

The need for a prevalence study.

There needs to be some type of measure of the social and economic impacts of gambling in the ACT. There is no doubt that gambling industries offer both benefits and costs to the community but the balance of these are not known in the ACT. There apparently was a study done on the Social and Economic Impact of introducing a casino into Canberra, however, this would only take in part of the picture because the main type of gambling that people experience difficulties with is Electronic Gaming Machines or Pokies and our casino doesn't even have these.

Can we keep increasing the availability of gambling opportunities – especially poker machines - without knowing what kind of impact this would have on the community. When an economic analysis was done on the alcohol industry which argued that it returned net benefits to the community (as does the gambling industry) it was found that alcohol **costs** the Australian economy between 6 and 8 billion dollars annually (Hawks, D., 1997). If it's possible that this may also be true for the gambling industry then before we expand it we need to take stock and put in place strategies, policies and procedures which will minimise the harm associated with gambling.

The generally accepted prevalence rate of 1% of the population having problems with gambling is small, but just using percentages doesn't show us that there are **real people** who are suffering. The prevalence rate also does not take into consideration that a person experiencing a gambling problem lives in a community which he/she impacts. So the negative aspects of gambling can manifest themselves in individuals and their families (partners and children), their social network, their productivity at work and sometimes even in illegal acts to finance the gambling in order to try and make up losses. It's also important to realise that prevalence rates in Australia have been estimated to range from 1% up to 3%, this is similar to the prevalence rate of alcohol problems, 2%-5% (Hawks, D., 1997). This similarity highlights a deficiency in there being no body for gambling related problems, the equivalent of the National Drug Strategy which has sufficient funding for research, education, prevention and treatment, think of the media campaigns and the education in schools which look at minimising the harm from alcohol.

When looking at the social and economic impacts of gambling, rather than looking at %HDI, perhaps a more useful area of investigation would be to look at where the expenditure on gambling is coming from (savings, household expenses, money allocated for other purposes etc) and from which income brackets.

In conducting a study on the social and economic impacts of gambling I think it's important to remember the comments in the report titled "Inquiry into the Social Impact of the Extension of Video Gaming Machines Beyond Casinos in Tasmania" which, paraphrased, says that the intention should not be to reduce every social cost to a monetary value as this undermines the nature of the personal costs experienced by many individuals and may not necessarily generate meaningful results. Quantifying social costs **is** useful in illustrating that the social impacts provide a powerful argument for government assistance, however, social costs which cannot be quantified should in no way deter governments from responding appropriately to reduce/eliminate these costs.

Comments on the paper “Has Dealing with Alcohol Anything to Teach us in Relation to Gambling?”

There are a number of points made in this paper which are consistent with harm-minimisation approaches to the use of alcohol which can be used to model an approach to gambling, we don't have to re-invent the wheel.

Some of the harm reduction strategies suggested include:

- **Controlling the consumption** of alcohol in association with gambling.
- Statement of the **odds INFORMED CONSENT**.
- It should be **illegal to engage in irresponsible promotions** which exaggerate returns or which may mislead in relation to the odds.
- **Access** to games not be rendered too available or their cost so modest as to make them accessible to everyone. At the very least no credit should be extended to gamblers or ATMs placed in close proximity to gambling outlets. The same logic would apply to pawnbrokers.
- Licensing law in all of our states makes it **illegal** for a licensee or their employees **to continue to serve** someone whom they judge to be intoxicated.a licensee has a responsibility to ensure that a patron does not, as a consequence of the service offered, become incapable of determining whether that service should be continued. Has the same principle application in gambling?
- In the same way as it has been persuasively argued that it is too late to wait until someone has developed a physical dependence on alcohol before attempting to address that dependence when to do so is very difficult and subject to relapse: it would be recommended that **the early signs of dependence** on gambling be widely and publicly disseminated and that there be appropriate treatment and referral agencies catering to people displaying these signs.
- Increasingly it has been argued that activities like smoking, drinking and gambling all of which have the potential for producing dependent behaviour should attract **an additional tax which is hypothecated** with a view to its being used to fund public education and treatment for those adversely effected by these activities...
- It is open to the gaming industry to **ban forms of gambling** such as those offering continuous programmed reinforcement, which have been found to be particularly “addictive”. Additionally, there are a number of technical fixes which may be of assistance, the imposition of payment intervals and cooling-off periods...
- **...guidance be available regarding “safe gambling” and the early signs of “unsafe gambling”...**
- Paraphrased: To provide treatment in the absence of any attempt to **prevent** the occurrence of dependence represents a strategically inappropriate response. It is not only the vulnerable few develop problems associated with gambling as there is no consistently demonstrated personality trait associated with the propensity to become dependent on gambling. **ANYONE IS AT RISK!** There are situational and structural determinants or risk factors which need to be addressed. For example, absence of clocks or windows, proximity of ATMs to gambling outlets, and inducements to frequent gamblers.

Other points to consider.

- Codes of practice need to be enforceable – is this possible with self-regulation.
- ... proper costing will need to take into account the whole gamut of benefits associated with gambling so also must it take into account the full gamut of harms, both direct and indirect.

The need for “gambling free” venues.

I frequently hear comments from clients about their frustration and not being able to go anywhere to have a few drinks and socialise with their friends without being exposed to gambling – gaming machines in particular. Perhaps providing “gambling free” venues is a community service that the

The ACT picture.

There is a need for an overall government strategy which incorporates research, education, prevention and counselling services. Both Victoria and Tasmania appear to have a models which could be incorporated in the ACT. This would enable a means to allocate sufficient funding and an independent regulatory body.

Current funding allows for the employment of one part-time Gambling Counsellor and one part-time Financial Counsellor with Lifeline Canberra's Gambling and Financial Counselling Service.

Gaps in service delivery in the ACT identified by GAFCS.

- There is very little research available about the ACT in terms of prevalence of problem gambling and the social and economic impacts of gambling.
- No after-hours counselling services.
- No regional counselling services (ie surrounding regions of the ACT, particularly Queanbeyan)
- Lack of resources to adequately evaluate service effectiveness.
- Current funding only allows for the employment of 1.4 workers, this poses a problem in conflict-of-interest situations and when counsellors are unavailable due to leave taken or days spent in training.
- Current funding does not allow for increased demand. Research indicates an increase in the number of clients accessing a service when it is promoted, therefore to offer greater assistance it would be imperative to advertise but not possible because we would not be able to meet the increased demand.
- Education and prevention strategies are vital but not offered in the ACT. There are no funds specifically allocated to education, prevention nor media campaigns.
- No awareness campaign for GP's in the ACT.
- No enforcement of Voluntary Code of Practice.

As with the Alcohol and Other Drugs field services are available through both the public and community sectors. If the availability of gambling is here to stay then there is a need to provide gambling related services reliably through both the public and community systems. If a community organisation is providing assistance in the problem gambling area and is defunded those affected will still be able to access services provided by the government.

Funding levels need to be determined. The services which the ACT and/or Federal Governments wish to provide need to be identified and a percentage of either gross profit (turnover) from the entire gambling industry (EGM's, Casino games, Racing, Sports betting, Keno) or government revenue need to be allocated to this.

Funding research into the social and economic impacts of gambling in the ACT (Probably the Australian Institute of Gambling Research). This research would involve determining a baseline and future replication work to monitor trends and any increases in the availability of gambling (ie increase in the availability of current products or the availability of new products).

When conducting research into the social and economic impacts of gambling need to look at the total range of gambling related problems such as depression, anxiety, relationship/family breakdown, job loss, sick leave, crime, suicide etc

To avoid conflict-of-interest it has been suggested by some that gambling service providers be banned from making donations to political parties.

In summary, our main points are:

1. There is harm associated with gambling and it needs to be measured.
2. There need to be national strategies, policies and procedures in place to minimise the harm associated with gambling, with adequate funding for
 - (a) Education and prevention strategies
 - (b) Research
 - (c) Treatment services
3. There needs to be collaboration with the gambling industry to reduce the risk of gambling products.