

2018 VICTORIAN ELECTION POLICY SUMMARY

Policy Options

FEWER POKER MACHINES

The Victorian Government has invited existing poker machine operators to allow for a licence to operate those machines from 2022 till 2042. Where venue operators do not re-apply to retain their existing machines, those entitlements should be retired from circulation and not made available to other operators. We welcome the decision by venues such as Geelong and Melbourne AFL Clubs to surrender their poker machines, but if these entitlements are simply taken up by another operator then gambling harm may not be reduced.

We applaud the New Zealand model for poker machine licensing in which Councils determine a policy to reduce gambling harm. They are empowered to reduce machine numbers by not allowing licenses to be transferred, and requiring licenses to be retired when a venue closes.

The model used in New Zealand allows local government to determine the issuing of a gaming licence for a new venue or for more machines in an existing venue consistent with the local government's own policy on gambling.

\$1 MAXIMUM BETS

The AGR strongly supports a \$1 bet limit per button push on EGMs. It has the support of Coles, who own EGM venues.

The 1999 Productivity Commission report pointed to bet limits on EGMs as a possible measure to reduce problem gambling.

A 2006 study by the South Australian Department for Families and Communities found that at risk gamblers were far more likely to increase their bet size to chase losses than recreational gamblers. In 2010 the Productivity Commission estimated that only 12% of recreational gamblers bet at \$1 or more a button push, compared to 50% of problem gamblers.

REDUCE OPERATING HOURS

Reducing venue operating hours to 10 am to midnight for gaming areas. In 2010, the Productivity Commission recommended that gaming machines in hotels and clubs (not casinos) should be shut down for 6 hours between 2 am and 8 am, at a minimum. South Australia, for example, has a mandatory 6 hour break.

MACHINE DESIGN

The State Government should use the machine approval process to remove designs from machines that contribute to gambling harm, such as (1) losses disguised as wins (2) linked jackpots and (3) free spins.

This ban could be applied immediately to any new machine approvals and be a condition of new license purchases.

BAN POLITICAL DONATIONS

To avoid corruption, ban political gifts and donations by poker machine owners, operators and peak bodies to local and state politicians and parties.

At the state level these bans on political influence are long overdue. In the case of Local Government they become more necessary as more decision making is moved to the local level.

MAINTAIN THE 50 / 50 POKIE CLUB AND PUB SPLIT

In 2016 -2017 Victorian gambling clubs took \$904 million while gambling pubs took \$1705 million. Pubs market and manage their poker machines to extract almost twice as much money per machine, because they have a clear profit motive to do so.

In any revision of government policy, the 50 / 50 split needs to remain in place, even if clubs are not using all of their entitlements.

REDUCE GAMBLING HARM CAUSED BY OPERATORS**■ DAILY EFTPOS CASHOUT LIMIT SHOULD BE \$200**

People with a problem gambling risk or a moderate risk of harmful gambling report accessing EFTPOS significantly more times when gambling than non-problem gamblers. The Victorian Government should deliver on the intended effect when it removed ATMs from venues, and reduce daily EFTPOS cash withdrawals to \$200. The Alliance feels that there is little practical distinction between EFTPOS and ATM for people at risk of gambling harm.

The reduction of EFTPOS withdrawals in venues is likely to have little impact on people who are not engaged in high risk gambling behaviour. Over the last few years the widespread use of paywave means that for patrons paying for all other services in the venue, the same card used to withdraw cash can be used to make payments with far less effort and inconvenience than using it to withdraw cash and then pay for food and drinks.

■ DIRECT THE VCGLR TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ALL GAMBLING HARM

The Government must direct the VCGLR to take into account recent research on gambling harm in its determinations on poker machine applications. Recent research has found that gambling harm occurs in more ways than previously understood and that the majority of health harm is caused to people previously categorised as 'low' or 'moderate' risk.

■ FAMILY VIOLENCE

There is an established link between harm from gambling and family violence. Recent Australian research indicates that people who have significant problems with their gambling are more likely than people without gambling problems to be victims and perpetrators of family violence and over half of people with gambling problems report perpetrating physical violence against their children. Research indicates that family violence is three times more likely to occur in families in which there is significant harm from gambling than in families in which there is no gambling-related harm.

■ MANDATORY STAFF INTERVENTION

The Alliance believes that it should be a separate obligation for venue operators to ensure their staff offer appropriate assistance to people showing signs of being harmed by gambling, not merely when the person is showing distress.

As there is a clear profit motive for venues to allow people to keep gambling, even when they are showing signs of harmful behaviour or problematic behaviour, a sanction is needed to motivate the venue to act in the best interest of the people gambling in the venue.

The review of the removal of ATMs from Victorian EGM venues noted that "venue based data showed that staff were observing patrons making multiple withdrawals through EFTPOS but in general were not using this information to inform identification of possible problem gamblers." Recent allegations from whistleblowers working in poker machine venues reveal that operators demand staff target people to lose more money without any consideration of the harm that will result to that person and their family.

■ CREATE A DUTY-OF-CARE FOR VENUE OPERATORS

In the view of the Alliance all gambling providers owe a duty to their customers to do all they reasonably can to reduce any harm that may arise from the product they are selling. This is a duty that should apply universally to all businesses. However, in the view of the Alliance, the gambling industry fails to fulfil this 'duty of care' to their customers. Instead many in the gambling industry seek to do the minimum they can get away with in terms of consumer protection measures.

The current ability of gambling businesses to avoid a duty of care to their customers serves as a barrier to those businesses undertaking meaningful measures to reduce problem gambling and other harms caused by gambling activities. It fosters a culture of doing the minimum that governments will let the industry get away with.

The existing Mandatory Code for gambling providers should be strengthened by requiring gambling businesses to take all reasonable steps to observe identifiable signs of problem gambling and to intervene appropriately when such signs are detected. There should be harsh penalties for gambling businesses that engage in 'egregious' conduct, knowingly or recklessly exploiting people with gambling problems.