and Sheedy (1995) in their study of gaming venues, where about half of the venues operators surveyed were willing to implement strategies to help problem gamblers.

It is clear that there are different approaches that can be used to understand the nature of problem gambling. One approach is to locate the problem within the individual gambler. Indeed, some participants in this research felt this to be the case, as did Bybee (1989). Another approach is to view gambling as a social problem with social origins and social implications. This is the view taken in this report, and is supported by most of the research participants, and others such as The Interchurch Gambling Taskforce (1997) and the Victorian Council on Problem Gambling (1997).

Each approach has different implications for what to do about problem gambling. The approach that blames the individual locates the solution within that individual, with society having no real obligation to support them in that process. The alternative approach, which locates gambling as a social problem, requires a response from the government, the gaming industry and the community to deal effectively with the problem.

Regardless of whether gambling is seen to be a problem caused by individuals or having social origins, it is clear the consequences profoundly effect the community. Some of these were described in the literature review, and also by respondents to this research. The issue is then what do we, as a community need to do about this problem.

Recommendations

These specific recommendations from this research made below are supported by the research undertaken in Victoria by Pfeiffer and Sheedy into Problem Gambling and Prevention Strategies in Gaming Venues (1995)

For Government

Due to their position of power, governments have an obligation to implement policies that safeguard the community, and gambling should be no exception. Tighter controls are needed over the number and placement of gaming machines and venues, pro-gaming advertising, and the allocation of gaming licenses. Also the current voluntary codes of practice should be replaced with a government-enforced code. More funding should be made available for research into the impacts gambling has on the individual, the family, charities, criminal activity and the business sector. A larger variety and number of services should be made available to help those with gambling related problems and more needs to be done to promote existing services. School children and adults alike should be informed about responsible gambling and the possible harms associated with it. Advertising should play a part in this education by being more balanced and truthful about the way it portrays the gambling industry, including making people aware that gambling can be addictive and that it needs to be treated as a disease, and not as a stigma.

For Gaming Industry

Firstly the industry needs to recognise that it does have a responsibility to its patrons and that it can make a difference. Venue operators and staff should provide a service that abides by government regulations honestly and fairly and be willing to implement strategies aimed at reducing the harm caused by excessive gambling. Some of these are: displaying and implementing the voluntary codes of practice, promoting the industry in a more realistic light through advertising, displaying information on support and counselling services, displaying clocks, providing natural light in gaming areas, offering other forms of entertainment, encouraging people to self ban, displaying the odds of winning and placing warning signs on gaming machines. Venues should be discouraged from having note changing machines, providing ATM's, paying large winnings in cash, and promoting gambling by using incentives. Management and staff should be willing to increase their understanding of problem gambling and how best to deal with those affected, by participating in training programs and encouraging patrons to access support services.

For the Community

The community as a whole also has a responsibility toward those amongst them who have a gambling problem. Firstly the community needs to accept and support those with a problem and recognise that they need help, not rejection. The general public needs to be aware of issues such as isolation, loneliness and depression that can cause people to gamble. Education is the key to understanding and maintaining an awareness of the issues surrounding problem gambling. The community must demand tighter regulations and protection to minimise the harm that effects us all from problem gambling by lobbying government, attending rallies, and writing letters to members of parliament etc. The public needs to push for more money to be spent on research into the impacts of gambling and push for alternative forms of recreation. Professionals such as doctors and teachers need to be trained to recognise and offer assistance to those who need it and direct them to the appropriate service and these skills need to be updated from time to time.

Further Research

There is obviously a great deal of work that remains to be done, some areas suggested by this research as requiring further investigation include: a more in-depth study of gamblers and their views on harm minimisation strategies as this project was fairly small, a study of the impacts gambling has on business, charities, and rates of crime, and a more extensive survey of the gaming industry to establish how many venues actively promote and abide by the Gaming Codes of Practice, and if not why not. This research could also address the apprehensive and cautious nature of some venue operators and staff experienced in this research.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the literature reviewed and the responses given to this research strongly advise that more be done to minimise the harm of problem gambling, not only for those already effected, but also for those who are potentially at risk. Most respondents were in favour of the government, the gaming industry and the community taking more responsibility for promoting and delivering responsible gambling. Many participants recognised that problem gambling is a social issue with social implications and for this reason it is felt that if these recommendations were to be implemented then everybody could be a winner.

Dealing with problem gambling

How effective are mechanisms — such as education and information programs, venue exclusion arrangements, venue and machine redesign — which seek to minimise problem gambling?

A key role of the Victorian BreakEven programs has been to work with the gaming industry that generates the need for the service, which is a very unusual approach for a health service provider. The role involves linking support services to the gaming industry through liaison and education of gaming venue staff.

Very early on Break Even discovered that approaches to local gaming venues on an individual basis was not effective. Decisions and processes needed to happen on a state or industry wide level. An industry working group made up of representatives of Break Even and the major industry players, Australian Hotels Association (AHA), Tattersall, TabCorp, Crown Casino, and Licensed Clubs of Victoria was formed. The chief aim was to provide an exchange of ideas and understandings around the issue of problem gambling, to look at opportunities for harm minimisation and prevention strategies. Some strategies which have been discussed include the display of information on responsible gambling and support services in gaming venues, increased natural light and clocks in venues, payout of large wins in cheque form, and a number of ways in which the industry could take a preventative approach.

The AHA responded by developing a course for gaming venue staff titled, "Responsible Serving of Gaming", which was based on an education program that had been developed and delivered by Break Even to local gaming venues.

The gaming industry, although hesitant at first, saw the value in being pro-active especially in light of increased community discontent, particularly with the co-location of shopping centres and gaming venues. Calls for legislative changes and government pressure for the industry to self regulate resulted in the release of the Gaming Industry Code of Practice on February 5th 1997. The Code outlines what each level of the gaming industry is prepared to do to assist problem gamblers and also includes an advertising code.⁷

An evaluation framework is also needed to be established for education and information programs designed to minimise the harm associated with gambling so that appropriate data can be measured and intended objectives can be collected from the beginning. Additional resources would also be required to put this place on a regional basis.

⁷ Pfeiffer.W. It's A Gamble! Community Quarterly No. 42 March 1997 p15-22

How effective are different approaches to the rehabilitation of those who suffer from problem gambling (both in terms of favourable outcomes and cost effectiveness)?

An outline of the BreakEven-Western counselling model, principles of practice, mission statement and objectives is attached. A thesis on the use of systemic family therapy has also been included to provide additional information.⁸

Early in 1997 the BreakEven-Western service conducted a client outcome study and is currently in the process of carrying out a similar study the results of which should be available at the end of 1998. An invitation to participate in the research was given to anyone who attended a counselling session with the BreakEven-Western counsellors. The review focussed on obtaining feedback from individuals, couples and families who experienced either on-going counselling (General) or Single Session Consultations (SSC's) at BreakEven-Western.

Aims of the Review:

To find out what aspects of the program were working well and what needed to be changed.

To get suggestions for improvements from individuals who use the service.

To examine client perceptions of helpfulness and satisfaction with the counselling service.

To compare feedback from individuals who experienced SSC's to those who attended on-going counselling. *This article shows a small snapshot of results from the study. Responses from on-going clients are referred to as General and responses from Single Session clients are referred to as SSC.*

Highlights of the Results

Participants:

SSC = 20 past clients; 13 gamblers and 7 family members

On-going = 38 past clients; 35 gamblers and 3 family member

Experiences of contacting the service

Clients reported that the BreakEven-Western Problem Gambling Service is easy to access and that counsellors could, generally be contacted when necessary. The locations for counselling appointments were also easy to get to.

Client Opinions of the Counselling Service

Most clients found the sessions helpful overall. 60% of SSC and 58% of general clients rated the helpfulness of the counselling experience 8 or above on a 10 point scale.

In answering what was unhelpful clients responses included;

“The counsellors didn't show enough personal experience with gambling addiction” and “Nothing was unhelpful”

Satisfaction with the Service

The top 3 client expectations prior to attending their counselling session were;

“To get in control”

“Help”

“To stop gambling”

48% of SSC clients and 55% of general clients felt they had got what they wanted out of the counselling experience.

⁸ Hammond, G. **Problematic Gambling patterns: Approaching a Systemic View** Master of Family Therapy Thesis Paper, Latrobe University February 1998.

Overall clients reported a high level of satisfaction with the service. 55% of SSC and 63% of general clients rated their satisfaction 8 or above on a 10 point scale.

{Comparisons between SSC responses and General Client responses}

Indicators of behaviour changes post counselling session/s

<i>Issues</i>	<i>SSC</i>	<i>General</i>
	<i>Going well</i>	<i>Much Improvement</i>
<i>Family</i>	46%	31%
<i>Gambling</i>	39%	47%*
<i>Relationship</i>	39%	40%
<i>Leisure</i>	31%	26%
<i>Mood</i>	31%	26%
<i>Financial</i>	23%	42%
<i>Physical Symptoms</i>	8%	23%
<i>Legal</i>	-	6%

62% of SSC clients had counselling with family members while only 26% of General clients brought family members along.

How have things been going since the counselling?

	<i>SSC</i>	<i>General</i>
<i>Much Worse</i>	-	11%
<i>A little worse</i>	-	5%
<i>Same</i>	-	16%
<i>A little better</i>	30%	27%
<i>Much Improved</i>	70%	41%
<i>Would you say the counselling influenced this?</i>	yes = 85%	yes = 60%

Client willingness to re-contact Break Even-Western

<i>Question</i>	<i>SSC</i>	<i>General</i>
	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>1. Would you recommend the service to anyone else?</i>	100%	87%
<i>2. Would you consider using the service again?</i>	95%	84%
<i>3. Would you feel comfortable contacting the Counsellors again?</i>	100%	90%
<i>4. Would you be interested in discussion or information nights?</i>	70%	71%
<i>5. Would you be interested in meeting with other people in your situation for support?</i>	45%	74%
<i>6. Day</i>		43%
<i>Night</i>		57%
<i>Once a week</i>		24%
<i>Once a fortnight</i>		22%
<i>Once a month</i>		30%
<i>8. Would you like a copy of the BreakEven-Western newsletter?</i>	100%	84%

Main Themes

Counselling is an opportunity to clear the air and talk about the gambling behaviour. This reinforces the idea that gamblers feel alienated in the community because of the secrecy surrounding their gambling.

Problem gambling counselling involving the gambler and family members helps improve relationships. This supports the Family Therapy/Systemic approach of BreakEven-Western.

Often clients want to control gambling rather than stop completely, this challenges the traditional approach used by Gamblers Anonymous.

Clients appreciate the counsellors knowledge and expertise in the problem gambling area.

Clients identified that they are interested in Group therapy sessions for gamblers and couples to share their experiences in a supportive environment.

The results support the continued use of SSC as a choice offered at intake.

Clients reported that they are interested in receiving the BreakEven-Western Newsletter.

Signs of Success

Success cannot always be measured by a reduction in gambling other factors or aspects of a persons life can also show signs of change which can be classified as a measure of success. Other factors which indicates progress towards change are:

- . Clients begins to learn from shocking events in their lives more rather than denying the shocks.
- . Act on some of the challenges commonly facing problem gamblers, e.g. break down secrecy or move towards intimacy rather than towards gambling.
- recognize their own self-tricking thinking.
- . Client comes to identify the issues and possibilities and takes action.
- . Client meets some of their goals.
- . Client quality of life improves.
- . Client increases their control of their gambling.
- . Client comes to several sessions
- . Gambling becomes less of an issue between a couple.
- . Client increases the integration of their thoughts, actions, feelings.
- . Client increases the integration of their personal life, social life and their symbolic life.

The factors that contribute to achieving successful outcomes in counselling include:

Individual factors:

- . Engaging client
- . Flexible
- . Client comes to counselling already determined to change
- . Taking advantage of therapeutic moments

Agency factor:

- . Qualified staff
 - . Free out of hours service
 - . Supportive / cohesive team of counsellors.
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How effective are industry codes of practice in addressing instances of problem gambling?

See attached Comments on the Victorian Codes and their implementation as prepared by BreakEven problem gambling services in Victoria.

Research with Gaming Venues

The current research supports the theory that the gaming industry does have a level of responsibility in problem gambling and is also willing to implement strategies to reduce its impact. This is consistent with Eadington (1989) who suggests that there is potential for the reduction of the negative impact of gambling to be mitigated by the environment provided by the gambling industry. The results of this research indicate that many of the gaming venue operators are very willing to partake in the prevention of problem gambling and have shown a high level of support for specific strategies such as displaying and providing information on support services, displaying clocks, training staff, providing self banning procedures, consistent with those recommended by Mellor (1995) and some already implemented by Hurrah's Casino Hotels (Sherman, 1991) and also by the German government (Fabian, 1995). Other harm minimisation strategies informed by Mellor (1995) and encouraged by BreakEven (1997) include:

- displaying the odds of winning
- implementing a house policy of no loans or credit
- displaying a house policy on problem gambling
- providing responsible gambling tips for patrons
- stickers on machines or messages on the screens of electronic gaming machines warning of potential danger such as 'Gambling is not a solution to personal problems' or 'Have you kept to your limit?'

Implementing specific restrictions also minimises harm, for example:

- not providing note taking or change machines
- machines in restricted areas only
- no credit access for gambling
- avoiding the use of alcohol or other inducements to gamble
- not promoting gambling as a coping strategy or relaxation technique for stress relief
- not promoting gambling as a means to personal, social or financial success
- ensuring gaming room is not accessible to minors

The interest of venues needs to be capitalised on, with gaming venues being encouraged to participate in the further development and implementation of prevention strategies.

Strategies not supported by the venues surveyed produced some interesting written responses. Many venues indicated the belief that the provision of an EFTPOS machine was part of the competitive market. Other venues (competitors) provide them so they see this as maintaining patronage. Encouraging \$500 winners to leave the venue also promoted some feedback. Venues expressed their understanding that they were there to provide somewhere for people to gamble and they need to be allowed to do this. Calling a cab to encourage big winners to 'cool off' was seen by some to be an invasion. Encouraging payment in cheque was considered to be going against patron demand. However payment by cheque can reduce the security risk for both the venue and the patron. This can be another way a venue can be seen to be providing patron care.

While there was general support for providing and displaying information on support services, the placement of that information varied. Some venues had no problem displaying signs or posters in the main foyer, however the majority of written responses indicated a preference to keep the information away from the cashier's station and place them in more discreet areas such as the men's / ladies' rooms. These are quiet areas where the information can be seen and cards or brochures can be taken without detection. However, a reminder near the cashier's station can perhaps be more influential to those needing to be reminded of the dangers of excessive gambling. It is our belief that the display of information does not threaten, offend or frighten off patrons who do not have a gambling problem. Displaying information can project an image of responsibility that may in fact place the venue, and in deed the whole gaming industry, in to a better light with some patrons and even some critics of the industry within the community.

For the majority of Australians, gambling is an enjoyable entertainment, however, the nature of the gaming industry within Victoria and indeed Australia, as well as the unique experience of urban casinos, accentuates the importance of working within a harm minimisation strategy. The recommendations presented in this paper are to enlighten debate, increase interest in research on prevention strategies and challenge other problem gambling services in the development of strategies and the implementation of their services. The Community Education and Liaison Officers within the BreakEven network in Victoria are strongly committed to excellence in the provision of services to both the community and the gaming venues. The authors believe that prevention and education strategies, as outlined in this paper, can be developed in cooperation with the gaming industry. Indeed, discussions have, and continue to take place on a number of levels which this research will further inform.

Further research is highly recommended and necessary in this area both at state and national levels. Due the Gaming Industry Codes of Practice now in place in Victoria, a comprehensive analysis of harm minimisation and prevention strategies in gaming venues, as a follow up to this survey, would be invaluable in the review of the effectiveness of this code. An analysis of harm minimisation and prevention strategies in any country where widespread gaming is available, would provide an opportunity to both increase the understanding of problem gambling and to identify further prevention strategies for gaming venues and the gaming industry as a whole.⁹

Are there aspects of the codes of practice which should be included in regulation, and if so, why?

See attached Comments on the Victorian Codes and their implementation as prepared by BreakEven problem gambling services in Victoria.

⁹ Sheedy. T & Pfeiffer. W. **Problem Gambling and Prevention Strategies in gaming Venues: A survey of Gaming Venues in Victoria. Australia.** International Gambling Conference, Montreal Canada 1997

Is funding and coordination of existing services adequate? What mechanisms should be used for funding these services?

The funding level of services should reflect the demand for services and the availability of gambling opportunities in a given area. In Victoria there appears to be a greater concentration of gaming venues in low-income areas which correlates with the number of people seeking help from services.

Co-ordination of services on a statewide and metropolitan level is not adequate. Funding is necessary to ensure that BreakEven Services can successfully achieve the following

- Address matters of common interest & concern to BreakEven Services and the wider community.
- Practice effective communication across BreakEven services and the wider community.
- Work co-operatively with the government in the implementation of the Problem Gambling Strategies.
- Promote the professional development needs of BreakEven workers.
- Encourage the development and implementation of research.
- Develop resources that will assist all BreakEven workers.
- Provide opportunities for the sharing of information and expertise.¹⁰

Additional resources are needed to ensure that prevention and harm minimisation is approached from a informed and researched basis. Harm minimisation has been suggested as the approach to use yet little direct research has been funded to ensure that education practices are supported and adequately implemented. Current staffing level of education staff within BreakEven do not allow adequate time or resources for focus group testing of materials and delays in the release funds limits the amount of work that can be undertaken. Clear measurable objectives are also required to ensure quality outcomes.

Benefits and costs for local communities

Costs and other economic impacts

The Commission is interested in any information and comments on the economic impacts of the distribution of gambling revenues and profits.

Break Even-Western, the government funded Problem Gambling Counselling Service called together a range of people from across the Western Metropolitan region of Melbourne with an interest in the issue of gambling to participate in a regional conference on Friday 17th October. Almost 70 people attended the conference, which was held at the Yarraville Community Centre.¹¹

Speakers included: Gabrielle Levine Director, Western Region Department of Human Services
Kelly Minogue Mayor City of Hobsons Bay
Sarah Brown Queen of Hearts Study (FCRC)

¹⁰ Victorian BreakEven Statement of Purpose, BreakEven-Secretariat 1998

¹¹ BreakEven-Western, Western Region Gambling Conference Proceedings: Developing a Response. October 1997

David Carr The Interchurch Gambling Taskforce and representatives from financial counselling, various ethnic communities, Gamblers Anonymous, community action groups, Women's Health West and Break Even-Western.

Participants felt that further research and programs needed to be developed to respond to the continued growth of the gaming industry, particularly in the West. Other key points included messages for the Victorian government, the gambling industry, the community and to service providers.

“Who Wins?: Women and Gambling in the West”, a research project of Women's Health West was also launched at the conference by the Vic. Health Promotion Foundation. The report documents the effects of increased gambling opportunities in the West for women and their communities.

Kelley Johnson from the Women's Health Service said, “Social isolation, the attractiveness of gaming venues and the lack of alternative safe meeting places were identified by women as the reasons for the attraction of gambling for women”.

Conference participant's recommendations included;

- Need to ask those who are effected by gambling for their opinion and involvement.
 - Need to develop a Network to represent all community groups on the issue and to develop action research is undertaken and implemented.
 - A change to legislation further limiting the number of EGMs, particularly in low-income areas and the setting of maximum number of EGMs per local area.
 - The development of a regional newsletter that documented research and action to link professionals in the community.
 - Greater recognition that there is a range of different groups in the Region affected by gambling in their own unique way.
 - That the development and sharing of theoretical frameworks on problem gambling is important.
 - Acknowledgement of the importance of working with the Gaming Industry to minimise the harm associated with gaming.
 - Need for community groups to access information from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.
 - Recognition that you don't need experience in order to take action.
 - Financial Counsellor's recognise the importance and need to work more closely with Break Even and that they make have a lot to contribute with their experience in working with low income families.
 - People from a non-English speaking background may not understand counselling and that community education may be a better option for working with these groups.
 - People from NESB groups seem prohibited in talking about the problem.
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