

Relationships Australia

Tasmania

The Break Even Program Addressing the Impacts of Poker Machines in Tasmania

Since the inauguration of the Break Even services in Tasmania in 1997, our Break Even Program team have assisted many individuals and families affected by poker machine gambling, and have also worked to strengthen community groups against the inherent hazards in this gambling product.

Machine gambling continues to be one of the most contentious and troublesome of our society's leisure products, as well as being one of the most lucrative areas of taxation for our state government.

Overall gambling losses by Tasmanians has now reached a level of approximately \$900 per annum per adult – a figure which, given our lower average household disposable income than the rest of Australia, suggests that gambling may be impacting more heavily on Tasmanians than other Australians.

Every day in our work we see more of the impacts of gambling on individuals and families, and those effects spread far beyond the gambler.

Of all forms of gambling, poker machines are especially dangerous because they are so accessible and the public are not informed of the technology built in to the machines which make them so addictive. Research undertaken in the US has confirmed the reputation of electronic gaming machines as the “crack cocaine” of the gambling industry:

*“The rapid PG [pathological gambling] -onset in machine gamblers is a phenomenon that has been widely alluded to, but remained anecdotal and elusive. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical examination of the question. As the analogy of crack cocaine suggested, context matters. The quality of different forms of gambling affect the progression of PG much the same as different substances affect the progression of dependence. **We suggest that gambling machines “deliver” their “active ingredient” more rapidly, continuously and directly than the traditional forms of gambling.**”*

From Robert Breen and Mark Zimmerman,
'Rapid Onset of Pathological Gambling in Machine Gamblers',
Journal of Gambling Studies, 2002, 18, 31-43.

<http://www.ncalg.org/Library/Studies%20and%20White%20Papers/Addiction%20and%20Health/Breen%20Rapid%20Onset.pdf>

Machine gambling has been limited, prohibited or made less accessible in many parts of the world, including certain states in the United States, in Norway, in Nova Scotia, and in Western Australia and South Australia. Research completed in Australia by one of the world's most respected experts concludes:

*“ . . . the data we collected showed the **virtual impossibility of regular VLT [Video Lottery Terminal] or EGM [Electronic Gaming Machine] players gambling responsibly: that this failure to control expenditure and time had **nothing to do with pathology** but was an integral part of the pleasure of gambling on a continuous form and a purely human response to the method whereby the EGM supplies games in an automated and endless sequence.**”*

“The process is unethical because it is contrary to existing consumer protection principles of informed consent.” [emphasis added]

From Mark Dickerson, Conference Summation,
Insight Nova Scotia International Problem Gambling Conference,
Nova Scotia, October 6, 2004.

See also:

M. Dickerson, J. Haw, and L. Shepherd, *“The psychological causes of problem gambling: A longitudinal study of at risk recreational EGM players”*, University of Western Sydney – School of Psychology, Bankstown Campus, January 2002 – March 2003.

There is compelling research evidence of both the negative impact and the antipathy of Australian communities to the present regime of poker machine gambling.

Following is a summary of the negative impacts of poker machine gambling experienced by our clients:

PERSONAL AND FAMILY DIMENSIONS OF THE GAMBLING TOLL

- Marital and family breakdown
- Family violence
- Child neglect and abuse
- Children's futures jeopardised
- Loss of family reputation
- Social isolation
- Loss of employment
- Loss of work productivity

- Accidents, including road accidents
- Criminal acts (theft, robbery, financial crime)
- Court appearance/Gaol
- Suicide (attempted, completed)
- Homicide
- Financial stress
- Debt
- Bankruptcy
- Loss of family assets
- Homelessness
- Mental health problems (anxiety, depression, suicidality)
- Increased alcohol, tobacco, and other drug consumption
- Poor general health

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DIMENSIONS OF THE GAMBLING TOLL

- Erosion of cultural resources (cultural and social activities including social club participation, church attendance)
- Impact on community fund-raising activity
- Loss of wealth from communities
- Breakdown of community solidarity
- Loss of human capital via outmigration, unemployment, imprisonment of gambling victims
- Increased demand for health, welfare, legal, policing, and court services.
- Increased financial burden on taxpayers to meet the expanded costs of maintaining state-funded services.

We strongly support any measures which will significantly reduce the harm presently being inflicted on individuals and families through machine gambling.

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