

Anglicare Tasmania submission to the Fifth Social and Economic Impact Study of Gambling in Tasmania

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Working for a just Tasmania

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About Anglicare Tasmania

Anglicare Tasmania is a large community service organisation in Tasmania with offices in Hobart, Glenorchy, Launceston, St Helens, Devonport, Burnie, Sorell and Zeehan and a range of programs in rural areas. Anglicare Tasmania's services include crisis, short-term and long-term accommodation support; NDIS disability and mental health support services; support services following a motor vehicle accident; aged and home care services; alcohol and other drug services; financial and gambling counselling; and family support. In addition, Anglicare Tasmania's Social Action and Research Centre conducts research, policy and advocacy work with a focus on issues affecting Tasmanians on low incomes.

Anglicare Tasmania is committed to achieving social justice for all Tasmanians. It is our mission to speak out against poverty and injustice and offer decision-makers alternative solutions to help build a more just society. We provide opportunities for people in need to reach their full potential through our services, research and advocacy.

Anglicare Tasmania's work is guided by a set of values which includes these beliefs:

- that each person is valuable and deserves to be treated with respect and dignity;
- that each person has the capacity to make and to bear the responsibility for choices and decisions about their life;
- that support should be available to all who need it; and
- that every person can live life abundantly.

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Anglicare recommendations

Anglicare Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Fifth Social and Economic Impact Study of Gambling in Tasmania. We have considerable experience delivering gambling help services, community based programs and research to support people harmed by gambling addictions.

The current Gambling Support Program Strategic Framework 2019-2023 utilises a clear public health approach as it aims to strengthen community resilience, develop personal skills and provide services to support those most affected by gambling (WHO 1986). This program could be enhanced by additional 'upstream' public health initiatives to strengthen the government's commitment to supporting Tasmanians at risk of harm from gambling. We have included some recommendations for building healthier public policy and creating supportive environments for all Tasmanians.

Empower local communities

Local communities who have a say and are able to influence decisions that affect their community are more likely to be healthy and happy (Laverack et al 2008). Any venue wanting to introduce new electronic gaming machines (EGM) or where there has been a 6 month break in EGM operation is required to consult with the community through the Community Interest Test. This test provides local people with the opportunity to decide if they want EGMs in their community. Venues in place prior to March 2016 are exempt from this requirement. As this represents a large number of EGM venues across Tasmania, we recommend that this policy is changed so that all venues are required to consult with the community through the Community Interest Test on a scheduled basis.

We know that populations change and so do views about what is needed; the Community Interest Test could be repeated every 5 years and/or when a venue changes ownership. This would be a step in the right direction for healthier public policy on gambling in Tasmania.

Reduce harm

Tasmanians aged 25 to 34 years old are significantly more likely to use electronic gaming machines than any other age group, with the next highest participation rate in the 18-24 year old bracket (ACIL Allen Consulting et al 2017, p 13). We are concerned that these population groups also represent those notably affected by the impacts of COVID-19, through job loss and mental health conditions, for example. Tasmanians are known to lose significant amounts of money using poker machines - up to \$600 an hour (TLGC 2016).

If the maximum bet limit was reduced from the current \$5 to \$1, and the spin rate lengthened from 3 seconds to 6 seconds, the amount of money lost would be reduced significantly. We recommend a policy designed to reduce the intensity of play on poker machines to particularly help younger Tasmanians keep more of their money, especially in the current recession.

Additionally, research demonstrates that people often underestimate their expenditure when gambling, losing track of both money and time, especially whilst using EGMs (Rintoul & Thomas 2017). A mandatory card-based pre-commitment system is proving to be an effective intervention to support people to limit their gambling on poker machines (Livingstone et al. 2014). An account summary allows people to see exactly how much they have lost and the time spent gambling. This information would assist in behaviour change therapies associated with overcoming addiction.

We recommend a mandatory card-based pre-commitment system in all licensed venues as a way to create a supportive environment for Tasmanians, particularly for those with a gambling addiction.

Reduce availability

As with the restriction on purchasing alcohol and tobacco, limiting the accessibility of gambling opportunities is an effective way to create environments that better support the health of Tasmanians. Many gambling venues are open between 14 and 18 hours a day, between 8am and 2am, which is much longer than most other businesses in Tasmania. It is unlikely that purely recreational gamblers frequent venues at the extremes of these opening times.

Restricting the accessibility of gambling to a maximum of 12 hours a day would create a more supportive environment for Tasmanians, particularly for those with a gambling addiction or those at risk of developing an addiction.

Early identification, intervention and advertising

Screening, brief intervention and clear referral pathways are evidence-based tools used successfully in other public health interventions; for example, smoking prevention and cessation. A joined-up approach across health, social care and education could assist in the identification of people who are gambling for the first time, or those with a gambling addiction.

The Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council recommends a whole of population screening tool for mental health (PESRAC July 20 rec 61). We recommend that gambling activities be included in this screening tool to provide an excellent opportunity for brief intervention and, where appropriate, referral to support services. Additionally, data from this screening could provide insight into preferred gambling methods, to help inform policy and intervention.

To complement this initiative and the current Gambling Support Program Strategic Framework 2019-2023, we recommend additional investment in the advertising and promotion of financial health and wellbeing. Similar to messaging we have seen with smoking and alcohol addictions, people should be made aware of the impacts of gambling addiction, the availability of free gambling support and financial health services.

These are just a few options that we seek to highlight; the state's public health team would be able to assist in further development and other initiatives.

Data to support policy and program development

We recommend that the authors of the Fifth Social and Economic Impact Study of Gambling in Tasmania consider analysis of the following information within their research:

1. The Community Interest Test where it has been applied
2. The mandatory code and its effectiveness
3. The relationship between deprivation and gambling harm
4. The impact of gambling on relationships, particularly family relationships and domestic violence
5. Case studies of individual characteristics and personal journeys that lead to gambling addiction, to support targeted health promotion, education and social marketing activities.

Figure 2 - Real per Capita Total Gambling Expenditure by State, 2012/13 and 2017/18 in the discussion paper is notably adversely affected by betting company location, leading to confusion, misinterpretation and invalid comparison; these data should be adjusted or removed. We also recommend adding analysis for household disposable income, as Tasmanians tend to earn less than other Australians.

In July 2020, Anglicare conducted a snapshot survey of clients of the Gamblers Help service about the personal impact of venue closures due to COVID-19. The following information was obtained from 33 respondents:

- Almost 10% of respondents said they had been experiencing stress or anxiety with the closure of gaming venues. However, only 3% indicated that they were experiencing withdrawal and only 3% said they felt more edgy or grumpy.
- Almost 25% said they had been using other forms of gambling: lottery 12.5%, online 37.5% and racing 50%.
- When asked if they would visit gaming venues when they reopened, 21% said yes, 12% were unsure and 67% said no.
- 12% of respondents requested additional support to talk with one of our counsellors.
- One respondent reported that they had bought a car with the money they had saved since the venues were closed. Another respondent reported that they felt better during this period than they had before.

It would be helpful for the authors of the Fifth Social and Economic Impact Study of Gambling in Tasmania to consider similar questions within its study to better understand the impact of the gambling venue closures (on those who gamble, and also those who do not).

Additionally, Anglicare staff have recently conducted a number of venue visits across the state to provide education and support to staff working in gambling venues. This education covers how to recognize addiction, how to raise the issue and how to refer people to support services. The manager reported positive feedback explaining that staff were grateful for their support and advice and indicated they felt more confident after these visits.

Lastly, we note a recent significant increase in money spent in poker machines since venues re-opened. Tasmanians generally spend around \$15 million per month using electronic gaming machines. However in July this increased to almost \$19.5 million and \$18.5 million in August 2020 (Dept. of Treasury 2020). Whilst we recognise that people are going out to support the economy and visit local venues, we are concerned that increased gambling activity may be related to poor mental health, job loss and the impacts of COVID-19.

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