

3 July 2023

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne, VIC 3002

Dear Public Accounts and Estimates Committee,

RE: Inquiry into the Regulation of Gambling and Liquor and Reducing the Harm caused by Gambling

Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and strongly recommends that the Victorian Government take immediate action to improve the regulation of gambling to minimise gambling harm and the occurrence of gambling-related suicide in Victoria.

Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. With over 380 members representing more than 140,000 workers, staff, and volunteers across Australia, we provide a collective voice for service providers, practitioners, researchers, local collaboratives, and people with lived experience.

Suicide is a complex, multifactorial human behaviour with many associated and varied risk factors. Gambling behaviour and problem gambling can contribute to several of these risk factors, including financial hardship, unemployment, and relationship breakdown.¹ The research indicates that almost one in five people presenting with suicidality also experience harm with their gambling.²

Concerningly, a study undertaken at the Alfred Hospital in Victoria found that among people in crisis admitted to the emergency department or assessed by the crisis assessment and treatment team (CATT) the prevalence of problem gambling was more than four times that of the broader community.³ In particular, the study identified that half of those with gambling problems were presenting with suicidal thoughts or attempts.

New South Wales data also suggests that of those who seek help for gambling harm, as many as 11% attempt suicide.⁴ While the Victorian Coroners Prevention Unit reported 128 gambling-related suicides between January 2000 to December 2012.⁵ Worryingly, it has been found that for every person experiencing gambling harms, it is estimated that anywhere

¹ Armstrong, A., & Carroll, M. (2017). Gambling activity in Australia: Findings from wave 15 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. Australian Government, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Gambling Research Centre.

² De Castella, A., Bolding, P., Lee, A., Cosic, S., & Kulkarni, J. (2011). Problem gambling in people presenting to a public mental health service: Final report. Melbourne: State Government of Victoria, Monash University

³ With Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre. Problem gambling in people presenting to a public mental health service, October 2011, Authored by Anthony de Castella, Pip Bolding, Adeline Lee, Sonja Cosic, Professor Jayashri Kulkarni.

⁴ Office of Responsible Gambling. (2019). *Gambling Help Services: Annual Activity Report 2018/19*. NSW Government.

⁵ Coroners Prevention Unit. (2013). Gambling-related suicides, Victoria 2000-2012, Data summary. Coroners Court of Victoria



Phone 02 9262 1130
admin@suicidepreventionaust.org
www.suicidepreventionaust.org
GPO Box 219 Sydney NSW 2001
ABN 64 461 352 676
ACN 164 450 882

from 7 to 17 other people are adversely affected.⁶ Given the heightened risk of suicide for Victorians experiencing gambling-related harms it is imperative that the Victorian Government strengthen gambling regulations to reduce harm from gambling and prevent suicide.

We refer the committee to two documents which address gambling and suicide risk and contain key recommendations for actions to prevent gambling-related suicide. The documents are attached to this submission and can be downloaded here:

- [Gambling and suicide prevention: a roadmap for change](#)
- [Submission to the inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm](#)

Gambling and suicide prevention joint paper:

In early 2022, Suicide Prevention Australia and Financial Counselling Australia released a joint paper *Gambling and Suicide Prevention: A roadmap for change*, that outlines key opportunities for government action to reduce gambling harm. The report was developed together with a range of experts across sectors and people with lived experience. It emphasises that the current regulatory framework needs to be scrutinised to identify deficiencies and opportunities to minimise gambling-related harm and to identify what currently prevents regulators from addressing them.

Several of the report's recommendations are applicable to the inquiry. In particular, we would like to draw your attention to recommendations 5,6,8,9 and 10 of the report which have been modified to the context of this inquiry.

Recommendation 1: The Victorian Government address gambling harm in the next iteration of the Victorian Suicide Prevention Framework 2016-2025.

Recommendation 2: The Victorian Government review and amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to improve consumer protection legislation and regulation.

Recommendation 3: The Victorian Government recommend the gambling industry adopt a Suicide Prevention Strategy which involves proactive harm minimisation, staff training and operational protocols particularly towards customers entering VIP programs.

Recommendation 4: The Victorian Government ensure the gambling industry deliver community education on the consumer protections and harm minimisation options available to gamblers to promote self-exclusion and pathways for accessing help.

⁶ The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies. (2010). Occasional Paper No 33 Problem gamblers and the role of the financial sector. Australian Government, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.



Recommendation 5: The Victorian Government ban all forms of gambling advertising, VIP marketing and inducements to gamble.

Submission to the Federal Government inquiry into online gambling:

Suicide Prevention Australia made a submission to the Federal Government inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on problem gamblers in late 2022. The submission contains research on the current state of knowledge and statistics concerning gambling-related suicide and the steps required to effectively regulate the gambling industry. Advice from people with lived experience helped guide the development of the submission and the recommendations for action to prevent gambling-related suicide.

While the recommendations contained in the submission are aimed at the national level several key actions can be adapted and implemented at the state level. In particular, we would like to draw your attention to recommendations 2,3,5,7 and 8 of the submission which could be implemented in Victoria. As above, these recommendations have been here modified to the context of this inquiry:

Recommendation 6: The Victorian Government develop a gambling harm minimisation strategy.

Recommendation 7: The Victorian Government introduce regulations to intervene early when gambling harm patterns emerge among gamblers to reduce harm and prevent suicide.

Recommendation 8: The Victorian Government ensure that all helpline operators funded by the State are trained to have conversations about gambling and know how to refer callers to specialist gambling assistance services, and that banks, gambling companies and other organisations have protocols for correct referral of customers with gambling issues who are at risk of suicide.

Recommendation 9: The Victorian Government fund an awareness and education campaign on the signs of harmful gambling for adults and youth.

Recommendation 10: The Victorian Government increase funding for treatment and support initiatives including investment in integrated treatment facilities for people experiencing the harms of gambling at-risk of suicide and the development of a peer-based care model so that those with lived experience of gambling-related suicidality have support from those who have first-hand experience.



Given that more than 500,000 Victorians experience some form of gambling-related harm every year, gambling regulation must be strengthened to ensure adequate consumer protection.⁷ If the Committee requires any further information, please review the attached documents, or contact Christ Stone, Director of Policy and Government Relations, chriss@suicidepreventionaust.org.

Yours sincerely



Nieves Murray
Chief Executive Officer

⁷ Victorian Statewide Mental Health & Gambling Service, 2023, What's the harm, viewed 23 June 2023, [What's the harm | gambling minds](#)

