



# ***Impacts of Gambling on Young Aboriginal People in Gippsland and East Gippsland***

## **AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

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## Terminology

In this report we use the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to all Australian First Peoples, both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal.



## Report summary and recommendations

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While eight in ten young people have an experience of gambling (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, p. 2), and while gambling is widespread in the Aboriginal community (Hare, 2015), there is very little research about Victorian Aboriginal young people's experiences of gambling.

This research aims to address this lack of knowledge. This report shares the findings of a collaborative qualitative research project designed to explore the experiences and impacts of gambling on young Aboriginal people in Gippsland and East Gippsland, both their own and other people's. The study was a collaboration between the Gippsland East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and La Trobe University. Our approach involved interviews with Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community members and a feedback session where GEGAC staff drew on their own experiences to interpret and extend the interview data.

From this research, gambling appears widespread and popular in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community, including among young people. Community members identify the positive aspects of gambling, and also see the harm, including for young people and children. It is also clear that for a range of important reasons, young people and the broader community have some concerns about discussing gambling harm. However, it is apparent from this research that gambling is closely connected to other issues that services and community members are seeking to address (from drug and alcohol to mental illness to children's welfare and poverty and deprivation), and that gambling is both a cause and a consequence of problems in these areas.

Resonating with similar research in the Sunraysia Aboriginal community (Maltzahn et al., 2017), this research demonstrates that young people and other community members have compelling reasons to gamble, from needing money to needing psychological relief and social connections. Reinforcing this, many factors encourage gambling, from widespread advertising, to the appeal of venues, accessibility of online gambling and family and community comfort with gambling. Compounding this, online gambling is extending opportunities to gamble and the scale of harm. Community members expressed considerable concern about the impact of advertising and online gambling.

Given these deep and broad issues, it is not enough to tell young people not to gamble or to change their individual behaviour, or to tell them that addressing the negative impacts of gambling on them is dependent on family members doing so. Recognising this, participants in this research identified a number of initiatives and approaches that could address gambling harm. They emphasised the need for resources for holistic programs that address gambling harms in the context of other issues in people's lives, rather than isolated gambling-specific services. Participants suggested better education in the form of community-specific visual information and advertising, and positive community-based community-building activities, including not-for-profit bingo as a form of gambling harm minimisation. Community based activities ranging from camps to outdoor activities and family days had particular support from many participants.

This report aims to provide GEGAC, other members of the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community, and other services and government agencies with evidence to better respond to gambling as it impacts upon young people in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community. While this study was conducted solely in Gippsland and East Gippsland, we note it has significant synergies with similar research conducted with the Sunraysia Aboriginal community (Maltzahn et al., 2017), and we believe it will be relevant to other communities in Victoria and Australia.

## Recommendations

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The following recommendations reflect the views of the research participants and have been written to inform GEGAC's work on reducing harm from gambling for young people. Recognising that young people live within the broader community and are exposed to gambling by older people, the recommendations address changes that would impact on both younger and older people.

### 1. Affirm and reinforce GEGAC's community engagement model and extend to young people

**Rationale:** The current community engagement model used by GEGAC and other Victorian Aboriginal services in relation to gambling recognises that gambling is best addressed holistically. This model is designed to create safe environments, including at community events, where people can discuss the impacts of gambling, and access information and service linkages. As our research suggests, aiming to talk about gambling in an isolated way, without recognising how it relates to other issues, risks alienating people. Similarly, it is difficult for people without strong links to the community to raise gambling as an issue. In contrast, integrating gambling work into broader programs that strengthen community relations and cultural expression and address the root causes of disadvantage and harm is more likely to be successful. Participants suggested these points were particularly important for young people, where they saw rapport building as both very important and as needing time. Two people recommended outreach to individual people's homes as this allowed workers to speak to people in a more comfortable setting; this is recognised in GEGAC's Community Engagement Model.

Recognising this, participants made strong recommendations that community-based activities such as information sessions, camps, groups and sports be supported. These activities would provide forums to educate and engage with community members about gambling harms, alternate activities to gambling, and to address the disadvantage and trauma that can lead to gambling harm.

**Recommendation:** Continue to support and to strengthen the community engagement model. As part of this, provide community based-activities such as camps, family days and groups. Include a particular focus on young people affected by their own and other people's gambling.

### 2. Extend outreach to young people, including through online platforms

**Rationale:** While young people appear to experience gambling harm in Gippsland and East Gippsland, both from their own gambling and other people's, there is a range of barriers, including shame, stigma and concerns about confidentiality, that impact on young people accessing gambling services. Consequently, few access existing services. As many young people access gambling online, online gambling service provision may be appropriate.

**Recommendation:** Explore opportunities to develop online outreach and resources for young people about what gambling is (including the range of gambling forms), the links between gambling and other problems, possible harms, and how to access help.

### 3. Strengthen support for self-exclusion

**Rationale:** Several people described trying to exclude themselves from gambling venues, either formally using self-exclusion processes or informally. While there is a formal process for self-exclusion from Victorian gambling venues and support available for those wishing to self-exclude, and appropriate information is being developed, the self-exclusion process is arduous and there appear to be barriers for Aboriginal people wishing to take up this option. Some councils in the Gippsland and East Gippsland area have Liquor Accords and related liquor forums that provide a venue for discussion with licenced venues, where ways to improve take-up of self-exclusion can be discussed.

**Recommendation:** Link in with the Liquor Accords and forums in each council area to discuss self-exclusion and other issues related to minimising gambling harm in the Aboriginal community.

#### 4. Create and distribute additional resources

**Rationale:** Participants believed that written resources, including those at venues, and generic advertisements aimed at the Victorian community, had little impact on the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community. Additionally, where young people did not recognise activities such as 'scratchies' and sports betting as forms of gambling, education was less likely to influence them. Participants believed that picture and video information, including local Aboriginal people, would have more impact than existing resources. They recommended community education at schools and community events, as well as online.

**Recommendation:** Develop resources specifically for the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community, with a particular emphasis on visual rather than written resources, to educate people about what gambling is (including the range of gambling forms), the links between gambling and other problems, possible harms, and how to access help. Use GEGAC online resources (including website) to provide information and encourage people in the community to discuss gambling. Distribute materials and talk with people about gambling by attending schools and community events.

#### 5. Financial literacy training

**Rationale:** Participants believed that young people had fewer budgeting skills than older people, and that this made them more susceptible to gambling harm. At the same time, participants acknowledged that many Aboriginal people, particularly those on low incomes, were already adept at budget management and stretching money as far as possible.

**Recommendation:** Explore the provision of financial literacy training to young people to assist them in managing their money.

#### 6. Address racism at gambling venues

**Rationale:** Participants identified racism in some gambling venues, which exposes Aboriginal people to additional harm.

**Recommendation:** Liaise with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Venue Support Program with the aim of providing cultural training to local venues to address racism.

#### 7. Greater controls on gambling venues

**Rationale:** Many participants identified the role of venues and advertising in promoting gambling, leading to gambling harm.

**Recommendation:** Meet with local councils and state and federal members of parliament representing Gippsland and East Gippsland to advise them of these research findings, and ask them to advocate for stricter controls on poker machines, gambling venues and gambling advertising.

#### 8. Research

**Rationale:** Young people appear to be gambling online, and both young people and community members expressed concern about the accessibility and impact of internet-based gambling. However, little is known about the impact of online gambling on young Aboriginal people. Further, it is unclear what regulatory or other responses could best address harm from online gambling.

**Recommendation:** Conduct research on online gambling, with a focus both on its impact on young Aboriginal people and possible regulatory and other interventions to reduce internet-related gambling harm.

## Why this research?

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Since 2014, the Gippsland East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) has been one of three regional Aboriginal Health Services funded to develop a culturally appropriate service delivery model to reduce gambling harm within local communities. GEGAC works from a Community Engagement Model that aims to build confidence in the community by creating safe environments to discuss the impacts of gambling on family and community. As part of this model, GEGAC's Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer is able to have a yarn with individuals and groups about the impacts of gambling, either in people's homes or at other services, and provide information and linkages about the range of services available to support those who experience harm from their own or another person's gambling. Services cover financial literacy, financial counselling, online, telephone and face-to-face therapeutic counselling and self-exclusion support. GEGAC does not use the term 'problem gambling', using instead the term 'safe gambling'. Community events that provide information and 'safe gambling' messages in the context of fun activities in culturally safe environments are a central feature of GEGAC's model.

In 2015, GEGAC staff read research that indicated that some Aboriginal young people (particularly those concerned about drug and alcohol use) were much more concerned about gambling than non-Indigenous young people (Mission Australia, 2014). The report found that Aboriginal young people who were highly concerned about alcohol and other drug use were significantly more likely to be concerned about gambling compared to comparable non-Indigenous people (73.9% compared with 41.8%). While other young people were most concerned about coping with stress, school or study problems and bullying and/or emotional abuse, the Aboriginal young people in this group were most worried about family conflict, gambling and bullying/emotional abuse. GEGAC wanted to explore whether this applied in Gippsland and East Gippsland as well.

More broadly, they were acutely aware that with the expansion of online gambling and other changes to the gambling environment, young people needed to be equipped to navigate changes in gambling, and GEGAC staff wanted a better understanding of what young people felt about gambling in order to do this.

To answer these questions, GEGAC commissioned La Trobe University to conduct research with them on gambling and young people in their community.

## What we knew

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While there is little available information about gambling for young Aboriginal people in Gippsland/East Gippsland, some wider research on gambling is relevant to GEGAC's work and this study.

Nationally, many Australians gamble (Productivity Commission, 2010), and 2014 figures suggest that over three million adult Victorians had gambled in the previous year, far outnumbering the approximately 1.3 million who had not (Hare, 2015). Reflecting this, in 2016, people in Victoria lost \$12,755,961 on bingo (spending \$72,245,232) (Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation) and spent \$2.6 billion on poker machines (Willingham, 2017), up \$43 million from the previous year (Brennan, 2016).

Aboriginal people are more likely to gamble than non-Indigenous Victorians and may be around ten times more likely to experience gambling harm (Hare, 2015).

Previous national research indicated that fifty per cent of young people had gambled by the time they were fifteen years old, and almost 80 per cent had done so by nineteen; subsequent research has argued it is likely that these figures are now higher due to the growing availability of online gambling (Thomas, 2014).

In addition to people's own experience of gambling, the impact of other's gambling is relevant. The 2014 Victorian research cited above found that 2.79% of Victorian adults (approximately 122,493 people) reported negative impacts from another person's gambling, adding to the 1.15 per cent of gamblers who had experienced negative impacts from their own gambling (around 35,394 people) (Hare, 2015).



While there is no research about the impact of gambling on Aboriginal people or young people in Gippsland and East Gippsland, many people in this area also gamble, including in the three local government areas covered by GEGAC: the City of Latrobe, the Shire of East Gippsland and the Shire of Baw Baw.

In the Latrobe City council area, in 2015-2016, people lost \$43,563,001 from 522 poker machines in 13 gambling venues – an average of \$83,454 per machine, \$199,025 per day, and \$766 per person. While La Trobe ranks 34th in population in Victoria, it ranks 27 in poker machine losses in the state (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation).

In the Shire of East Gippsland, in the same period, people lost \$23,639,559 from 332 machines in 10 venues – an average of \$71,203 per machine, \$64,589 per day and \$664 per person. East Gippsland ranks 40th for population, but 34 for poker machine losses (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation). East Gippsland had the second highest rate of increase of poker machine player losses in regional Victoria in 2016-2016, increasing by \$1.296 million (up 5.8%) (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Gambling Information Resource Office, 2016).

In contrast, while people in the Shire of Baw Baw collectively lost a significant amount of money in 2015-2016 (\$14,661,093), machine numbers and losses per person were somewhat smaller than in neighbouring councils that GEGAC covers: there were 198 poker machines in four gambling venues, with losses averaging \$74,046 per machine, \$40,058 per day, and \$401 per person. Baw Baw is the 38th most populous state in Victoria, and ranks 41 for poker machine losses (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation).

While these figures highlight the personal participation in and negative impacts of gambling, research increasingly demonstrates that it is not enough to focus on individual factors in relation to gambling, and that the role of the gambling industry in promoting harmful patterns of gambling must be considered (Thomas, 2014). Further, international researchers 'universally acknowledge that addressing gambling-related harm requires a comprehensive, integrated and sustained approach' (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2015, p. 1), The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation calls for an evidence-based public health approach to gambling and gambling harm that includes, among other elements, a whole of community approach to reducing gambling harm, increasing the capacity of individuals, families, communities and health and welfare services to respond to problem gambling and developing targeted approaches to addressing needs of sub-populations (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2015).

Gambling research also demonstrates the significance of generational and intergenerational harm, which is of particularly relevance to investigations of young people and gambling. Generational loss is 'determined to have occurred when a person experienced a loss of a developmental or life course stage' (Browne, 2016, p. 66) and intergenerational loss is described as 'legacy harms that go beyond the gambler's life course and transfer to the next generation' (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, p. 2). The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation notes that as intergenerational harms are not well understood, further research is needed (Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation). This research highlights generational and intergenerational harms in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community.

This information reinforces the need to understand the impacts of gambling on young Aboriginal people in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community, and for consideration of relevant public health approaches to strengthen any positive impacts and address any harms.

## This research

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This research aims to help GEGAC develop the strongest possible programs to reduce gambling harm in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community. To do so we explore:

- The different types of gambling practiced within the community;
- The positive and/or negative impacts (if any) of gambling on young people;
- Whether young people see gambling as a problem in the community;
- Whether people in the broader Aboriginal community in Gippsland and East Gippsland had concerns about gambling within the community;
- How young people would look for information and support if they were concerned about the impact of their own or someone else's gambling; and
- What forms of support people feel would be most helpful for young people.

GEGAC and La Trobe University worked together to make sure the research was ethical and consistent with national guidelines on appropriate research approaches and methods for research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003). This included providing capacity building opportunities for GEGAC staff, such as training on conducting research interviews, ensuring GEGAC staff played a key role in developing and revising interview questions and analysing research data and resourcing GEGAC staff to conduct the research interviews.

To explore the questions above, GEGAC staff interviewed 24 Aboriginal community members, including young people and workers. The participants were recruited through talking to clients about the research and through word-of-mouth across Bairnsdale and the La Trobe Valley. 7 young people were interviewed. Of these, one was under 18 and six were 18 to 24. Sixteen workers were interviewed, including 11 from Aboriginal organisations and 5 working predominantly with young people. One community member who was not a worker, but was only slightly older than 24, was interviewed. Workers were selected to give a range of perspectives and came from sectors and roles covering children's welfare, community development, crime prevention, drug and alcohol, education, health, justice, mental health and youth work. Half those interviewed were women. Twenty people were interviewed in individual interviews, and four in pairs. The interviews were conducted by GEGAC staff in Bairnsdale and Morwell in the first half of 2017 and were subsequently analysed thematically by La Trobe University staff.

After analysing the interview data, La Trobe University staff reported back to GEGAC through a feedback session with six GEGAC staff, where La Trobe University staff shared content and themes from the interviews and sought responses and clarification from GEGAC staff. These responses were recorded and analysed to inform this study. The feedback session included both staff who had been directly involved in the research project and those who had not. All GEGAC staff present were women. (One of the participants had also participated in an individual interview for the research.) The following report presents key themes and findings from both the interviews and feedback session.

We have structured this report based on the broad themes identified through data analysis. First we consider the extent of gambling and different kinds of gambling in the community. Next we look at impacts of gambling on young people and the community. We then identify why, where and how people gamble and whether gambling is different for young people. Next we identify existing strategies people use individually to address gambling harm, barriers to talking about gambling harm and accessing support, and additional strategies that are needed to address gambling in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community.

Interview participants are identified in this report by a number (1-24). The GEGAC staff who participated in the feedback workshop are identified by the abbreviation FB (given the small group, identifying individual quotes could compromise the confidentiality of individual participants). One person, who participated in both the interviews and the feedback session, will be identified both by a number and at different points as part of the feedback group. Participants will also be identified by their gender, if they are a young person (identified by the abbreviation Y, specifying whether they were under 18 or 18-24) and whether they are working professionally in the community (identified as worker).



## Extent and kinds of gambling in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community

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As the figures above suggest, gambling is part of many people's lives in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community. Our research indicates that many young people and other people in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community participate in gambling, choosing from a wide range of forms but with an apparent preference for electronic poker machines and bingo, and gambling both in physical settings and online.

The people we interviewed talked more about poker machines than any other form of gambling, and thought this type of gambling was most common in the community. Bingo was also identified as very popular, and while some people suggested it was less popular with young people than older people, others said that young people also attended bingo, both to play once they were old enough to, and, prior to that, accompanying family members who played. Bingo was described as social (where 'everyone catches up' [FB, woman, worker]), and a family and community gathering where 'you'll see heaps of kids running out the front' [FB, woman, worker]. As a consequence, some young people 'can't wait to turn eighteen' [FB, woman, worker] so they can play.

Other forms of gambling that people identified included cards (poker, Uka and Uno), betting on horses, other sports betting including on football, 'scratchies', Keno and raffles. Poker was described as very popular, particularly in Bairnsdale. People gambled both in person (at home, TABs, clubs and other settings) and online (through phones and computers), and we will return to this later in this report.

One of the points of note in the interviews was that some people had a limited initial idea of what counted as gambling. For example, one young man initially answered the question of what sort of gambling he had done by saying he had only ever played the pokies. When prompted by questions about whether he had tried particular forms of gambling, he then realised that he had also bet on cards during informal games with friends, bought 'scratchies' and bet on the Australian Football League's Indigenous round. He reflected, 'when you say gambling, you just picture someone in the pokies, not all these other things' [#2, Y, 18-24, male].

## Impacts of gambling on young people and the community

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One of our key questions was what the impact of gambling was on young people. The accounts of the seven young people we interviewed give some direct insight into this question. Complementing these, older participants added their perspective on the impact of gambling on young people and on the broader community.

### Positive experiences and impacts

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#### *On Young People*

One of the young people we interviewed described gambling without negative impacts, whether his own gambling or other people's. He enjoyed the 'social part' and 'me time' of gambling and played for fun. The last time he played he had won 'a bit and ended up going out and buying myself a brand new bed, mattress' [#16, Y, 18-24, male].

While, as we will describe below, the other young people described negative impacts from gambling, they also saw positives, both from the experience of gambling generally and when people won. Gambling enabled fun with friends and family and a social experience. Winning both meant having extra money and being able to buy things, and '[b]eing able to brag that you won something, I like that, attention' [#2, Y, 18-24, male]. Winning could feel like being 'on cloud nine' [#24, Y, 18-25, female]. Additionally, one young woman whose sporting club sold raffle tickets saw how the proceeds covered the team's transport costs.

### **On The Broader Community**

This reflects experiences in the broader community. Participants in the research identified a range of positive consequences from gambling for people of all ages ('I love it, I love it' [#19, female, worker]), including the following four reasons. Gambling brought friends and family together to have fun, both because people come together to play and catch up, and because winnings that put money in people's pockets mean people are more likely to get together. Gambling wins feel great, with people describing their impact as a 'rush' [#2, Y, 18-25, male], 'thrill' [#11, Y, 18-25, male; #20, male] and 'high' [#10, female, worker], sometimes with people cheering. Gambling was also described as a way to temporarily take away depression and possibly help women in particular escape violence at home, although there was a sense that such escapes were short-lived: 'The gambling is a double edged sword, I suppose, because it does take away depression but when you lose you feel worse' [#13, male, worker]. Finally, gambling is a way to get extra money and material goods, both for individuals and community groups, for example as a form of fundraising for community groups like sports clubs. One participant said that when someone wins, the 'family prospers because we've got extra' [#10, female, worker], allowing people to buy food and clothes as well as necessities and treats for children.

The positive impacts of gambling on people in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community, both young and older, are significant and strongly felt. Their role as a reason for why people gamble is explored in more detail below.

### **Negative experiences and impacts**

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Six of the seven young people described concerns about gambling or negative impacts from gambling, ranging from relatively minor concerns (such as 'miss[ing] out on things I want through the week' [#11, Y 18-24, male]) to serious, life-threatening impacts (including self-harm and suicide attempts). As above, we also describe here older people's accounts of negative impacts of gambling on young people and other community members.

### **Problems associated with one's own gambling**

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#### **On Young People**

As we will discuss below, more of the young people we interviewed described harm from or concern about other people's gambling rather than their own. However, two young people expressed concern about or described harm from their own gambling.

One young woman described how watching her mother and her siblings impacted on her response to gambling:

First time I went I put my whole pay in, and it was like: 'oh crap, it's gone'. So I kind of didn't feel very great, but ever since then, I've only been probably like four or five time, and just I don't find the fun in it [#24, Y, 18-25, female].

This young woman was one of two young people who had banned or self-excluded themselves from gambling venues.

The second of these, a young man, gave a powerful account of the impacts of his own gambling on his life and his family's. We include here his detailed account of his experiences. He emphasises how easy it is for gambling to become a habit and describes how gambling was a way to mask the pain that came from abuse he experienced as a child:

First time I ever went was with my cousin and it was just the, you know, 'you're 18, let's go have a beer, we'll go down to the pokie machines'. [I had] never played the pokies before... The first time I went I wasn't expecting much and started playing and started winning a bit of money, and I don't know if it was the noises, the flashes, or whatever it was, but I think I was hooked from the moment I went in there.

[Gambling on poker machines] makes me feel good for the time I'm there, but at the same time I know I shouldn't be so I'm sort of torn between feeling good about being there but then feeling really shit because I know I'm wasting money, mainly 'cause I've got [family responsibilities]. ...I'm always just constantly fighting with myself...It's a terrible addiction.

...[I]t was the sounds and noise and when you win money you felt good, and there would be times when I would go in there with \$50 and [win enough to] have \$1,7000 cash in my hand, and instead of walking out I'd sit there and play, thinking I'm going to win more and more. I wanted to do it for my family and give them money but at the same time [I am] just being selfish by continuing playing and you know, I'm getting frustrated for putting this money back in when I could just be walking out, but it is not that easy to walk out.

...So in my case, I was abused at a young age...and it is only just this year this sort of surfaced, and for years I had suppressed it with drugs and drinking and gambling when I could... I'm only just starting to deal with that now, and I guess that's why I gamble a lot. Because a lot of the stuff that I've tried to suppress and forget about, I've tried to block out with gambling and drinking and taking drugs, and you know, I've done all that in the past. Just this last year, last couple of months, I ended up in hospital because of it, because it all got too much for me and I couldn't deal with it all. So at the moment I'm on some anti-depressants and like I said some Valium because I haven't been sleeping. ...Gambling it does, it is to do with domestic violence, sexual abuse...

For years I've tried not to deal with this because...it's made me feel disgusting and yuck about what's happened...but I know now, for me to get better and better for my family, I need to start talking about it, and I am... It's not easy...

This young man's account of the negative impact of gambling on him, and the personal causal factors driving his gambling, are an example of severe harm. While the other young people's experiences did not appear to be as severe, all but one described harm that was noteworthy, distressing and had negative ripple effects in the community.

In addition to the experiences of young people themselves, other people we interviewed talked about their experiences when they were children or young people. One woman in her twenties described having gambled more than she wanted to as an eighteen-year-old, and then having stopped:

...when I was like 18, I used to have a gambling problem... I'd go there every time I got paid but I'd only put 50 bucks in, and then it got to one time I went and put my whole friggin' pay in and I've never ever been back to the pokies since' [#21, female, worker].

These accounts suggest that for at least some young people, their own gambling is causing significant difficulties.

### **On The Broader Community**

Gambling harm was not limited to young people. Other participants also talked about gambling harm experienced by older people in the community. One man said that he believed gambling caused early death in the community, saying he had 'lost heaps of family members through that'. He said: 'It's all related to the money so if they've got no money they can't pay rent, they've got no food, they turn to alcohol and if they can't afford a slab they'll get the cheapest stuff, it turns nasty'. He described an aunt whose gambling:

turned into drinking, abuse, stealing and stuff like that and the stress and that might have got to her, depression through what they've done, just wasting their money...then they go into a dark place, then they get depression, and it leads to a lot of different things... [#22, male, worker].

Overall, people described the negative financial and psychological impacts of people's gambling. There were several interrelated consequences of gambling, particularly because of losing money.

Firstly, people faced poverty and deprivation. Participants described people going without food and other necessities, not having money to pay for petrol or public transport fares and not being able to pay their rent. This in turn led to stress that could feed conflict or violence:

I've had a cousin who every time he gets drunk and on drugs and that he ends up at the pokies and he spends all his pay through the pokies and he don't have money. He still lives with his parents and he don't



have money to pay rent or, and yeah, that causes conflict between them [#21, female, worker].

Well, the good thing is they can get together with their cousins and other community members and catch up but like I said the bad things, they are taking that money away from their kids, clothes for school, food, everything and then they start, that's where stress comes into play, family violence can come into play and it is just like a big ripple effect, child protection come into play, police and then you are sitting in a cell feeling sorry for yourself at the end of the day cause you've got a gambling problem [#3, male, worker].

Being short of money could create a vicious cycle: some participants described people not being able to get to work because they did not have money for petrol or to pay for car registration, which then meant they had even less money: 'the next day they've got nothing to go back to work with and it really kicks them in the gut' [#13, male, worker].

Losing also led to lies, which led in turn to conflict, as one person described:

If they haven't been honest with the family that they've got a gambling problem then how do they handle that, what, they lie and say, I've lost the money or somebody stole it and then that creates a whole lot of other stuff and goes on [#10, female, worker].

More broadly, participants said gambling losses stopped people doing what they saw as more positive things, such as going to school, work and university, and at times led to crime, as people tried to find other ways to recover the money they had lost or find more money to gamble again:

[Y]ou know, I've spent my pay and my partner's pay, even stolen from my partner's mum [#15, Y, 18-24].

In addition to the impacts from financial losses, participants described negative psychological impacts, including feelings of anger, frustration and shame, and consequent stress and depression ('I'm always just constantly fighting with myself' [#15, Y, 18-24]. The young man described above said:

[Gambling in this way]...makes you feel like an absolute shit, because that's my family, that's my [child], and I'm putting my addiction before [them], and it hurts and very upsetting, but I'm not the type to show emotion [#15, Y, 18-24].

The stress and anxiety that losing created also led people to what he described as 'numbing agents' [#15, Y, 18-24], such as drugs and alcohol, 'to try and suppress how you're feeling cause you've now just stuffed up and used the money' [#10, female, worker].

Several identified another link between gambling and drugs, explaining that some people sold drugs to make money for gambling or gambled to try to win money to buy drugs.

These accounts demonstrate that both young and older people are experiencing a range of harms from their own gambling. Individual people's gambling also impacts on other people, as we will explore in the following section.

## **Problems associated with another person's gambling**

### ***On Young People***

Gambling harm experienced by young people was not only due to their own gambling; other people's gambling had a significant impact on them. For four of the young people we interviewed, the negative impacts they experienced stemmed from other people's gambling (and two of the young people, both female, did not themselves gamble at all).

One young person said her friend's boyfriend's gambling caused her friend stress. Another young woman described family conflict because of gambling, saying gambling led to family breakdown. The last time someone in her family gambled, she said 'it actually turned into a huge argument because they just spent all the money and there was nothing left...' [#24, Y, under 18, female]. One young man described the emotional hurt of seeing a much-loved relative with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 'wasting away the last few years of his life that he has left...' He described his relative getting his pension and 'blow[ing] it on booze and pokies':

He has a car...that he always wanted to do up and...I've noticed, the more he gambles, the less he works on that car.'

When he was a child, the young man said he would be 'excited to tell him about something or for him to show me something, and now I just know what it is going to be, just the same, him like a zombie pressing that button and drinking a beer'.

While he understood that his relative's gambling was a direct result of trauma, he thought this understanding led people to accept it as inevitable, something he regretted:

I understand why he does it, being with his PTSD and everything, however...I think that's the problem. A lot of people look at it and go, 'he's a [survivor of traumatic events], this is the way he copes', and then we just leave it at that. We think, 'at least he's not doing something else, at least he is out there', and I think we don't need to look at it that way, we need to still think that it doesn't matter that he's [traumatised], he still has a gambling problem, we need to address it [#2, Y, 18-24, male].

Another young person said her mother had an addiction to the pokies and that this had had negative financial and emotional impacts on her, her mother and her siblings growing up:

Sometimes [mum would] get really stressed out, and so she'd go and do what she had to do, and sometimes she'd lose all her money and then come home and then sometimes we'd have nothing [#24, Y, 18-24, female].

Reinforcing the young people's perspectives, older workers described the impact of other people's gambling on young people, including when they themselves had been young. One person, now a community worker and aged 25-33, saw 'one of my friends get carted around to TABs, to bingo, the pokies, to the pubs and sit there for long hours, and basically they were taught how to gamble and made it accepted and now those people who have gambling problems and alcohol problems because of their parents dragging them to these places because they couldn't get a babysitter...' [#3, male, worker]. The boy also went without food and missed school: 'he sometimes didn't go to school cause he is sitting on the pokies, the TAB. Sport too, he missed out on sport so socialising with us young fellows'. It wasn't just one child in the family:

It has affected their whole family because their whole family, a lot of them gamble and it is like the two generations, their children, his generation and the next generation, they all gamble, all the brothers and sisters gamble and most of their children as well...'

Another participant described her daughter's gambling losses: 'at the end of the day she's got no money to get her through the next week, and it is not just her, it's her partner as well.' This in turn impacts on her daughter's children: 'They have to go without bread and milk, the lunches. I'm the one who has to try and make up for it somehow, so in that sense I put money aside so they don't go without [#8, female, worker].

Another spoke of how gambling had led to fighting: 'I grew up around gambling. A lot of the Elders takes their nephews and nieces to the pokies, and if they have a win they get drunk. After that they may have a bigger win then they end up playing with a few slabs, bluing, fighting, and then after that there's no money next morning and they feel sorry for themselves' [#22, male, worker].

From these accounts, it is clear that young people do see gambling in the community as a problem, and have experienced clear harm from other people's gambling.

### ***On The Broader Community***

Their concerns are reinforced by older people in the community who see gambling harm for people of all ages. As above, the impact of other people's gambling caused financial and psychological harm in the community, on both young people and older people. As reflected in the comment above, participants said both children and young people at time went without food because of other people's gambling losses. Gambling losses also meant people who have lost money ask others, both individuals and community organisations, for help or loans to cover their losses, described by one participant as 'that big ripple effect' [#3, male, worker]:

I've given like board money to people that think that they've got to go shopping and then end up not winning and there goes my board money which I [could have] went and blew myself but I didn't [#8, female, worker].

Overall, while gambling clearly provided pleasure and had a range of positive impacts, gambling also had significant negative impacts on young people and the broader community.

## Why do people gamble?

Despite the weight of negative impacts, the people interviewed articulated clearly why gambling could be so compelling, both for young people and older people.

People told us about a number of reasons why people gambled: 1) external factors such as advertising, 2) social and familial factors, 3) material and psychological factors and 4) other compounding factors.

### 1) External Factors

#### *External factors - advertising*

The ubiquity of gambling advertising was mentioned multiple times, and participants saw the widespread exposure to advertising across a range of platforms, including on TV, online and in real life such as at sports grounds, as a key reason why people gambled.

TV advertising, particularly during Australian Rules football and other sports, was described as very common:

They talk about Gamblers Helpline, they talk about what gambling does to people, to families and all that, but then they advertise it, it's on TV every day [#4, male, worker].

Online advertising was also seen as pervasive, and as expanding the range of events, across international time zones, that people might bet on, from US presidential elections to American football to English Premier League. This in turn reflected the proliferation of online betting sites, with participants observing that while in the past there was a limited number of places and ways to gamble, there was now a very large number of online gambling sites. Some people also felt that online advertising was predatory, with the implication that online advertising was more intrusive than television advertising. One young man said, 'I'm trying to watch a video on YouTube and bam, Sports Bet' [#2, Y, 18-24, male]. Another person said, '...when they're constantly coming up in different people's feeds, that's just like baiting people' [#10, female, worker]. In addition to simply encouraging people to gamble using products or events they were familiar with, the advertising was seen as expanding people's capacity and inclination to gamble by showing the wide range of events people could gamble on at any time of night or day.

While participants differentiated between TV and online advertising, they saw them as interrelated, with TV advertising pushing gambling apps and other online gambling. Regardless of the platform, people described gambling advertising as pervasive, almost inescapable, 'everywhere' [#10, female, worker]. Four participants described it as 'in your face' [#4, male, worker] [#13, female, worker] [#17, male, worker]:

[I]t's there, it's in your face, it's advertised, it's not like it is hidden, it is something that is out there for everybody to know [#10, female, worker].

Advertising was consistently seen as influential and excessive by participants in this study.

#### *External factors - venues*

In addition to external factors such as advertising, participants identified other factors that were not about individuals that explained why people gambled, including characteristics of venues. One participant described the way venues first drew people in with inviting, comfortable facilities. He identified a combination of glamour ('lights, ...colour') and plenty, describing comfortable couches, free tea and coffee, cheap food and being able to watch pay TV ('everything is there'): '...it's paradise for people that doesn't have much at home....' [#3, male, worker].

Once people were inside, the venues are then designed to draw them to gambling, including through in-house advertising (for example, placed on dining tables), internal flows that make people walk through gambling areas on their way to eat or drink, displaying some forms of gambling (eg Keno) in dining and drink areas and making poker machine areas visible from other areas of the venues, something we will return to below.

Participants saw venues as explicitly designed to encourage people to increase their gambling.



### **External factors - features of the game**

Finally, participants identified some features of the game that encouraged people to gamble, and the attractions of different forms or elements of gambling. Participants identified the way poker machines allow you to be by yourself ('just you and the machine' [#3, 25-33, male, worker]), and one person pointed out that while bingo is social at the beginning, during breaks and at the end, while the game is actually being played people are absorbed in that:

The tune out zone would be the pokies, yeah and bingo I suppose. A lot of the Elders and whatnot, even actually young people are getting into it but I know that, that might be a zone out too because a lot of them talk at half time but it's sort of, lots of silence [while they are playing] [#2, Y, 18-24, male].

The particular features of different types of gambling made them attractive in different ways to potential gamblers.

### **2) Social and familial factors**

Participants also described social and familial factors and settings that influenced people's comfort and familiarity with gambling, an important factor for young people. One participant said that young people were being exposed to gambling 'younger and younger' [#10 female, worker]. For several people, gambling was a normal activity that they were comfortable with and probably skilled from a young age, and that brought the community together.

As with gambling advertising, people described gambling itself as extremely common, something young people growing up would see 'every single day' [#4, male, worker]. People consistently described gambling as a normal part of life: popular, socially accepted and passed on from one generation to the next. People catch up in gambling venues, extending earlier experiences of getting together around a card game:

I think it is not talked about in community because it's not seen as being bad for the community, more a socially accepted thing, handed down through generations of people, of community. You know, the Elders used to get together, play cards and stuff, have a few beers and as the Elders were let into the clubs, you know, they started going to bingo and started to go to the pokies to catch up with each other and their friends [#3, male, worker].

People gave evocative descriptions of childhood impressions of gambling;

I remember when I was younger at Lake Tyres, we'd play two up all night, under car lights. And then play poker all night then, outside, play two up and at dusk we'd turn the car lights on, so we could see the pennies drop, and [later go] inside playing cards all night [#4, male, worker].

You know, you see your deadly uncle coming out of the bloody TAB, driving a deadly car and you're standing there cold and he's like, 'get in' and you're like, 'far out, I want to be like that one day' [#3, 25-33, male, worker].

One of the most powerful ways people described learning about gambling was in the family. One participant described his mother as a big influence stopping him from gambling. When he told her about the one time he had played the pokies, she said 'good, never do it again' [#2, Y, 18-25, male]. He was the exception. For most people, the family was where they learnt how to gamble. In one woman's words, '[I] grew up on gambling'. One worker said:

It's not the young fellas' fault, it's a learnt behaviour. They've learnt that at a young age, they saw it. By the time they were five or six, they knew how to handle cards [#4, male, worker].

Gambling also felt like a rite of passage, something that marked adulthood:

When my son turned eighteen, the first thing he did was, 'I'm going to put \$20 in the pokies'. Didn't really think much of it, because it was, 'I'm eighteen now, can have a beer, and I can play the pokies' [FB, woman, worker].

The combination of broad social expectations and exposure, and the normalisation of gambling in families, was a significant reason identified by participants for why many people gambled.

### 3) Material and psychological factors

People also described the ways gambling addressed material and psychological needs.

For some people, gambling offered the promise of 'a quick fix or a quick buck' [#4, male, worker], to buy drugs or a car; for others, it was about trying 'to win money to be comfortable' [#19, female, worker] or 'hoping to get rich on one press' [#7, female, worker]. Interestingly, material needs were mentioned far less than psychological factors.

Psychological factors were mentioned frequently. Gambling offered time alone, stress release, a chance to switch off from drugs and alcohol, and a way to manage trauma ('Just takes away the pain of grieving, loss' [#3, male, worker]):

I guess the isolation, being alone. Like I said, I've been through a fair bit growing up and just starting to deal with it now, but growing up, you know, never really had anyone, so always depended on myself, and I get into these moods sometimes where I just need to be alone and going to pokies is like I'm alone and I don't have to talk to anyone. I don't need to talk to anyone there, I can just focus on this here and not have to worry about anything else [#15, Y, 18-24, male].

Building on this, one theme was the way gambling temporarily blocked out and suppressed painful and difficult emotions, often caused by trauma. One young woman described the link between depression and gambling:

It's kind of like to do with a lot of depression, like, somebody feels depressed and they want to go get a drink or do some drugs, make them feel a bit better so pretty much gambling is the exact same. You're feeling down and out so you just want to go and try your luck and see if you win some money and if you do you're on cloud nine and by the time it's all gone then you're back to feeling the same [#24, Y, 18-25, female].

Gambling also offered entertainment and fun. Participants described the way gambling offered a 'high' [#10, 42-49, female, worker; #12, female, worker], a 'buzz' [#3, male, worker; #15, Y, 18-24, male], 'the thrill' [#10, female, worker; #20, male], 'that adrenalin' [#10, female, worker], that while short-lived, was powerful. More than that, it could offer those things in a social setting, whether for lonely older people or groups of young people out with young friends or family members. One participant described an older man who would play the poker machines from six o'clock on a Saturday night until four the next morning, saying the main attraction for him was the 'social aspect' [#6, female, worker]. Another described big groups of ten to fifteen young friends, 'all laughing... all yahoo' [#4, male, worker], enjoying the social event.

It was emphatic from participants' information that gambling could be compelling in the context of pressing and deep-seated material and psychological needs.

### 4) Other factors

Participants identified four other things that increased the likelihood that someone might gamble: misconceptions about what gambling is, not seeing gambling as destructive, drugs and alcohol and the addictive nature of gambling.

As described earlier, some young people appeared to have a limited idea of what constituted gambling, and so may be less equipped to recognise or know how to respond to gambling harm than if they realised what they were encountering was gambling. For example, one participant said young people might think of gambling as:

just the horses, 'well, I don't bet on the horses, so I don't have a gambling problem' but if people had an understanding that all these things were gambling and what they can lead to then...they would take it on board more [#10, female, worker].

A number of participants described the way drug or alcohol consumption made some people more likely to gamble excessively. One woman in her twenties said, 'I've had a cousin who every time he gets drunk and on drugs and that, he ends up at the pokies and he spends all his pay through the pokies' [#21, female, worker]. Another participant explained that gambling seemed less destructive than things like drugs and alcohol:

With the multitude of issues that Aboriginal people face, gambling on the face of it seems the least destructive. ...[I]f someone is going to have an adverse...reaction to alcohol it's sort of fairly immediate... whereas gambling, I think people don't see it in the same, as destructive. Not fully aware of the consequences of it all [#6, female, worker].

Finally, regardless of why they started gambling, some people get to the point where it does not feel like a choice anymore, and keep gambling, often despite the costs ('it's a disease they can't get rid of' [#8, female, worker]).

Together, these factors created compelling explanations for why people gamble, even when negative impacts appear to outweigh rewards.

## Where and how do people gamble?

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In addition to asking people about the impact of gambling, we wanted to understand more about where and how people gambled, and so we asked participants specifically about their experiences of gambling venues and online gambling.

### *Gambling venues*

People spoke about the venues in broad terms, rather than specifically in relation to young people, and emphasised two things: the role of venues in encouraging gambling, and the racism Aboriginal people are subjected to.

A number of people were satisfied with venues, and enjoyed the fact that venue staff knew who they were. Some participants said that gambling wins from venues put money in the Koori community.

In contrast, some participants were critical of the venues. Reflecting comments in a parallel study by the researchers in the Sunraysia Aboriginal community, participants said that venue staff were happy to see people while they were spending ('you're going to be pouring money into their machines and that's their wage' [#1, female, worker]) and described the many ways venues made their establishments attractive. As noted above, they painted a picture of warm, welcoming places that can provide respite and comfort, both as a place to spend time with family and go get away from them, and as somewhere comfortable and associated with plenty and glamour.

Venues offer free tea and coffee, comfortable couches, and somewhere where you can spend all day or night. In one person's words, it's 'paradise for people who don't have much at home', 'it's got the lights, the glamour, the colour, just draws people in' [#3, male, worker]. In addition, venues offer cheap meals such as two-for-one meal deals, to encourage people to come to the venues, and once there, encourage them to gamble. Participants noted that there had previously been restrictions on venues that meant that people visiting for a meal or a drink could not easily see the gambling areas, but that these restrictions had been loosened in recent years. Participants observed that in addition to the general advertising people are subjected to online and on television, as described above, people are exposed to advertising for gambling while they are in venues, from promotional material on dining room tables to signs about Keno in the eating areas. At the feedback session, one worker reflected on the impact on such advertising on her, a connection she had not previously made:

I must admit, with my grandkids, I play Keno with them, they pick the numbers [FB, woman, worker].

Several people raised concerns about the level of responsibility venues had when patrons were experiencing gambling harm or appeared to be losing excessively, saying that venues let people stay and keep gambling even when it was clear they were in trouble; one person compared this to venue's legal responsibilities when people are drinking excessively. In contrast, another person described a local venue that would ring one of the participants when they felt his aunt had been too long at the venue:



Personally I think some of the venues are alright, I have an aunty, really loved her gambling. I think it wasn't the gambling..., it was more socialising having a few beers but then after a few beers she'll put her whole pay check through and not realising after that. But there's a few venues around here what actually look after the elderly, especially my aunty and that and see, let them know or they'll ring my family and say she's still here, it's good that there is a few that do it [#22, male, worker].

Again reflecting sentiment in the Sunraysia Aboriginal community, several people felt that there should be more restrictions on venues, saying there were too many venues and that they should be smaller and have shorter hours. One person noted, however, that if venues were closed down, people could and would simply move to online gambling. While under the Victorian Responsible Service of Gambling framework, gambling venues are required to identify strategies to discourage patrons from engaging in 'extended and intensive play' (Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, 2012, p. 3), participants believed that more should be done to disrupt people who appeared to be gambling excessively. One person called for more information on poker machines to tell people how long they have been gambling. They also suggested that venues should stop giving give-aways, restrict advertising in non-gambling areas of the venues, particularly around meal areas, and send people home if they had been gambling too long. Capturing this, one person said:

Stop giving out free stuff and cut the lights and the glamour, I reckon if a person has been sitting there for maybe three, four hours, kick them out, tell them to go home [#3, male, worker].

Interestingly, participants commented on racism in venues more often than in the Sunraysia research mentioned above. While some people said staff members were pleasant, others said staff were racist and discriminatory, and that unlike other communities, Kooris get banned as a group ('one Koori mucks up, it affects everybody. White fellow or any other nationality mucks up, they can still come in' [#4, male, worker]). Some of the descriptions were that venues and their personnel 'talk down to you' [#14, female, worker] and were 'less accommodating to Aboriginal people' [#6, female, worker], 'rude' [#8, female, worker], 'a bit short or blunt with you' [#17, male, worker] and 'very nasty' [#19, female, worker]. To address this, several participants called for cultural training for venue staff.

While some participants were positive about local venues, accounts from several other participants highlighted the way venues recruited gamblers, tolerated harm to gamblers and discriminated against Aboriginal people.

### Online Gambling

It is clear that physical venues are no longer the only way people gamble, particularly young people. Amongst the people we interviewed, there was widespread concern about the way the internet extended the reach of gambling, both by creating additional and easier ways to gamble and because smart phones and laptops allowed gambling to follow people wherever they went. This was intensified by gambling apps, gambling-like games and by targeted social media advertising. The internet has changed gambling from something you had to go somewhere to do, to a 24-hour activity where '[y]ou can lay in bed and bet hundreds of dollars ... without leaving the house' [#2, Y, 18-25, male] as one person put it.

More than that, people described the way online gambling normalised betting, lured people in to gamble, and aggressively advertised to potential gamblers. Participants mentioned several online gambling games, including Slot Machines on Facebook, that while not technically gambling as players do not have to pay to play, normalise betting. The games and related applications promote themselves aggressively everywhere from Facebook to YouTube, including by placing advertisements in Facebook feeds ('just like baiting people' [#10, female, worker]) and showing when social media friends are playing them and inviting their online networks to play. Reinforcing the role of social media in promoting gambling, when community members do win, they often post on Facebook.

Participants said that children and young people were playing online games, and believed that this was priming them to gamble. One woman described her two-year-old grandson's familiarity with online poker machines:

I actually don't really like [online gambling sites] because my grandson is only two years old and he already knows about pokies... [H]e'll say, 'you want to play pokies nan?' [#8, female, worker].

Another participant said that people as young as twelve were playing 'pokies' on the phone: 'when they see their parents on the phone with the bingo, the pokie machines, they want to have a go too' [#19, female, worker]. Another described a young relative of five or six on the iPad who 'plays the pokies and loves it..., sitting there pushing the button' [#15, Y, 18-24, male].

Compounding this, online children's games include poker machines and other forms of gambling in their story lines and activities.

Further blurring the line between games and gambling, people described phone apps that 'give' gamblers \$20 or 'free' chips as an incentive to bet, and remarked that in this context, money lost can feel like it is not real money ('the money is invisible' [#17, male, worker]). Once people have linked their bank accounts to the apps, it is easy for people to lose more than they realise:

It's like with just having a game, you say, 'I'll download it and see what it is like', you do that with gambling and that and then they say, 'add your details of your credit card and you will get like 10,000 chips', you know. There's no association with actually handing over the money but you can accumulate debt real quick [#10, female, worker].

With those sites, ...you're not physically spending your money so you're not keeping track of it, so that probably could be worse than going actually to the pokies cause there you've got a limit on how much you can spend in the venue or how much you can actually get out, whereas if you are doing online gambling, you know you go until you're broke [#7, male, worker].

The community members interviewed for this research expressed clear concern about the reach and impact of online gambling, particularly on young people.

### **Is gambling different for young people?**

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One of the questions we wanted to explore was whether young people were experiencing gambling harm, and, if they were, if they talked about it. As described above, it is clear that young people did identify gambling harm, and were concerned about. However, most of the participants, including young people, felt that while young people talked about gambling wins, they tended not to discuss the negative impact of gambling. In contrast, one worker said young people talked about gambling a lot.

Our participants saw three reasons for this silence: young people did not see gambling as a problem, but rather as normal; they might be uncomfortable to discuss their own gambling with older people, for example, if an older family member had told them not to gamble; and they did not want to be judged.

Several of the young people we interviewed thought that gambling was different for young people. This was in part because young people were more likely to use phone apps and bet online, but also because they thought older people found it easier 'to say no sometimes' [#20, male] and had better budgeting skills. One person told us:

older people know more how to budget whereas us young ones we still don't know really how to budget that well [#11, Y, 18-24, male].

While participants identified many commonalities between gambling for young and older people, they also identified some specific issues for young people, both in terms of participating in gambling and in seeking help if they felt concerned about their own or others gambling.

## Existing strategies to address gambling harm

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While we did not ask explicitly about strategies people already use to amplify the positive aspects or manage the negative impacts of gambling, five people described themselves or a family member excluding themselves from gambling venues, whether informally or through a formal process. In contrast, only two people mentioned accessing counselling or other support.

## Barriers to talking about and addressing gambling harm

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Young people's reluctance to talk about gambling harm appeared to be consistent with overall reticence to disclose gambling problems in the community, both the Aboriginal community and beyond ('It's a shame thing. But I think that's the broader community, I don't think it's just the Indigenous community' [FB, woman, worker]). One participant in the feedback session explained the impact of shame on talking about gambling losses:

You only hear about the wins. It's only socially acceptable when you have a big win. When you've lost, it's a shame job. You don't want to tell anyone you've just blown \$200' [FB, female, worker].

This was compounded by the combination of gambling being seen as socially acceptable and not destructive ('I think it's a bit like alcoholism, 20 years ago' [FB, woman, worker]), in part because the impacts of gambling harms could be less obvious than those of alcohol or drugs, that appear to have more direct health impacts. As a consequence, 'so many people deal with it in silence' [FB, female, worker]. This individual silence was reflected at a community level. At the GEGAC feedback session, one worker saw gambling as linked in to issues that did concern the community like family breakdown, but wondered out loud how the community felt about discussing these links:

It seems like it's part of the cycle. And maybe perhaps the community are just not ready to open up to it being part of the conversation as well [FB, woman, worker].

Related to this, there was a sense that community members saw other issues as bigger problems. One worker in the feedback session said this:

With my outreach work that I've been doing, a lot of the elderly, when I start talking about gambling, they say, 'don't worry about the gambling, you ought to worry about those fullas out there taking drugs, that's the biggest problem that we've got' [FB, woman, worker].

In addition, as discussed above, some people lack a clear understanding of what counts as gambling; considering gambling as simply poker machines and horse racing, and so did not think of themselves as gambling despite betting in a number of forms. This creates a barrier to describing any related harm, seeking help or engaging with relevant treatment messages, as the person gambling may not think of themselves as a gambler.

Overlaying these barriers to talking about gambling harm was the broader concern that in identifying gambling harms, something positive would be lost to the community. This was particularly acute given interventions such as the imposition of welfare cards in Aboriginal communities were taking control away from individuals and communities. One GEGAC worker in the feedback session explained that:

Like with the welfare card... you're basically depriving a lot of probably already disadvantaged, disempowered people in the community with the opportunity to participate in something they enjoy...I'm not sure if that is why we sort of sit back and go, 'hang on, yes, we know that pokies are really harmful and we all know people are affected, but that bingo isn't so bad' [FB, woman, worker].

While not all these barriers related specifically to young people, it was clear that any responses to gambling harm needed to consider the positive elements of gambling and not reinforce shame or disempowerment.



## Support

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In response to the question about what support, if any, young people needed to address gambling harm, many people identified programs and responses that were relevant to people of all ages. Most participants wanted programs and responses that targeted the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community; in contrast, one person wanted programs for the whole community, not just the Koori community. Again, most people wanted local Aboriginal organisations to run any programs; one person (a different person from the person above) thought non-Indigenous services would be better. Rather than singling out 'problem gamblers', people felt responses should be community-wide, and particularly identified online promotion as a way to reach people.

Participants suggested a range of messages and approaches to deploy, from saying that gambling was not part of Koori culture ('remind them, their culture is about sharing and helping each other out and gambling, you're being a bit selfish' [#2, Y, 18-25, male]) to advertisements featuring local people who had been affected by gambling or showing someone surprised by how long they had been playing a poker machine. The young man who had grappled with gambling harm in his own life was one of those who suggested that local people could be powerful educators and advocates:

In my opinion you need to get someone in a community like Bairnsdale, someone like myself – and I'm more than happy to speak about my experiences and what gambling has done and my past, if it is going to help others – but I reckon that's the kind of stuff you might need to do in each community around Victoria. You need to find that one person that everyone in the community knows very well, and is well respected, and get them to talk about it in a way where everyone is going to listen... You need somebody to get the people together and speak to them so they can see the emotion of the person speaking, and then that way I reckon they will understand and get an idea...[of] the effects of gambling and drugs... [#15, Y, 18-24, male].

Participants saw the aim of such messages as raising awareness about gambling and getting people thinking, particularly about the forms of gambling, its harms and impacts and where to get help.

The interest in online and other advertising reflected a broad view that brochures and other written materials were ineffective. Instead, participants suggested using visual approaches, including pictures and videos, and face-to-face interaction, including outreach to people in their homes, schools and community settings.

Activity-based responses were suggested by many of the people interviewed. They called for events ranging from BBQs to family days with information stalls, outdoor activities and camps, groups like men's groups, and sports and forums. They saw these activities as a way to inform people about issues, provide alternatives to gambling and address the root causes of problems that made gambling compelling.

Participants in the staff feedback session recounted that GEGAC had previously run a local bingo game from the community hall GEGAC had then owned as a fundraiser for a funeral fund; the local football club subsequently took over the game. The costs to players had been low ('they didn't make money off it, but it used to cover the cost of the prizes' [FB, female, worker]), tea and coffee was provided for free and women from the community would make soup. It was a big social occasion that brought many people in the community together. Reflecting on this, this group expressed interest in the Mallee District Aboriginal (MDAS) prevention project that was offering free bingo, and discussed whether this would be a useful intervention in Gippsland and East Gippsland.

Five people raised self-exclusion or barring themselves without being prompted, including two young people, but there appeared to be limited information about how formal self-exclusion worked, and consequently a need for more information and support to allow people to successfully self-exclude.

Participants also made a range of additional, broader suggestions, from more job creation so that young people had meaningful activities and a good income, funds so that people had money to have fun with, cultural training for venue staff and management to address the racism in gambling venues, and conducting research to better understand online gambling.

Resonating with the research base suggesting that responses to gambling should go beyond a focus on individuals and address whole of community responses, but with a focus on sub-populations, participants identified a range of community-based responses that addressed both the individual experience of gambling and the broader social and regulatory drivers impacting on gambling.

## Conclusion

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From this research, gambling appears widespread and popular in the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community, including among young people. Community members identify the positive aspects of gambling, and also see the harm, including for young people and children.

It is also apparent that for a range of important reasons, young people and the broader community have some concerns about discussing gambling harm. Aboriginal communities are dealing with many injustices and problems, and do not need to be burdened though the identification of new and seemingly insoluble problems.

However, it is also clear from this research that gambling is closely connected to other issues (both as a cause and consequence) that services and community members are concerned about (from drug and alcohol to mental illness to children's welfare and poverty and deprivation). Understanding the place of gambling (as both a cause and consequence of problems) is a missing piece in fully understanding people's situations, and possible solutions. Because of these connections, it is crucial that solutions to gambling-related harm be holistic, rather than just gambling-specific, and address both the impacts of gambling and the underlying causes of gambling harm.

One form of preventable gambling harm stood out. Participants identified the need for training for gambling venue staff and management to address racism against Aboriginal people.

Resonating with similar research in the Sunraysia Aboriginal community, this research demonstrates that gambling helps people to meet real needs. Young people and other community members have good reasons to gamble, from needing money to wanting psychological relief and social connections. Compounding this, many factors encourage gambling, from widespread advertising, to the appeal of venues, accessibility of online gambling and family and community comfort with gambling, and online gambling is extending the opportunities to gamble and the scale of harm. Community members express considerable concern about the impact of advertising and online gambling.

Given these deep and broad issues, and reflecting research about the need for a public health approach, it is not enough to tell young people not to gamble or to change their individual behaviour, or to tell them addressing the negative impacts of gambling on them is dependent on family members doing so. Reflecting this, participants in this research identified a number of initiatives and approaches that could address gambling harm, and emphasised the need for resources for holistic programs, rather than isolated gambling-specific services. These included better education in the form of community-specific visual information and advertising, and positive community-based community-building activities.

This research is an important early step in better learning from and with the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal community about young people's experiences and understandings of gambling, and provides evidence for deploying resources to better meet the needs of young Aboriginal people and other community members experiencing gambling harm.

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