

Reducing harm from smoking, gambling, alcohol and other drugs

Case Study: Gambling Harm Prevention

Background

Gambling has the potential to generate negative social and economic impacts for the player, their family and friends, and the wider community. Gambling-related harm can include financial loss, relationship breakdown, intimate partner violence, increased prevalence of anxiety and depression, emotional or psychological distress, issues with work or study, criminal activity, reduced health and wellbeing, and suicide.

Whilst there are many different forms of gambling, a significant source of financial loss and harm in Ballarat comes from Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs), also known as poker machines (pokies). It is also the form of gambling over which Council has the greatest influence through its statutory roles and decision-making processes. Whilst the state-controlled nature of gambling regulation leaves Council with minimal regulatory influence, the City of Ballarat is committed to reducing the harms that result from gambling where possible.

Project Description

In 2022, City of Ballarat adopted a Gambling Harm Minimisation Policy which identifies a 'whole of Council' approach to minimising gambling-related harm in the community. The scope of the policy relates to Council roles as a planner and regulator, community partner and advocate.

Council has an opportunity to influence community health and wellbeing outcomes through the Community Impact Grants Scheme hence has developed a Harmful Industries declaration to ensure council grants are allocated to clubs and projects which align with health and wellbeing priorities of council, this includes sponsorship from gambling venues, and businesses gaining significant income from alcohol, tobacco, vaping and fast food businesses.

The City of Ballarat are key partners in the Ballarat Gambling Harm Prevention Taskforce which has initiated and promoted the Ballarat Gambling Harm Prevention Taskforce Facebook page and plans annual events for Gambling Harm Awareness week.

The Sebastopol Library implemented the Libraries After Dark program focusing on engaging at-risk communities and those most vulnerable to social isolation in free community evening activities, as an alternative to gambling venues.

The City of Ballarat work with key stakeholders to provide understanding and knowledge around gaming machine use, what community can do to help reduce the harms associated with gambling and support stakeholders to implement alternative activities. Two data reports are prepared each year detailing losses on gaming machines which are uploaded onto the Council website for community information.

Outcomes

- Development of a Gaming Machine application fact sheet
- Undertake six monthly pulse checks relating to gaming machine spending within the local government area and share findings with internal staff and community stakeholders
- Implementation of Harmful Industries declaration.
- Host a Gambling Harm Awareness Week event in partnership with Ballarat Gambling Harm Prevention Taskforce
- Ongoing funding sourced for extended opening hours after the success of the Libraries After Dark program at Sebastopol Library. This program provided the following outcomes:
 - Some individuals definitely attended the library as an alternative to gambling venues and these individuals had also disclosed that they were in the recovery phase of gambling addiction
 - Best attended programs were social connections programs, where conversation and recreation were the focus
 - Increased knowledge of the harms associated with gambling by staff involved with the program.