



## **Australian Government**

### **Australian Government response to the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform report:**

### **The prevention and treatment of problem gambling**

[May 2013]

**Government Response  
Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform**

***Third Report: The Prevention and Treatment of Problem Gambling***

The Australian Government welcomes this report and recognises the important ongoing work of the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform.

The Government is committed to taking action to reduce the harm caused by problem gambling and acknowledges that research can play a prominent role in informing future policy and programs and provide lessons learnt through evaluation.

Since the Committee's report was released, the Government has, through the *National Gambling Reform Act (2012)*, established the Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) from July 2013.

The AGRC will be an independent research body, housed in the Australian Institute for Family Studies (AIFS), which will provide greater insight into problem gambling through the provision of a comprehensive and forward thinking research and evidence program.

The AGRC will be supported by an independent Expert Advisory Group on Gambling, which will provide advice to the Director of AIFS in relation to strategic directions and research plans and programs into gambling and strategies to increase the capability and capacity of researchers.

**Response to the Joint Select Committee's Report**

The Government agrees or agrees in-principle to many of the recommendations made by the Committee.

The Government acknowledges that the Committee has made several recommendations which involve conducting or commissioning research. The Government has a strong history of funding problem gambling research which is consistent with the ongoing approach to evidence based policy, and has previously funded research into topics which relate to the areas highlighted by the Committee. The new AGRC will be the first ever dedicated national body for gambling research. Many of the Committee's recommendation could be relevant to the work of the AGRC and the Committee's report will be provided to the AGRC when established to inform their consideration of their forward work agenda.

The Australian Government recognises that the Committee has also made recommendations in areas which state and territory governments have primary responsibility or where joint effort is required. These recommendations will require further consultation with jurisdictions.

## Government Response to the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform Prevention and Treatment of Problem Gambling

Recommendation	Government Response
<p><b><u>Rec 1:</u></b> The committee emphasises the importance of jurisdictions ensuring appropriate performance targets are developed, and that ongoing monitoring and appropriate evaluation of individual initiatives is undertaken to build the evidence base for effective measures to address problem gambling. The committee recommends jurisdictions report to COAG each year on progress against the National Framework for Problem Gambling and that the reporting include key performance targets and evaluation information.</p>	<p><b>Agree in-principle.</b> The Australian Government will develop appropriate performance measures for its programs to address problem gambling. Initiatives under the <i>National Gambling Reform Act 2012</i> will also be subject to review by the Productivity Commission in September 2014.  The Government notes that there is not currently a National Framework on Problem Gambling. The Australian Government will discuss this issue further with state and territory governments.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 2:</u></b> The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designate gambling as a National Health Priority Area to be funded for research under the auspices of the National Health and Medical Research Council; and</li> <li>• recognise gambling as an 'associated priority goal' under the Commonwealth Government's National Research Priority of 'promoting and maintaining good health', enabling funding support for gambling research to be provided by the Australian Research Council.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Agree in-principle.</b> The Government supports objectives to enhance funding and improve capabilities to conduct research on problem gambling.  Through the <i>National Gambling Reform Act 2012</i>, the Government has established the Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) to enhance national gambling research.</p>

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Recommendation	Government Response
<p><b><u>Rec 3:</u></b> The committee recommends that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Problem Gambling Taskforce commission research on the complex causes and consequences of stigma and the most effective way to address and reduce the stigma associated with problem gambling. States could then draw on this work to develop strategies to address stigma and include appropriate messages in their own social marketing campaigns.</p>	<p><b>Agree in-principle.</b> The Government acknowledges that the stigma associated with problem gambling can have negative consequences. Research which relates to this recommendation has already been conducted by Gambling Research Australian (GRA), including: <i>Gamblers at Risk and their Help Seeking Behaviour (2011)</i>, and <i>Problem Gambling and Harm: Towards a National Definition (2005)</i>. The Government is also conducting a trial project which aims to reduce the stigma of problem gambling by supporting former problem gamblers or people affected by problem gambling to talk about their experiences at community awareness sessions. Findings from this project will be used to further explore the causes and consequences of stigma and how this can be reduced or mitigated. Further research into the causes and consequences of stigma may be conducted by the AGRC. The Government will continue to support and monitor this research.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 4:</u></b> The committee recommends that gambling social marketing strategies, particularly those claiming to address stigma, are thoroughly market researched prior to launch and evaluated to determine effectiveness and any unintended consequences.</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> The Government considers that thorough market research prior to the commencement of any marketing campaigns is an appropriate, best-practice approach. The Government also supports the evaluation of social marketing strategies to address problem gambling.</p>

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<p><b><u>Rec 5:</u></b> The committee recommends that as part of strengthening self-exclusion arrangements, governments, through the COAG Select Council on Gambling Reform, work with industry towards jurisdiction-wide venue exclusion as well as legislative changes which mean that prizes won by people in breach of self-exclusion orders should be forfeited to government revenue as recommended by the Productivity Commission.</p>	<p><b>Matter for jurisdictional consultation.</b> The Australian Government considers that self-exclusion can be an important tool to support problem gamblers and their families and has committed to work with state and territory governments to strengthen self-exclusion arrangements.  The <i>National Gambling Reform Act 2012</i> also provides for self-exclusion to be available through the pre-commitment system that will be rolled-out across Australia from 2018. This will allow players to choose to self-exclude anonymously on a jurisdiction-wide basis.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 6:</u></b> The committee recommends that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, in consultation with the financial sector, commission further research on ways to progress practical measures that could be put in place by the financial sector to assist people with gambling problems and their families.</p>	<p><b>For consideration by the AGRC</b> Further research into this topic may be conducted by the AGRC.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 7:</u></b> The committee recommends that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs undertake further research on the impact of comorbidities on problem gambling and how integrated treatment services can be developed and implemented to effectively address comorbid conditions.</p>	<p><b>Agree in-principle.</b> The Government recognises the importance of co-morbidities on the development and treatment of problem gambling and has a long history of funding research on this issue.  Research which relates to this recommendation has already been conducted by GRA, most recently through a publication of <i>Gambling and Comorbid Disorders</i> (February, 2013).  Further research into this topic may be conducted by the AGRC.</p>

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<p><b><u>Rec 8:</u></b> The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government fund the establishment of a national helpline, similar to the Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service, as a practical resource for primary health care professionals to assist them to identify and refer patients who present with gambling problems.</p>	<p><b>Not agreed.</b> The provision of problem gambling treatment and referral services is a responsibility of state and territory governments and is generally funded from gambling-related revenue collected by these governments.  The Australian Government contributes to Gambling Help Online which provides online counselling across Australia 24 hours a day/seven days a week and also provides people with information on gambling issues, crisis support, self-help advice and referrals.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 9:</u></b> The committee reiterates its call for a national independent research institute on gambling, as originally proposed by the Productivity Commission and recommended in the committee's previous two reports.</p>	<p><b>Agree.</b> The <i>National Gambling Reform Act 2012</i> establishes the AGRC, a new independent research body that is responsible for developing a nationally consistent research agenda. This is consistent with the Productivity Commission's recommendations.  The AGRC will be located within the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).  Establishing the AGRC within AIFS ensures an independence from the Government whilst providing the support of an experienced and highly capable research organisation.  The AGRC will be funded by the Australian Government, with approximately \$1.5 million allocated per annum, commencing in July 2013.</p>

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Recommendation	Government Response
<p><b><u>Rec 10:</u></b> The committee recommends that any gambling research funded by the Commonwealth Government and made public should include: disclosure of any conflicts of interest; details about the nature and extent of any industry involvement; and list any additional sources of funding. The committee encourages jurisdictions to follow this approach.</p>	<p><b>Agree in-principle.</b> The Government supports methods to promote transparency in research and this matter will be considered by the AGRC. Commitment of other jurisdictions to this recommendation is a matter for jurisdictional consideration.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 11:</u></b> The committee recommends that the COAG Select Council on Gambling Reform work to establish a national minimum dataset on gambling, in line with the Productivity Commission's recommendation. The dataset should be made publicly available.</p>	<p><b>Matter for jurisdictional consultation.</b> The Australian Government will discuss this issue further with state and territory governments.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 12:</u></b> The committee recommends that the COAG Select Council on Gambling Reform establish agreed parameters around the collection by governments of a basic level of nationally consistent industry data on gambling.</p>	<p><b>Matter for jurisdictional consultation.</b> The Australian Government will discuss this issue further with state and territory governments.</p>
<p><b><u>Rec 13:</u></b> The committee recommends that the COAG Select Council on Gambling Reform work collaboratively with gambling treatment providers and relevant health professional bodies to build appropriate evaluation measures and benchmarking practices into gambling treatment services.</p>	<p><b>Matter for jurisdictional consultation.</b> The Australian Government will discuss this issue further with state and territory governments.</p>

**Government Response to the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform  
Prevention and Treatment of Problem Gambling**

**Additional comments by the Chair and Senators Xenophon, Di Natale and Madigan**

Recommendation	Government Response
<p><b>Rec 1:</b> That the Government cap the number of poker machines nationally and that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs investigate a means for national capping the number of poker machines.</p>	<p><b>Disagree.</b> Each jurisdiction already has a cap on the number of poker machines. This is a responsibility of state and territory governments. The Productivity Commission, in its 2010 inquiry report, found that tougher caps have mainly led to higher utilisation of the remaining stock of gaming machines, without affecting overall spending.</p>
<p><b>Rec 2:</b> That the Problem Gambling Taskforce with the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs commission work by an independent individual/organisation to further investigate a legislated duty of care for venues. This work would draw on international examples, discuss and weigh up the obstacles, benefits and costs and be reported to the COAG Select Council on Gambling Reform and be made public.</p>	<p><b>For consideration by the AGRC.</b> The Government recognises that staff in pubs and clubs play a critical role in identifying and supporting problem gamblers to seek help. The role of these staff will be even more important under the <i>National Gambling Reform Act 2012</i> pre-commitment system. The Australian Government is committed to working with the states and territories to review and update responsible gambling training in all jurisdictions. Further research into this topic may be conducted by the AGRC.</p>
<p><b>Rec 3:</b> That an appropriately resourced research facility initiate a study into the possible link between Effexor-XR and the onset of problem gambling.</p>	<p><b>For consideration by the AGRC.</b> Future research into this topic may be conducted by the AGRC.</p>