

## Preventing Gambling Harm

### Context

The City of Ballarat recognises that gambling is a recreational activity enjoyed by a large number of residents as well as visitors to the region. However, unlike many other recreational activities, gambling has the potential to generate negative social and economic impacts for the player, their family and friends and the wider community. There is a large body of evidence that demonstrates the adverse consequences which result from problem gambling, including financial loss, relationship breakdown, emotional or psychological distress, issues with work or study, criminal activity and reduced health and wellbeing.

The *Victorian Local Government Act 1989* requires councils to provide the best outcomes for the community, while having regard to the long-term cumulative effects of decisions. Under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, there is a statutory responsibility for councils to consider the social and economic impacts of gaming machines in their municipality, under Clause 52.28 of the Victorian Planning Provisions. The City of Ballarat is also required to seek to protect, improve and promote health and wellbeing under the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and to apply the ‘precautionary principle’ to preventing and controlling public health risk.


The City of Ballarat has developed policy to provide guidance in relation to Electronic Gaming Machines. This includes the City of Ballarat Gaming Machine Community Policy (2011) (currently under review), Gaming Local Planning Policy – Clause 22.14 of the Ballarat Planning Scheme and through a specific initiative within the Ballarat Strategy - Minimising the Harm caused by Electronic Gaming Machines. The aim of these policies is to ensure that an appropriate balance is struck between providing access to EGMs and the City of Ballarat’s broader responsibilities relating to community wellbeing and health.

The City of Ballarat acknowledges that there is a large body of evidence that demonstrates the adverse consequences which result from problem gambling, including financial loss, relationship breakdown and reduced health and wellbeing, and is concerned by the prevalence and accessibility of EGMs in the Ballarat area and their potential harmful impacts.

In endeavouring to achieve a healthy and safe community, the City of Ballarat is committed to reducing the harms which result from gambling and supports the use of a broad range of measures and strategies to ensure the impacts of gambling are reduced in the municipality.

### The City of Ballarat’s current role in Preventing Gambling-Related Harm

The City of Ballarat has a ‘Shared’ role in relation to Preventing Gambling-Related Harm.

	<p><b>Shared:</b> The City of Ballarat is one of a few or many responsible stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountable for some aspects</li> <li>• Some capacity</li> <li>• Moderate City of Ballarat role required to improve community wellbeing outcomes.</li> </ul>
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In line with the City of Ballarat Social Policy Framework (2018), the principles of Equity, Inclusion, Proactive, Leadership, Collaboration and Compassion are to be considered in development of all new social policy, provide a foundation for action and can be seen in the current roles of the City of Ballarat in relation to Preventing Gambling-Related Harm as identified below. Fully integrating these principles into different aspects of social policy work will take time and will require the dedicated efforts of everyone involved.

### **Planner/Regulator**

- Using relevant planning and regulatory controls available to local government to minimise the harm caused by gambling.
- Assessing Electronic Gaming Machine (poker machines) applications, selectively and strategically seeking to reduce the number of poker machines in Ballarat, taking into consideration - the location of the venue, harm minimisation measures adopted by the venue, and the likely impact on the community.

### **Coordinator**

- Supporting and assisting coordination of collaborative work of the Ballarat Interagency Taskforce on Gambling in advocating for harm minimisation approaches and improved community awareness of gambling harms.
- Where possible, integrating gambling harm prevention into other City of Ballarat policies.

### **Advocate**

- Maintaining membership with the Alliance for Gambling Reform and support campaigns for reforms of the gambling industry that reduce the harm it causes.
- Advocating to the State Government to reduce the City of Ballarat Regional Cap of 663 pokies machines.
- Advocating to government and peak bodies for effective reform of the gambling industry, including the adoption of maximum bet and cash insertion limits consistent with the Productivity Commission<sup>1</sup> and the Alliance for Gambling Reform<sup>2</sup>.
- Encouraging all gaming venues to adopt harm minimisation strategies.

### **Educator**

- Researching and accessing data on local gambling context and needs to inform community awareness and advocacy.

### **Related City of Ballarat policy documents:**

1. **City of Ballarat Gaming Machine Community Policy (2011) (currently under review) - <https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-04/Gaming%20Policy.pdf>**
1. **The Ballarat Strategy – Minimising the Harm caused by Electronic Gaming Machines (page 118) - <https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/city/city-strategy/ballarat-strategy-2040>**
2. **Gaming Local Planning Policy – Clause 22.14 of the Ballarat Planning Scheme - [http://planning-schemes.delwp.vic.gov.au/schemes/ballarat/ordinance/22\\_lpp07\\_ball.pdf](http://planning-schemes.delwp.vic.gov.au/schemes/ballarat/ordinance/22_lpp07_ball.pdf)**
3. **Social Policy Framework 2018 – [https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/COB\\_Social%20Policy%20Framework%20Document\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/COB_Social%20Policy%20Framework%20Document_Final_0.pdf)**

## Key Messages – Gambling harm

- The City of Ballarat supports and advocates for harm minimisation approaches to gambling in Ballarat.
- Australians spend more per person on gambling than any other country in the world - almost double the rate of New Zealand.
- Gambling is now understood to be a public health issue with outcomes that affect communities, not the sole responsibility of an individual as a consumer.
- Australians spend more money gambling than on other activities that can be addictive and dangerous, including alcohol, tobacco and all illegal drugs.
- Relationship conflict or breakdown, reduced performance or loss of role at employment or study, financial difficulties, emotional or psychological distress, family violence, child neglect, criminal activity, suicidal thoughts and suicide are some of the impacts of gambling.
- For every person directly harmed by gambling, between five and 10 friends, family and others, including employers are also affected.
- There has been a rapid growth in online gambling and sports betting in recent years, however poker machines remain the number one cause of gambling losses and gambling harm.
- Gambling is being normalised through prolific advertising on TV, in print media, on billboards and through sponsorship of sporting teams and events, and engaging children through humour, cartoons and catchy music<sup>3</sup>.
- Mass media poker machine advertising is banned in Victoria.
- From 30 March 2018, gambling ads are banned during the broadcast of live sports between 5am – 8.30pm on commercial free-to-air TV, radio and pay TV. The new restrictions supplement existing rules about gambling ads during live sport and will enhance community safeguards during times when children are part of the audience.

## Key Messages - Poker Machines

- The City of Ballarat is concerned by the prevalence and accessibility of poker machines in the Ballarat area and their potential harmful impacts.
- The City of Ballarat does not endorse any increases to the City of Ballarat Regional Cap of 663 Electronic Gaming Machine's (poker machines).
- The City of Ballarat supports the regulatory controls recommended by the Productivity Commission and the Alliance for Gambling Reform including - restricting access through reduced numbers of poker machines and trading hours, limiting maximum bets to \$1, removing deceptive features such as 'near misses' and losses disguised as wins.
- There are currently 15 poker machine venues in Ballarat with a total of 657 machines (2018)<sup>4</sup>.
- In the City of Ballarat, there is an average of \$153,000 lost by players on poker machines per day and \$55.8M annually (2017/2018)<sup>4</sup>.
- Despite the perception that gaming venues contribute significantly to community initiatives, in Ballarat only 0.9 per cent of losses were provided back to the community through benefit initiatives in 2015/2016.<sup>4</sup>

## Key data and trends

According to the Alliance for Gambling Reform<sup>4</sup>, Australians spend more per person on gambling than any other country in the world - almost double that of New Zealand. Australians also spend more money gambling than on other activities that can be addictive and dangerous, including alcohol, tobacco and all illegal drugs, as seen below.



Source: Alliance for Gambling Reform<sup>2</sup>

There has been a rapid growth in online gambling and sports betting in recent years, however poker machines (Electronic Gaming Machines or EGM's) remain the number one cause of gambling losses and gambling harm – 3 in 4 problem gamblers are using poker machines<sup>1</sup>.

The City of Ballarat is concerned by the prevalence and accessibility of EGMs in the Ballarat area and their potential harmful impacts. Both the number of gaming machines and expenditure per adult is higher than in other regional Victoria municipalities and significantly higher than the state average. In the City of Ballarat, there is an average of \$152,778 lost by players on poker machines per day and \$55.8M annually (2017/2018)<sup>4</sup>. There is currently a total of 657 poker machines across 15 venues in the City of Ballarat, which is 99 per cent of the legislated local area cap of 663 (2017/2018)<sup>4</sup>. Gaming machine caps are a legal limit on how many gaming machine entitlements are available within specific geographic areas of Victoria. In Ballarat, the number of poker machines equates to 8.3 machines per 1,000 adults - the 13<sup>th</sup> highest ratio in Victoria - higher than ratios seen in Geelong, Bendigo, Shepparton and Melton<sup>4</sup>.

The estimated losses on poker machines incurred by gamblers in Ballarat, as a percentage of gross individual income is 12.1 per cent (2016), the 11<sup>th</sup> highest percentage in LGAs across Victoria<sup>4</sup>. Despite the perception that gaming venues contribute back to communities through gifts, donations, sponsorships, volunteer expenses and veterans support, we know that only 0.9 per cent of the total losses on pokies machines in Ballarat in 2015/2016 were given back through community benefits. This is significantly lower than in many other LGAs<sup>4</sup>.

Further background information about the impact of gambling harm, legislative controls, data, research and resources can be found through the following links and through the related City of Ballarat Policy documents listed above.

## Further Information

### Legislation and regulation information:

<https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/legislation-and-regulation/>

### Information about Regional Caps:

<https://www.vcglr.vic.gov.au/gambling/gaming-venue-operator/understand-your-gaming-licence/caps-and-limits>

### Research, data and publications:

<https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/research/published-research/>

<https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/publications/>

[http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/resources\\_data\\_research](http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/resources_data_research)

<https://www.gamblingresearch.org.au/>

## Services and support

- Gamblers help – assists those with gambling problems or family and friends affected by gambling with free and confidential advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Phone: 1800 858 858 or visit <https://gamblershelp.com.au/>
- Child and Family Services – Ballarat (providers of Gamblers Help services locally), Address: 115 Lydiard Street North Ballarat, Victoria 3350, Telephone: (03) 5337 3333.
- Gamblers Anonymous Tel. (03) 9696 6108 – support group for people with a gambling problem

## How community members can get involved

**Advocacy:** Community members can take opportunities to advocate against gambling harm. This could include:

- Signing the petition against poker machine harm at – [www.pokiesplayballarat.org.au](http://www.pokiesplayballarat.org.au)
- Respond to submissions for additional gaming machines when applications are submitted to the VCGLR - <https://www.vcgr.vic.gov.au/CA256F800017E8D4/VCGLR/775C37E1F7909A1DCA257B320078027A?OpenDocument>
- Promote and get involved in gambling awareness programs within schools, workplaces and sporting clubs such as 'Love the Game' - <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/reducing-harm/>
- Share your own stories of gambling harm and help raise awareness of the issues – Ballarat Community Health have a Voices for Change program which encourages people with lived experience to share their stories to help others - <https://bchc.org.au/news/voices-change-program-looking-volunteers-0>

## Contact:

City of Ballarat

Health and Social Planning Team

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**Position Statement Review: By August 2022**

## References:

1. Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2010). Available: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/gambling-2009/report> (Accessed: 22/05/2018)
2. Alliance for Gambling Reform. Available: [http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/the\\_alliance](http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/the_alliance) (Accessed: 22/05/2018)
3. Deakin University. *Gambling on our children's future*. Available: <http://invenio.deakin.edu.au/gambling-on-our-childrens-future/> (Accessed: 23/05/2018)
4. Alliance for Gambling Reform. *Resources webpage: Real Community Benefits – Club Venues spreadsheet*. Available: [http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/resources\\_data\\_research](http://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/resources_data_research) (Accessed 22/05/2018)