

## **Inquiry into the Victorian Auditor-General's reports no. 99: Follow up of Regulating Gambling and Liquor (2019) and no. 213: Reducing the Harm Caused by Gambling (2021)**

July 2023

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) thanks the committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry on reducing the harms caused by gambling in Victoria.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community, and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations, students and individuals throughout Victoria working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out-of-home care. Our member organisations work closely with children, young people, and their families, many of whom are experiencing disadvantaging circumstances including economic disadvantage. The Centre's response to this inquiry will focus on the impact of problem gambling on children, young people, and families in this state.

### **The social impacts of gambling**

With Australians losing \$25 billion to gambling annually, gambling is a pressing public policy issue that affects the health and wellbeing of children, young people, and families in many ways.<sup>1</sup> Despite compelling data showing a link between gambling and damage to mental ill health, gambling harm is rarely discussed in mainstream public health dialogue.<sup>2</sup> Harmful gambling often presents with co-existing health issues such as consumption of cigarettes, alcohol abuse and drug use. The harm caused by gambling should be addressed by efficient harm reduction and preventive strategies, supported by strong public health messaging on the harms of problem gambling.

It is important to note the landscape of gambling has recently grown more complex due to the growth of online gambling platforms, continued development of digital technology, the effects of Covid-19 lockdowns, the connection between gambling and professional sport, and gambling advertising.

The social costs of gambling in Victoria alone are estimated to be around \$7 billion, accounting for twenty two percent of the Victorian mental health sector's total costs.<sup>3</sup> This cost has adverse implications on communities across Victoria, including financial impacts, emotional and psychological costs, relationship and family impacts and results in an increase of community vulnerabilities. However, evidence is limited regarding harm caused to the gambler's children, family and friends.

### **The experiences of and impacts on children and families**

A person that has a gambling addiction can have an impact on up to six individuals around them.<sup>4</sup> Those most frequently described as being affected by other family members' gambling behaviours include spouses and children. Harms experienced by partners can include the breakdown of relationships due to conflict and

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Gambling in Australia, 2021, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/gambling>

<sup>2</sup> Lubman et al, Problem gambling in people seeking treatment for mental illness, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2017, [file:///C:/Users/pallc/Downloads/research-report-problem-gambling-in-people-seeking-treatment-for-mental-illnes\\_XkVmN62.pdf](file:///C:/Users/pallc/Downloads/research-report-problem-gambling-in-people-seeking-treatment-for-mental-illnes_XkVmN62.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Browne et al, The social cost of gambling to Victoria, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2017, <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/publications/the-social-cost-of-gambling-to-victoria-121/>

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin et al, A typical problem gambler affects six others, *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 2017, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14459795.2017.1331252#:~:text=While%20the%20financial%20and%20psychological,for%20the%20typical%20problem%20gambler.>

financial strain, with children often most affected by impacts of adult gambling.<sup>5</sup> Parental problem gambling is attributed with concerns around child welfare including neglect, poor nutrition, and family violence.<sup>6</sup>

Over 200,000 children under the age of 15 are exposed to serious levels of parental gambling in Australia annually, causing psychological distress and impacting on child wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> The significant financial impacts on families with parental problem gambling result in children living with the effects of poverty and economic disadvantage, such as missing out on educational activities and housing instability.<sup>8</sup> Some children have reported parental gambling having a negative impact on their education pathways, with some forced to leave or delay education to look after their siblings and earn money to keep their family home.<sup>9</sup>

Feedback from the Centre's member organisations indicate there are growing concerns around the relationship between family violence and gambling. They have highlighted the increasing number of women victim survivors of family violence that are financially destitute due to economic abuse caused by their intimate partner's gambling addiction. Worryingly, there is an increasing trend of women seeking refuge in gambling venues such as pubs and hotels with poker machine facilities to escape unsafe environments at night. These women are inadvertently developing gambling addictions. Finding emergency help for victim survivors in unsafe situations is extremely difficult, particularly in regional and rural areas, with gambling being a key driver of violence committed by perpetrators.<sup>10</sup>

### Breaking the cycle of intergenerational gambling

Despite gambling support services being accessed at high rates throughout Victoria, effective assessment tools and therapeutic approaches are limited to those with unhealthy gambling behaviours and not extended to family members.<sup>11</sup> Alarming, the prevalence of gambling problems among adolescents is estimated to be two to four times adult population rates.<sup>12</sup> Gambling among youth can be associated with several factors including family history, impulsivity, excitement seeking, cognitive bias, perceived incentives, and mental ill health.<sup>13</sup> Studies show that gambling frequently crosses generations, particularly among vulnerable groups.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, young people who gamble often link their connection to complicated trauma, highlighting the intergenerational impacts of problem gambling.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Suomi et al, Gambling harm experienced by children of parents who gamble, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2021, [https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/1112/VRGF\\_RR\\_JUNE2021\\_Children\\_of\\_parents\\_who\\_gamble.pdf](https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/1112/VRGF_RR_JUNE2021_Children_of_parents_who_gamble.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Browne et al, The social cost of gambling to Victoria, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2017, <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/publications/the-social-cost-of-gambling-to-victoria-121/>

<sup>7</sup> Suomi et al, How many children are exposed to at-risk parental gambling in Australia? Addictive Behaviours, 2022, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306460322000715>

<sup>8</sup> Suomi et al, Gambling harm experienced by children of parents who gamble, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2021, [https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/1112/VRGF\\_RR\\_JUNE2021\\_Children\\_of\\_parents\\_who\\_gamble.pdf](https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/1112/VRGF_RR_JUNE2021_Children_of_parents_who_gamble.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Suomi et al, Gambling harm experienced by children of parents who gamble, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2021, [https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/1112/VRGF\\_RR\\_JUNE2021\\_Children\\_of\\_parents\\_who\\_gamble.pdf](https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/1112/VRGF_RR_JUNE2021_Children_of_parents_who_gamble.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Hing et al, The Relationship Between Gambling and Intimate Partner Violence Against Women, ANROWS, 2020, <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/RP.17.01-RR-Hing-GamblingDFV.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Rodda et al, Treatment for Family Members of People Experiencing Gambling Problems: Family Members Want Both Gambler-Focused and Family-Focused Options, *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 2020, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337355729\\_Treatment\\_for\\_Family\\_Members\\_of\\_People\\_Experiencing\\_Gambling\\_Problems\\_Family\\_Members\\_Want\\_Both\\_Gambler-Focused\\_and\\_Family-Focused\\_Options](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337355729_Treatment_for_Family_Members_of_People_Experiencing_Gambling_Problems_Family_Members_Want_Both_Gambler-Focused_and_Family-Focused_Options)

<sup>12</sup> Miller et al, Has Gambling Gatecrashed our Teens, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2019, [https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/16/gen-bet-has-gambling-gatecrashed-our-teens\\_SIPh7sd.pdf](https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/16/gen-bet-has-gambling-gatecrashed-our-teens_SIPh7sd.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Kyonghwa et al, The Gambling Factors Related with the Level of Adolescent Problem Gambler, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2019, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333795308\\_The\\_Gambling\\_Factors\\_Related\\_with\\_the\\_Level\\_of\\_Adolescent\\_Problem\\_Gambler](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333795308_The_Gambling_Factors_Related_with_the_Level_of_Adolescent_Problem_Gambler)

<sup>14</sup> Sieglff, Exploring the nature of gambling issues for young people living in rural communities, Anglicare Victoria, 2017, [https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Exploring-the-nature-of-gambling-issues-for-young-people\\_new.pdf](https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Exploring-the-nature-of-gambling-issues-for-young-people_new.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Suomi et al, Gambling Harm Experienced by Children Exposed to Parental Gambling: An Online Survey of Australians, *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 2023, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37149814/>

Children of problem gamblers are at a significantly higher risk of developing gambling-related problems themselves.<sup>16</sup> This finding emphasises the need for effective interventions to disrupt the cycle and prevent the perpetuation of harmful gambling behaviours across generations.

### Impacts of betting and gambling advertising

Evidence suggests that children and young people are exposed to high amounts of gambling messaging which can normalise harmful gambling behaviours.<sup>17</sup> A recent survey of 1,765 people found that seeing or hearing wagering advertising has a negative influence on gambling behaviours, particularly among young people.<sup>18</sup> This research highlights the link between the influences of betting advertising and potential harms that impact not only the individual, but children, young people and families more broadly.

In sports reporting as well as in the broadcast of sporting events, gambling has become entrenched and normalised in Australian society.<sup>19</sup> Children being exposed to constant television advertising impacts their attitudes and behaviours toward gambling. Limiting exposure to these advertisements will help prevent the normalisation of gambling and its subsequent intergenerational transmission.<sup>20</sup> The introduction of stricter regulations will reduce the influence of gambling advertisements on young people's attitudes and behaviours.<sup>21</sup>

### Options to address vulnerabilities experienced by problem gamblers, their children and families in Victoria:

1. Educate medical practitioners about problem gambling and its harms, and how prevention and early intervention relates to the health care industry
2. Increase awareness of the public health consequences of gambling on communities, children, young people and families
3. Increased understanding in mental health settings of the origins underlying gambling related harm
4. Strengthen policy for prevention initiatives to shift community attitudes toward gambling
5. Prevention programs to target broad groups in the community and move away from only focussing on 'at-risk' groups
6. Educational gambling prevention programs to be embedded in the Victorian curriculum
7. Improved service coordination to address the harms attributed to gambling impacts on children and young people
8. Child wellbeing in families of problem gamblers should be prioritised, with resources invested in the community services sector to provide support to families impacted by the harms of problem gambling.

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<sup>16</sup> Tulloch et al, Parental Gambling and the Health and Wellbeing of Children Derived From Two Nationally Representative Cohorts of Australian Children, *Applied Research Quality Life*, 2022  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11482-022-10052-0>

<sup>17</sup> Signal et al, Kids' Cam: an objective methodology to study the world in which children live, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2017, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28455122/>

<sup>18</sup> Australian Gambling Research Centre, Exposure and impact of sports and race betting advertising in Australia, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2023, [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/2302\\_3\\_exposure-and-impacts.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/2302_3_exposure-and-impacts.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Implicit associations between gambling and sport, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2018, <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/350/Implicit-associations-between-gambling-and-sport.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Hing N et al, Bet Anywhere, Anytime: An Analysis of Internet Sports Bettors' Responses to Gambling Promotions During Sports Broadcasts, *Problem Gambling Severity, Journal of Gambling Studies*, 2020, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28150058/>

<sup>21</sup> Thomas et al, Young people's awareness of the timing and placement of gambling advertising on traditional and social media platforms: a study of 11–16-year-olds in Australia, *Harm Reduction*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-018-0254-6>