

01/04/2011

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

The Multicultural Problem Gambling Service for NSW (MPGS) wishes to thank the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, for the opportunity to present a submission for consideration regarding the inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia.

MPGS is a joint initiative of the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW (CRC) and NSW Health and is funded by the Responsible Gambling Fund of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, working to provide problem gambling counseling to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

The key issues MPGS wish to highlight for the consideration of the Committee are as follows:

- A 2009 study conducted by NSW Health found that only a small (0.4%) percentage of gamblers ever develop problem gambling habits. At the same time we know that for every problem gambler there are another 10 people associated with them who are adversely affected. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data from 2006 indicated that CALD community members are not less or more likely to develop problem gambling than others, but their reasons for doing so and their attitude towards help seeking is different.
- A study commissioned by Gambling Research Australia in 2010 identified depression, stress and anxiety as precursors and factors contributing to the maintenance of problem gambling in CALD populations. Gambling problems were found to be associated with negative life events of divorce, separation, death of a family member, knowing someone in a serious accident and mental illness. It is likely that gambling is employed as a coping mechanism for negative life events.
- Reasons for problem gambling may vary across CALD communities according to their migration, refugee and re-settlement experience. Immigrants and refugees who are undergoing a process of acculturation to their new country may experience socioeconomic stress (Beattie, Blaszczyński, Maccallum and Joukhador 1999). Common stressors are believed to include having a minority group status, lack of language or other marketable skills. Feelings of self-doubt regarding one's cultural identity may be conducive to taking up gambling as an outlet to deal with these adverse effects of immigration (Scull and Woolcock 2005; Varma and Siris 1996). When one does not have sufficient language skills to socialize with the wider community, as is sometimes the case of older immigrants, and culturally appropriate alternative activities are limited or non-existent, gambling may become an attractive option for various CALD communities. For example, cultural

factors considered in the initiation and maintenance of gambling include adherence to cultural values, acculturation and culturally determined help seeking behavior. Gambling can be integrated into lifestyle, history and tradition. Cultural values and beliefs passed on through generations may also influence preferences for individual entertainment and escapism from their daily lives. Literature proposes that a successful adaptation into a new country could either increase or reduce the likelihood of developing problem gambling in immigrant communities.

- MPGS recognizes the following barriers to help seeking by CALD community members:
 - professional services may not be accessed because of a lack of awareness of their availability;
 - community members may be reluctant to seek professional help because of the stigma associated with 'public' disclosure, shame and cultural resistance to verbalising their problems in support groups or in front of an unknown counsellor;
 - the perception that mainstream services are culturally and linguistically inappropriate;
 - a lack of cultural sensitivity may result in clients not returning for further sessions.

- MPGS recommends:
 - targeted research identifying which CALD populations are more vulnerable to problem gambling
 - development of culturally aware harm minimization strategies
 - raising awareness of the significance and improving cultural sensitivity of various service providers
 - community based services designed to address the complexities and multiple barriers that CALD communities face.

The Multicultural Problem Gambling Service for NSW urges the Committee to consider the unique, varied and changing needs specific to problem gamblers from CALD communities when reviewing programs and services related to policy and service development in Australia. MPGS would be pleased to be involved with any future problem gambling initiatives targeting CALD communities that the Committee may wish to develop as a result of this enquiry.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this submission further, please do not hesitate to contact me via email: Maria-Lujza.Edwards@swahs.health.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

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