



**MISSION
AUSTRALIA**

**Joint Select
Committee Inquiry
into Future
Gaming Markets**

Mission Australia's submission to the Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Future Gaming Markets

About Mission Australia

Mission Australia is a national non-denominational Christian organisation that delivers evidence-based, client-centred community services. Our goal is to reduce homelessness and strengthen communities across Australia. In the 2015-16 financial year we supported over 131,000 Australians through 452 programs and services. In Tasmania our services include a range of homelessness, family support, mental health, and strengthening communities programs where problem gambling often arises as an issue of concern.

Summary of recommendations

Mission Australia is concerned about the impact of problem gambling on individuals and communities and has consistently called on governments to take action. Our submission is particularly focused on the effects of poker machines on the lives of our clients. Our service experience in working with people affected by gambling is that it can have far-reaching negative consequences for the lives of the people directly affected and also for their families.

Mission Australia is an active member of the Community Voice on Pokies Reform coalition and supports their submission and the four core measures proposed to:

1. Remove poker machines from hotels and clubs.
2. Not increase the number of poker machines in the casinos and to impose on the machines in the casinos a maximum \$1 bet limit and a system that requires people to set an enforceable limit on their losses. Further, for it to be mandatory for staff to intervene where customers may be experiencing harm from poker machines.
3. Continuation of counselling and other support services for those harmed by gambling.
4. Support hotels and clubs that currently have poker machines to transition their business model.

Community attitudes towards gambling

Mission Australia's focus is on the Inquiry's first Term of Reference:

- a) Consideration of community attitudes and aspirations relating to the gambling industry in Tasmania with particular focus on the location, number and type of poker machines in the State.

Recent Tasmanian research found that 84 per cent of respondents surveyed agreed that ‘The Tasmanian community does not benefit from having poker machines in hotels and clubs’.ⁱ Research has also found that one in three Tasmanians personally know someone who has experienced serious problems with gambling on poker machinesⁱⁱ and that 82 per cent of Tasmanians either want poker machines removed entirely from local venues (50%) or at least to be reduced in number (32%).ⁱⁱⁱ

These numbers are an important indication to Government that community attitudes to poker machines in Tasmania are highly unfavourable and that a vast majority of people in the community do not see benefits from poker machines and would either like them removed altogether or reduced in number.

Mission Australia has seen the deleterious effects of gambling on our clients and strongly supports efforts to reduce the number of poker machines in Tasmania.

The effects of gambling

We know from our service experience that clients with gambling problems experience not only financial crisis, but also a range of other issues including relationship breakdown, homelessness and depression. Problem gambling can cause disruptions in any and all major areas of a person’s life including psychological, physical, spiritual, social or vocational problems. The impacts of problem gambling also extend beyond the individual to the person’s family and community.

These impacts are illustrated by the story of Sally, one of our clients, whose life and family have been severely negatively impacted by Sally’s gambling.

Case study: Sally*

Sally is a woman living in a social housing estate in Tasmania with her husband Kevin and their four children, one a teenager in high school and the three others still in primary school. Sally plays the pokies almost every day at her local club. She uses the money that Kevin brings home from working six days a week to fund her gambling habit. Every morning, she leaves the house when the kids leave for school and spends a large part of the day playing the pokies.

The effects of this on Sally and her family are devastating. Sally and Kevin are several thousand dollars in debt to utilities companies, and their house is run down and damaged. The children are uncared for by their mother. The eldest is only allowed to be at school for three days per week because of violent behaviour, which is a result of her mother’s negligence and lack of care. Sally does not have a current driver’s license but nonetheless drives herself to the club as the only form of transportation to get there. The fridge is empty and the family does not have enough to eat.

Some of the systems that businesses set up to assist people struggling with money are detrimental to Sally and help to fuel her ability to gamble. The utilities companies allow her to pay \$20/fortnight off her bills, which means that she and Kevin have accumulated a huge debt and also that Sally has enough cash flow to continue her gambling.

This means that Sally is able to keep going without admitting that gambling is affecting her life. Sally enjoys gambling and sees it as an escape from the problems that are building up at home – problems that are caused by her gambling in the first place.

Through her local church, Sally and her family have made contact with and are receiving support from Mission Australia. Sally has repeatedly been offered many different kinds of assistance by Mission Australia, but refuses to engage with support services beyond basic food and assistance parcels. She does not want to engage with any services where conversation about her needs might reveal the impact of her gambling and compel her to admit that it is negatively affecting her life and her family.

Sally's husband Kevin is open to support and has become involved in men's groups and other programs through Mission Australia. Mission Australia has weekly contact with Sally, but talking about gambling so far remains off-limits and results in Sally shutting down when the subject is raised.

***names have been changed to protect privacy**

As illustrated in Sally's story, gambling can be used by vulnerable people as a coping strategy for dealing with problems and distress. Sally's story also illustrates that gambling disproportionately affects people experiencing disadvantage, such as unemployment, low income and social isolation, which the gambling industry takes advantage of by concentrating poker machines in areas of disadvantage.^{iv}

Mission Australia conducts an annual *Youth Survey* of people aged 15 to 19 to understand their concerns. In 2016, gambling was a major concern for 5.4 per cent of young people in Tasmania, slightly higher than their national counterparts at 4.4 per cent. When analysing the 2014 *Youth Survey* data to look more closely at young people experiencing disadvantage, we found that gambling was more likely to be a concern for young people in low SES areas than young people in high SES areas. Findings from *Achieving independence*, a report on *Youth Survey 2015* results from Mission Australia clients, indicated that gambling was more likely to be of concern to young clients of our services than to young people who were not Mission Australia clients (6.1% compared with 3.1%). These findings paint a picture of a certain group of disadvantaged young men and women facing challenges of a low SES background, for whom gambling is an added vulnerability.

In light of the significant impacts of problem gambling, particularly on those facing disadvantage and with complex needs, Mission Australia supports efforts to remove poker machines from pubs and clubs and place a \$1 bet limit on poker machines in casinos. These measures are an important complement to gambling counselling and other social services that support problem gamblers to address the impacts of their gambling for themselves, their families and their communities.

We support the submission from Community Voice on Pokies Reform and the four core measures proposed within.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Tasmanian Government:

- 1. Remove poker machines from hotels and clubs.**
- 2. Not increase the number of poker machines in the casinos and to impose on the machines in the casinos a maximum \$1 bet limit and a system that requires people to set an enforceable limit on their losses. Further, for it to be mandatory for staff to intervene where customers may be experiencing harm from poker machines.**
- 3. Continue counselling and other support services for those harmed by gambling.**
- 4. Support hotels and clubs that currently have poker machines to transition their business model.**

Conclusion

Mission Australia is an active member of the Community Voice on Pokies Reform coalition and supports their submission to the Inquiry. Our service experience tells us that gambling can be an incredibly harmful activity for vulnerable people and can have far-reaching effects on their lives and the lives of their families. We urge the Tasmanian Government to remove poker machines from hotels and clubs, limit their use in casinos, continue counselling and other support services for those harmed by gambling and support hotels and clubs to transition their business model away from income depending on poker machines.

End notes

ⁱ AnglicareTas. 2015. Community views on poker machines: Research report. Accessed online November 2016 at <https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/sites/anglicare-tas.org.au/files/Community%20Views%20on%20Poker%20Machines.pdf>

ⁱⁱ AnglicareTas. 2016. Community views on poker machines: Research report, February 2016. Accessed online December 2016 at https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/sites/anglicare-tas.org.au/files/Community%20Views%20on%20Poker%20Machines_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ AnglicareTas. 2015. Community views on poker machines: Research report, November 2015. Accessed online November 2016 at <https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/sites/anglicare-tas.org.au/files/Community%20Views%20on%20Poker%20Machines.pdf>

^{iv} The Allen Consulting Group, Problem Gambling and Research Centre, and the Social Research Centre. 2011. Social and Economic Impact Study of Gambling in Tasmania: Volume 2: Gambling survey, prepared for the Tasmanian Government Department of Treasury & Finance. pp 5, 6, 118. Accessed online November 2016 at [https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/domino/dtf/dtf.nsf/LookupFiles/Volume2secondgamblingSEIS.PDF/\\$file/Volume2secondgamblingSEIS.PDF](https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/domino/dtf/dtf.nsf/LookupFiles/Volume2secondgamblingSEIS.PDF/$file/Volume2secondgamblingSEIS.PDF)