

MEDIA RELEASE

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Performance Audit Report

Minimising harm caused by problem gambling in the ACT

Today the '**Monitoring and minimising harm caused by problem gambling in the ACT**' Report was presented to the Speaker for tabling in the ACT Legislative Assembly by the ACT Auditor-General, Dr Maxine Cooper.

Audit Conclusion (Extract only – for full conclusion see pages 5 and 6 of the Report)

Problem gambling is a complex issue with significant consequences. It is particularly prevalent in those gamblers who use electronic gaming (poker) machines. The ACT has the highest ratio per capita of gaming machines in Australia. Although the Government is acting to reduce the number of gaming machines, Audit estimates that based on current trends it will take twenty six years to achieve the target cap of 4 000 from the current 5 024.

Gambling harm reaches across the community and manifests itself in many forms. Harm is experienced by readily-identifiable problem gamblers as well as other gamblers who display problem gambling symptoms and its effects are felt by the broader community. For this reason, approaches for dealing with problem gambling should target a broader range of gamblers as well as those already identified as problem gamblers.

Key Findings (Extract only – for all key findings see pages 6 to 9 of the Report)

Context for minimising gambling harm in the ACT

- The ACT has been and remains in the vanguard in initiating progressive actions for minimising harm caused by problem gambling. For example, the ACT was the first jurisdiction in Australia to introduce a mandatory Gambling Code of Practice. This Code includes significant measures to deal with gambling harm and has stood the test of time when compared to other jurisdictions. However, it is time to review the Code as it has not been reviewed since 2004. In this review ways of encouraging licensees (Clubs) to improve their efforts needs to be a focus. For example, it is important to provide problem gambling information in 'a conspicuous way'.
- The Productivity Commission report on gambling (February 2010) showed that in Australia:
 - 62 percent of gambling expenditure is from gaming machines; and
 - around 75 to 80 percent of problem gamblers play gaming machines.
- In June 2009, the ACT was estimated to have 1 370 adults (0.5 percent of the then adult population) who were problem gamblers and a further 14 525 people (5.3 percent) who were reporting symptoms of problem gambling. While the estimated number of problem gamblers was small, for each person, it is estimated that at least another seven people are directly affected. This means that around 9 600 people may be directly affected by problem gambling in the ACT.
- Research suggests that the more frequently a person gambles the more likely they will

develop problem gambling symptoms. It is estimated that in June 2009 there were 48 234 high frequency gamblers in the ACT and a further 46 863 were medium frequency gamblers (17.6 percent and 17.1 percent of the then adult population respectively).

Taking action to minimise gambling harm

- Gambling problems are not identified early enough by individuals. Few people with gambling problems sought or received help, and most did not seek help until they were at risk of, or contemplating, suicide. More effective ways to raise public awareness of responsible gambling, problem gambling symptoms and the risks of gambling harm are needed.
- The gaming industry was encouraged to support initiatives to minimise gambling harm through their community contribution schemes. ACT gaming machine turnover was \$2.08 billion in 2008-09, and gross gaming machine revenue for ACT licensees (after returning winnings to players) was \$174.5 million. Of this 0.17 percent (\$305 640) was contributed by clubs to fund problem gambling assistance.
- In July 2011 the Problem Gambling Assistance Fund was introduced through amendments to the Gaming Machine Act. This requires licensees to contribute 0.6 percent of gross gaming machine revenue to problem gambling. This is expected to raise more than \$1 million annually.
- The Commission is considering using the Problem Gambling Assistance Fund to meet the costs of counselling services and club liaison delivered by Mission Australia, and to undertake further research into ACT problem gambling.
- The Commission approved training for Gambling Contact Officers and staff who offer gambling services with the intention of ensuring that the training covered the requirements of the ACT Gambling Code of Practice. Given the importance of maintaining an understanding of the responsibilities of a staff member providing gambling services or of a gambling contact officer, and the nature of the hospitality industry, more frequent training may be beneficial, say every three years.

Monitoring and evaluation

- The Commission monitors issues relevant to gambling harm in a variety of ways, most notably through the conduct of gambling prevalence studies. Only two such studies have been commissioned in the ACT, in 2001 and 2010. This is too infrequent. The Commission intends to conduct prevalence studies every five years but even more frequent studies may be warranted.

Recommendations

The audit made nine recommendations (see pages 10 to 15 of the Report). The ACT Gambling and Racing Commission agreed with eight recommendations. One recommendation was directed at the ACT Government.

The Report

Copies of the report are available from the ACT Auditor-General's Office website, www.audit.act.gov.au and the Office (please call 6207 0833 or go to 11 Moore Street, Canberra City).