Rural City of Wangaratta

Strategic Plan to Reduce Harm from Gambling

March 2024

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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which the Rural City of Wangaratta communities reside.

We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and celebrate and respect their continuing cultures. We are committed to walking beside all traditional owners as we move toward reconciliation.

Policy Statement

Council is committed to protecting the Wangaratta community from gambling-related harm. This Strategic Plan outlines the actions Council will undertake. The Strategic Plan to Reduce Gambling Harm should be read in conjunction with Council's Policy to Reduce Gambling Harm.

Council will actively seek to reduce losses from gambling by meeting its requirements as a responsible authority in accordance with the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003.

Council will adopt a public health approach, recognising that there are multiple social, economic and environmental determinants of harm. This approach acknowledges that harm may be experienced not just by the person who gambles but also by their family, friends and the wider community

A whole of community approach to protecting the community from harm will be utilised. Part of this approach includes Council opposing an increase in the number of Electronic Gaming Machines in the Wangaratta community.

Taking an evidence-based public health approach to the prevention of gambling harm includes the use of accurate, evidence-based, and non-stigmatising language. Council will use terms such as 'gambling' in place of 'gaming', 'people harmed by gambling' in place of 'problem gamblers', 'gambling losses' in place of 'expenditure' and 'EGM operators' in place of 'gaming venues'. This language identifies that gambling behaviour is influenced by a combination of factors, including characteristics of the individual person, social and cultural norms, aspects of the gambling environment, and broader policy and legislation

Council acknowledges that some forms of gambling considered lower risk, such as raffles, are utilised by community organisations for the purpose of fundraising. While Council does not actively support these activities, it is understood that these are a major source of revenue for clubs and community organisations. Council commits to working with clubs to reduce their dependency on gambling revenue but will not penalise clubs for lower risk activities where the main purpose is fundraising.

Background

COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Local government has legislative requirements to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of the community. The need to protect our community from gambling-related harm is expressed in both the *Community Vision* and under the strategic priority 'Nurturing our Wellbeing' in the Rural City of Wangaratta Council Plan (which incorporates our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan).

Community Vision
Wellbeing – Healthy behaviours and lifestyles

- I6 Reduce rates of gambling amongst the community.

Council Plan
Nurturing our Wellbeing – 2.4 Healthy behaviours and lifestyles

- 2.4.6 Reduce rates of gambling amongst the community.
  - 2.4.6.1 Develop a Gaming Policy to guide decisions relating to gaming and gambling within our community.
  - 2.4.6.2 In collaboration with key community organisations, advocate to other levels of Government for best practice gambling regulation and policy reform that reduces the harms associated with gambling.
  - 2.4.6.3 Partner with local services, community leaders and community and business organisations to inform the community about the health risks of gambling.

The Strategic Plan and associated Policy will guide Council in fulfilling its statutory obligations under the following legislation:

- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Gambling Regulation Act 2003*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Local Government Act 1998 (amended 2021)*

GAMBLING IN VICTORIA

Australia has the highest per capita expenditure on gambling in the world (1). In the past five years there has been a reduction in losses on EGMs and an increase in losses in sport and race betting in Australia. This is partly due to the closure of gaming operators during the COVID-19 lockdowns and the increase in online sports betting.

In 2019-20 per capita losses on EGMs in Victoria represented 59 per cent of per capita losses on all forms of gambling (2).

Trends in gambling behaviour in Victoria are as follows (3):

- Over two-thirds of Victorian adults had spent money on some form gambling, inclusive of lottery products, in the last twelve months (69.0%). There was little difference in participation between the genders (69.9% of men, 68.2% of women).

Specific gambling patterns among people using EGMs during 2018-19 are as follows (3):

- Twenty percent (20.4%) of gamblers had used EGMs in the last twelve months.
- More males had used EGMs than females (22.2% compared with 18.7%).
- ‘Problem gamblers’ (69.3%), moderate-risk gamblers (52.3%) and low risk gamblers (40.0%) were more likely to have used EGMs compared with non-‘problem gamblers’ (16.3%).
- Over a third (35.5%) of young adult gamblers aged 18 to 24 years had played pokies.

- Gamblers aged 35 to 54 were least likely to have used EGMs (inclusive of 14.9% of 35 to 44 year-olds and 15.1% of 45 to 54 year-olds).
- Lower income gamblers were more likely to have used EGMs than high income gamblers.

GAMBLING HARMS

Gambling losses are associated with harms. Some population groups are at a higher risk of experiencing harm from gambling, including people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people experiencing social isolation, people with low proficiency in English and people with low educational attainment.

Key factors about gambling harms are as follows (3):

- Seven out of every thousand people were identified as problem gamblers (0.7%), and twenty-four out of every thousand (2.4%) as moderate risk gamblers. Most Victorian adults (59.2%) were categorised as non-problem gamblers according to respondents' PGSI scores. Three in ten (31.0%) were non-gamblers.
- Men were significantly more likely than women to be problem gamblers (1.0%, compared with 0.5%), moderate risk gamblers (3.4%, compared with 1.5%), or low risk gamblers (8.4% compared with 5.0%). Conversely, women were significantly more likely to be classified as non-problem gamblers (61.2% compared with 57.1% of men).
- In 2018-19, 4.9% of Victorian adults indicated that they had experienced problems in the last twelve months that resulted from another person's gambling from over twelve months ago.
- For each person with a gambling problem 7-10 other people are impacted.
- Due to their high prevalence, the gambling forms with the greatest population impact were EGMs (37.7%), casino table games (15.0%), and Keno (13.2%).
- EGM accessibility is associated with police-recorded domestic violence incidence in postcodes in Victoria. Reducing EGM accessibility may potentially provide an avenue for reducing the incidence of domestic violence. (4)

WANGARATTA'S EGM CONTEXT

There are currently 154 EGMs operating out of four gaming operators in Wangaratta (refer to Table 1).

Table 1 – Gaming operators, EGM numbers and EGM losses 2022-23 Financial Year (5)

Venue Name & Address	Club/Hotel	Attached Entitlements	Licensed EGMs	Player losses 2022-23
Pinsent Hotel 20 Reid Street, Wangaratta	Hotel	44	44	$4,568,096
The Old Town 'N' Country Tavern Cnr Greta Road & Mason Street, Wangaratta	Hotel	35	35	$2,333,905

Wangaratta Club 4 Victoria Parade, Wangaratta	Club	25	25	$1,462,867
Wangaratta RSL 2-4 Templeton Street, Wangaratta	Club	50	50	$2,509,324
Rural City of Wangaratta		154	154	$10,874,191

At present Wangaratta is operating 69 per cent of its municipal cap of 223 EGMs (6). A municipal cap is a maximum and not a benchmark, calculated at 10 EGMs per 1,000 adults. If population rises, the limit may increase (7).

Table 2 contains key statistics about Wangaratta's gaming operators and EGMs over the past 3 financial years. It is important to note that gambling venues across Victoria were closed between March and November 2020 due to Covid-19 lockdowns. Gaming expenditure data published during that time reflects these closures.

Table 2 – Key gaming indicators, 2019-20 to 2022-23 (5)

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
EGM losses	$6,958,811	$5,239,122	$8,688,280	$10,874,191
Number of EGMs	154	154	154	154
Adult Population	23,109	23,307	23,498	23,618
Adults per gambling operator	5,777	5,827	5,875	5,905
EGMs per 1,000 Adults	6.7	6.6	6.6	6.5
EGM losses per Adult	$301	$225	$370	$460
Losses per EGM	$45,187	$34,020	$56,417	$70,612

Wangaratta has a higher density of EGMs per 1,000 adults (6.5) compared to regional municipalities and Victoria (5.9 and 4.8 respectively) (6).

Since the gaming operators opened in the 2020-21 Financial Year, EGM losses per adult and losses per EGM have increased, suggesting the Wangaratta community is using EGMs more intensely.

Community Consultation

The development of this Strategy and associated policy began to address actions embedded in the Council Plan (2021-25). The Policy and Strategy have been refined at each stage of the development.

Stage 1 – Preparation of evidence base

- Research of Council's legislative roles and responsibilities
- Review of Victorian public health data and priorities
- Review of policies by other councils
- Analysis of the Rural City of Wangaratta gambling context and vulnerability to gambling-related harm
- Review of scientific and academic research on gambling-related harms
- Preparation of Background Report

Stage 2 – Preparation of draft Gambling Policy and Action Plan

- Discussions with relevant council departments
- Facilitated Councillor Briefing Session
- Discussions with relevant health and wellbeing partners and stakeholders in community according to Council Plan commitments, including Gateway Health, Centre Against Violence, Victoria Police, Neighbourhood Houses, Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, The Centre/Sport North East, Northeast Health Wangaratta, Upper Murray Family Care, Anglicare Victoria (Loaves and Fishes), LINE Wangaratta.
- Initial draft developed and presented to Councillors

Stage 3 – Targeted Stakeholder engagement

- Targeted consultation with sporting and community groups supported by revenue from gambling
- Review of draft Gambling Policy and Action Plan by health and wellbeing partners and stakeholders
- Targeted consultation with EGM operators and venues with other forms of gambling
- Draft Policy and Action Plan presented to Council Meeting prior to public exhibition

Stage 4 – Public Exhibition and Final Review

- Public Exhibition Period
- Submissions to Councillors
- Response to feedback
- Incorporation of feedback
- Preparation of final Policy to Reduce Harm from Gambling and Strategy to Reduce Harm from Gambling, incorporating the Action Plan
- Adoption of Policy to Reduce Harm from Gambling and Strategy to Reduce Harm from Gambling by Council

Action plan

The actions outlined below are structured around four pillars which align with Council's statutory roles and its scope of influence to protect the Wangaratta community from gambling-related harm.

Manage and Support

Commitment: *Council will prevent or manage all forms of gambling on Council owned land and will support community groups, organisations and businesses offering gambling products to reduce their reliance on gambling-derived revenue.*	
	Actions
1.1	Continue to promote a variety of non-gambling events, activities and programs that encourage residents to lead active and healthy lives.
1.2	Discourage conducting Rural City of Wangaratta activities, social outings, meetings or municipal events at venues that provide any form of gambling. Exemptions will be made for commemorative events such as ANZAC Day, Vietnam Veteran's Day, and Remembrance Day commemorations, fundraising events that support disadvantaged groups in the community, and events that provide recognition for volunteers.
1.3	Maintain independence from the gambling industry by: 1.3.1: prohibiting advertising and/or the promotion of gambling of any form at Council owned or managed facilities 1.3.2: prohibiting any form of gambling, including online gambling, on Council owned and managed land 1.3.3: minimising financial support or provision of grants for activities that take place in gambling venues 1.3.4: not accepting financial or in-kind contributions from the gambling industry
1.4	Review Council's Procurement Policy and Procedure to discourage purchasing from companies that sell or are associated with gambling products.
1.5	Work with community groups and organisations to reduce their financial dependence on revenue derived from gambling sponsorships and gambling activities.
1.6	Seek external funding opportunities, in partnership with community where possible, that will contribute towards protecting the Rural City of Wangaratta community from gambling-related harm and assist with the delivery of this action plan.

Partner and Advocate

Commitment: *Council will be a leader in advocating to Federal and State Government and adjacent local governments, to implement harm reduction approaches, policies and legislation amendments.*	
	Actions
2.1	Support harm minimisation advocacy to federal and state government, including (but not limited to): submissions to VGCCC; opportunities to provide feedback in relation to state and federal legislation and policy changes.
2.2	Support the work of neighbouring councils to enhance combined regional approaches in reducing harm from gambling.
2.3	Join the Alliance for Gambling Reform.
2.4	Advocate to the State Government for changes to the Community Benefit Statement, including removing the Class B (Indirect community benefits) and Class C (miscellaneous) categories.

Plan and Regulate

Commitment: *Council will fulfill its statutory and land-use planning obligations to regulate gambling activities in the municipality and reduce the incidence of gambling-related harm.*	
	Actions
3.1	Where appropriate, integrate strategies to protect the Wangaratta community from gambling-related harm into our strategic planning framework. This includes, but is not limited to, the Council and Health and Wellbeing Plans, Community Vision and the Rural City of Wangaratta Planning Scheme.
3.2	Oppose a proposal for a new gaming operator or increase in the number of EGMs in an existing venue if an independent social and economic impact assessment indicates it will have negative social and economic impacts on, and minimal community benefit for, the community of the Rural City of Wangaratta.
3.3	Implement effective leasing arrangements to prohibit gambling activities and advertising on Council owned or managed land.
3.4	Advocate to prohibit new gaming operators in communities with limited access to non-gambling activities.
3.5	Incorporate conditions in planning permits relating to the design and operation of gaming operators that enhance harm minimisation measures.
3.6	In cases where new or additional EGMs are approved, incorporate conditions in planning permits that require the allocation of community contributions towards projects that address population risk factors, precursors for gambling-related harm, or educational campaigns to raise awareness of gambling risks and harms.

3.7	Make submissions to the VGCCC and support surrounding municipalities' submissions to VGCCC where there is reliable evidence that the application will have negative social and economic impacts and minimal community benefit.

Inform and Engage

Commitment: *Council will support initiatives that increase the community's awareness of the risks and impacts of gambling-related harm.*	
	Actions
4.1	Report to Council twice annually on latest gambling-related research, data collection or government enquiries.
4.2	Continue to monitor gambling-related research, evidence, data, legislative or policy changes, and gambling trends, including harm prevention and minimisation.
4.3	Work with and support relevant organisations, providers, agencies and initiatives to educate the Rural City of Wangaratta community on the overall negative public health impact of gambling and the risks involved with all forms of gambling.
4.4	Maximise opportunities for the community to provide their input into decisions made on planning permit applications and make submissions to the VGCCC on proposed gaming licences.
4.5	Provide the Wangaratta community, service providers and agencies, and other relevant stakeholders with the opportunity to contribute to strategies and actions relating to gambling in Council's policies, plans and strategies.
4.6	Create opportunities to incorporate gambling questions on existing surveys and during community consultation in order to further understand gambling harm within Rural City of Wangaratta.

Definitions

Community Benefit Statement	Community benefit statements provide the framework for reporting expenditure on community benefits by club and racing club gaming operators that receive gaming revenue in a financial year. A community benefit statement verifies whether the community benefit provided by the club is equal to at least 8.33 per cent of its net gaming machine revenue.
Community Support Fund (CSF)	Hotels operating electronic gaming machines (EGMs) are required to contribute 8.33 per cent of this revenue to the CSF which is a trust fund governed by the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. The funds are directed back to the community (not necessarily the community from which the revenue was generated) to support initiatives such as programs supporting people affected by gambling-related harm and substance abuse; youth programs; sport and recreation programs; art and tourism programs; and costs associated with administering the CSF.
Council	Rural City of Wangaratta
Electronic gaming machine (EGM)	An electronic gaming machine is a computerised gambling device that has a video screen displaying symbols on simulated reels. Cash is inserted into the machine and buttons are used to place bets. The machine randomly determines the position of symbols on the screen. Wins are returned as credits back into the machine. They are also referred to as EGMs, pokies and pokie machines.
Gambling	Gambling/betting requires a player to risk losing something of value (usually money) for the chance of winning more. Gambling outcomes may depend on correctly predicting an uncertain outcome (such as a particular horse coming first in a race), or luck (such as a winning combination of symbols on and Electronic Gaming Machine).
Gambling-related harm	Any initial or exacerbated adverse consequence due to an engagement with gambling that leads to a decrement to the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community or population. These harms include relationship breakdown, compromised mental and physical health and wellbeing, financial losses, demand for services, lost work productivity and crime. Gambling related harm can be divided into seven key areas: Financial harm, relationship disruption, emotional or psychological distress, decrements to health, cultural harm, reduced work or study performance and criminal activity. These harms can further be considered as general harms (which occur at any time), crisis harms, which are associated with attempts to seek help, and legacy harms, which occur long after gambling has ceased
Public health approach	A public health approach involves utilising scientific knowledge, evidence-based strategies, and community-based interventions to improve the health and well-being of populations by focusing on prevention, health promotion, and addressing the underlying determinants of health.

References

(1) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) Gambling in Australia, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 24 July 2023. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/gambling>

(2) Queensland Government Statistician's Office (2022) *Australian Gambling Statistics, 37th edition,1994–95 to 2019–*20, Queensland Treasury. <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/society/gambling/australian-gambling-statistics>

(3) Rockloff, M, Browne, M, Hing, N, Thorne, H, Russell, A, Greer, N, Tran, K, Brook, K & Sproston, K (2020) *Victorian population gambling and health study 2018–2019*, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne. <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/publications/victorian-population-gambling-and-health-study-20182019-759/>

(4) Markham, F, Young, M & Doran, B (2016) *The relationship between player losses and gambling-related harm: evidence from nationally representative cross-sectional surveys in four countries*, Addiction, 111(2):320-330, doi:10.1111/add.13178

(5) Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (2023) *Expenditure data*, Victorian Government. <https://www.vgccc.vic.gov.au/resources/information-and-data/expenditure-data>

(6) Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (2023) *Pokies across Victoria*. <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/gambling-victoria/pokies-across-victoria/wangaratta/>

(7) Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (2023) *Gaming machine caps and limits*, Victorian Government. <https://www.vgccc.vic.gov.au/gambling/gaming-venue-operator/understand-your-gaming-licence/caps-and-limits>

Related documents

- Council Plan (2021-25)
- Rural City of Wangaratta Community Vision 2033

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Wangaratta