

## 2.2 PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO GAMBLING HARM POLICY

(Author: KJ)

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### ***PURPOSE***

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the draft *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* for public exhibition and community feedback for a period of three (3) weeks. Following the period of public exhibition, the finalised policy is anticipated to be provided to Council in October 2022.

#### ***KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES***

The draft *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* [the Policy] is an update to the previous *Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020*. The Policy outlines Council's commitment to reducing harm from gambling within the City of Monash and guides Council in its decision making on gambling harm prevention.

Key changes included in the updated Policy include:

- Updated evidence base and inclusion of available gendered data.
- Simplified language and summarised policy statements.
- Language regarding EGM applications has been updated to clearly articulate Council's position to prevent harm to the most vulnerable areas within the municipality.
- New advocacy points in line with the Alliance for Gambling Reform advocacy campaigns.
- Clearer wording regarding not providing Council support or resources to community groups and clubs that promote gambling, in particular EGM venues, sports betting and online gambling.

The draft Policy seeks to build on the success of previous Council policies, initiatives, and leadership to prevent harm from gambling within the Monash community.

#### ***CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION***

This report seeks Council endorsement of the *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* for public exhibition and community feedback for a period of three (3) weeks from 27 July to 17 August.

It is anticipated that the final *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* will be brought to Council for adoption at its meeting in October after consideration of any public comment.

**PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO GAMBLING HARM POLICY**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

*That Council endorses the draft Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy for public exhibition and community feedback for a period of three (3) weeks, 27 July – 17 August 2022.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement for the draft *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* (refer **Attachment 1**). This policy outlines Council's commitment to reducing harm from gambling within the City of Monash and guides Council in its decision making on gambling harm prevention.

This report seeks endorsement for the draft Policy to be placed on public exhibition for a period of three (3) weeks from 27 July to 17 August 2022. Following the period of public exhibition Council adoption of the final Policy will be sought at the October meeting of Council.

**BACKGROUND**

Council's *Public Health Approach to Gambling Policy Statement 2016-2020* is due for review and renewal. Gambling harm is not limited to financial harm, it includes harm to mental and physical health, family and relationships, work/study and cultural harm. Harm from gambling is a major public health issue in Australia, with the most recent data estimating that Australians lost \$25 billion on legal forms of gambling, representing the largest per capita losses in the world. In Victoria, Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs, commonly known as pokies) contribute to 49% of the \$5.4 billion lost to gambling.

The gambling landscape has changed since the last policy was written due to factors such as the COVID-19 lockdowns impacting EGM venue operations, increasingly accessible gambling options through online betting and a significant increase in the amount of gambling advertising, particularly sports betting advertising. The City of Monash has a history of leadership in gambling harm prevention advocacy and initiatives. This policy seeks to build upon that history and the foundation of the previous policy.

***DISCUSSION***

Local government can play a key role in preventing harm from gambling, particularly harm from EGM gambling. Council is involved in the planning and regulation of new EGMs through its role in the planning permit process. Council can also advocate to reduce the harmful practices of the gambling industry, fund recreation alternatives to gambling, create environments free from gambling advertising and communicate to our community the harmful impacts of gambling in the municipality.

This Policy outlines the commitments the City of Monash will make to prevent harm in Monash. The Policy includes guiding principles incorporating best practice in gambling harm prevention including research, funding, partnerships, language, intersectionality, and gender equity. The policy statements are based on the role of local government in gambling harm prevention. These include categories such as:

- **Plan & Regulate:** Council is involved if a venue operator applies for new EGMs to be brought into Monash. Council can accept the planning permit or reject it based on whether there is evidence the new machines will negatively impact the community. Refer to Appendix C for a description of the EGM application process.
- **Advocate & Lead:** Many regulations on the gambling industry are set by State and Federal agencies. Council has a responsibility to act on the needs and concerns of our community and represent these views to the appropriate governing bodies. Council can lead by example by not taking direct contributions from the gambling industry, and we can continue to elevate gambling harm to the highest level of public prominence through strategic documents such as our Health & Wellbeing Plan.
- **Fund & Resource:** Council can support social initiatives that don't involve gambling through our Community Grants program or through council run programs and events.
- **Communicate:** We can keep the Monash community up to date with local gambling information such as losses, campaigns to reduce harm and any planning permits received for new EGMs.

It is proposed to seek community feedback on the draft policy for a period of three (3) weeks. The document will be published on the Shape Monash website and circulated to Council's Advisory Committees, industry stakeholders and community for comment. Once the community consultation is complete, officers will prepare a final version of the policy considering any feedback and bring the final policy to Council for endorsement.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The *Monash Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025* outlines Council's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of the Monash community. Gambling harm prevention is specifically identified within Priority Three: Harm Prevention and indirectly through Pillar Two: Engaged, Confident and Connected.

**CONSULTATION**

Officers have completed phase one of community consultation on gambling harm within Monash. A community survey, stakeholder interviews and a joint advisory committee consultation session posed key policy statements to the community for feedback. Feedback is summarised in the below table.

Policy statement	Don't know	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Council should continue to protect our most vulnerable communities against any detrimental social, economic and health impacts of any new electronic gaming machine (pokies) applications.			4%	96%
Council should continue to maintain independence from the gambling industry by refusing direct financial or 'in kind' contributions from the gambling industry.		2%		98%
Council should work with community groups and organisations that use Council land, facilities or receive Council funding to promote social environments that don't associate with gambling.		4%	8%	88%
Council should continue to advocate for regulatory reform to prevent harms to public health from gambling/pokies and promote harm minimisation strategies.		2%	6%	92%
Council should communicate with the Monash community on key issues of gambling including local gambling data, Council's advocacy initiatives, harm prevention messages and referral pathways for help with gambling addiction.		4%	11%	85%

Council should protect children, young people and vulnerable members of our community from gambling harm by not allowing any forms of promotional material in relation to gambling or associated venues to be displayed where the community come to work, socialise or recreate on Council land.		2%	2%	96%
Council should advocate for a continuation of the current maximum municipal cap of 777 EGMs (pokie machines) in the municipality and will oppose any increase to that number or the inappropriate relocation of existing machines to areas that are considered vulnerable.	2%	2%	4%	92%

All policy items had high levels of support from community and stakeholders. Respondents were given the option to self-describe their gender; men and women were equally represented in the community survey; no responses were received from people that identify as gender diverse. Responses to all policy statements were comparable for men and women.

Internal consultation with relevant Council officers also occurred to ensure the proposed policy aligned with current policies, frameworks and planning requirements.

Refer to **Attachment 2** for Phase One Consultation Report.

### ***SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

The *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* will support Council's agenda for a healthy and engaged Monash community, with a focus on prevention of harm from gambling.

### ***HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS***

The *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* recognises that gambling is a legal form of recreation; all community members have a right to choose to participate in gambling. The Policy does not restrict a person's choice to gamble, with the focus of the Policy on preventing harm from gambling.

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***GENDER EQUITY ASSESSMENT***

Because this policy is considered to have a direct and significant impact on the Monash community, a gender impact assessment (GIA) has been undertaken as part of this work. All people, regardless of gender, are impacted by harm from gambling. This could be harm caused by another person such as a loved one or employee or harm from gambling directly.

Population level quantitative data is not available on behaviours of gender diverse and non-binary people; data on gambling behaviour is only broken down by 'male' or 'female' classifications.

Data available from the 'Study of Gambling and Health in Victoria' (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation 2019) shows;

- Men are significantly more likely to experience harm from their own gambling than women (1% of men vs. 0.5% of women experience significant problems with gambling).
- More severe gambling problems are prevalent in young men (25-44 years old).
- The age bracket for women where prevalence of gambling harm is highest is 45-54 years old (3.3% experience moderate or severe harm). Prevalence of gambling problems within men of the same age bracket was still slightly higher (3.7% of men aged 45-54 and 3.3% of women aged 45-54 were classified as moderate or problem gamblers).

Furthermore, a recent ANROWS study (2020) shows there is a link between family violence and gambling. Gambling by both the male perpetrator and the female victim resulted in intensified intimate partner violence against women.

There has been a link identified between loneliness and gambling. Groups of people that might be at risk of loneliness or alienation may also be at a higher risk of harm from gambling. This could include people with a disability, newly arrived community members and older people. People who speak a language other than English at home will also have a unique set of needs and risk to gambling harm, in part due to risk of loneliness. People that speak a language other than English are also more likely to have barriers to engaging with gambling harm awareness messages/education and gambling support services.

As a result of the GIA, the following recommendations have been incorporated into the Policy and associated actions;

- When collecting gambling policy consultation data, Council will capture disaggregated data including data for people who are transgender or gender diverse, age and cultural background.

- Acknowledgement of the link between family violence and gambling within the Policy.
- Policy includes commitment to deliver targeted gambling harm prevention strategies to engage vulnerable community members.
- Policy includes commitment to promote family violence support services when communicating gambling harm prevention messages.
- Inclusion of gendered statistics available on gambling harm within the Policy.

### **CONSULTATION**

#### **Public Exhibition August 2021**

It is proposed that the draft *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* be placed on public exhibition for a period of three weeks from 27 July to 17 August 2022.

Public exhibition will include:

- Copy of the draft Policy on Council's website
- A copy sent to all of Council's advisory committees
- A copy sent out to all EGM venue operators
- A copy sent to all stakeholders consulted in the development of the Policy
- A copy sent to peak bodies and networks including Clubs Victoria, the Alliance for Gambling Reform and the Victorian Local Governance Association

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Policy and associated actions will be implemented within existing Council resources.

### **CONCLUSION**

The draft *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* has been prepared for Council consideration and community consultation.

The draft Policy reflects Council's commitment to improving the lives of the Monash community through the prevention of harm caused by gambling. It is anticipated that the final *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy* will be referred to Council for adoption at its meeting on 25 October 2022 after amendment from public comment.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

**Attachment 1:** *Public Health Approach to Gambling Harm Policy (draft)*

**Attachment 2:** *Phase One Consultation Report*