

6 March 2023

To: all sitting Labor members of the NSW Parliament

Labor needs to protect its communities

We are writing to all sitting Labor MPs to urge you to hear the message that **we need serious gambling reform, now.**

Labor's current policy stance on gambling machine reform is inadequate, and it is also inferior to what the Liberal Party is offering.

Those most harmed by the current gambling policies are largely in traditionally Labor-voting electorates, most prominently in southern and western Sydney. These are the very people you are asking to vote for you, and to trust that you will protect their interests and wellbeing if you form government. You need to improve your Party's current policy position, and do so very quickly.

NSW people lost \$23 million a day on gaming machines in 2022. For too long state governments have stood by and allowed the gambling industry to self-regulate. Through concepts such as 'responsible gambling' and framing the issue as being about a minority of 'problem gamblers', government and industry have transferred the responsibility for addiction to those experiencing harm. The result is a serious epidemic of addiction, with those defined as the 'problem gamblers' losing money amounting to approximately 40% of gaming machine revenue.¹ It is ethically repugnant to blame the situation on the vulnerable people that this industry mercilessly targets through advertising and incentives. The responsibility lies squarely at the feet of elected policy-makers who have stood by and allowed industry to use addiction for profit-making.

Effective reform starts with mandated cashless gaming machines with a built-in mandatory pre-commitment scheme, and additional harm minimisation measures. Key elements should include:

- *Mandatory pre-commitment:* Evidence shows a mandatory, full pre-commitment scheme is the most effective way to support people using poker machines to stay within spending limits, which is an effective way of minimising gambling harm. This system (currently being utilised in Norway) has demonstrated reduced gambling losses and reduced calls to gambling helplines.² Voluntary systems have weak results, with low uptake and with stigma attached with asking to opt-in to the system.³ The only effective scheme is a mandatory one.
- *Default limits:* Last year the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission reviewed Tasmanian and Australian prevalence data, as well as the model used in Norway, to determine suitable

default limits (which can be increased with proof of income).² These limits have been set at \$100 a day, \$500 a month and \$5,000 a year. The Alliance for Gambling Reform supports these limits. For additional protection the use of credit accounts must not be permitted.

- *Effective enforcement*: Ensure that once someone has reached the pre-set limit, they are unable to continue gambling for the set period (day, week, year).

We acknowledge that the recent debate in the NSW election campaign has moved things forward, but not far enough. Uncertainty in political will, talk of trials, and long introduction times are not good enough. There is too much talk of trials when the policy steps that need to be taken are already known. Voluntary trials of 'cashless' options without effective built-in harm minimisation measures are not needed, and could in fact produce distorted 'results' that mislead policymakers – perhaps intentionally. There are currently two trials underway, one at Wests Newcastle and another at Club York in Sydney. The only harm minimisation measures in place for these trials are voluntary, and such approaches have been proven to be ineffective by both national and international evidence.^{3,4}

There is also too much talk of long lead-times in introducing change. Under the present policies and laws many people in NSW are losing their livelihoods, their families, and in some cases their lives. Criminal money-laundering continues to flourish. There can be no case for delay.

As elected representatives, your decisions will impact on the lives of your community, especially the many who are vulnerable to addiction and impoverishment. The evidence already exists for a 'real reform' model.

The current political situation is calling on you to act, and you are accountable to the community for the impact your choices have on them. Please do not fail them.

Yours Sincerely,



Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Public Health Association of Australia is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia, working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians.

PHAA is also a proud member of the Alliance for Gambling Reform.

- 1 Productivity Commission. Gambling, Report No. 50. Volumes 1 & 2. Canberra: Productivity Commission; 2010.
- 2 Gambling Harm Minimisation Technologies Research, Stenning and Associates, Prepared for: Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission March, 2022, [https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/Documents/Gambling%20Harm%20Minimisation%20Technologies%20-%20Research%20Paper%20\(Stenning%20%26%20Associates\).pdf](https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/Documents/Gambling%20Harm%20Minimisation%20Technologies%20-%20Research%20Paper%20(Stenning%20%26%20Associates).pdf)
- 3 Thomas A, et al for the Australian Gambling Research Centre (2016). Review of electronic gaming machine precommitment features: Limit setting. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2016-03/apo-nid263156.pdf>
- 4 https://files.justice.vic.gov.au/2021-06/Evaluation%20of%20YourPlay%20Final%20Report_0.pdf