



## National Committee for Addiction Treatment

FACT SHEET

FEBRUARY 2010

# Gambling affects one in eight New Zealanders

**Each year \$2 billion is lost through gambling by New Zealanders. Around \$900 million is lost on poker machines (pokies) outside of casinos each year, and around 40% of this is by people with gambling problems.**

**The impact of gambling is felt right across New Zealand.**

- In New Zealand there are up to 60,000 people with gambling problems at any one time.
- Each person with a gambling problem affects at least seven others, making this a significant social issue.
- Problem gambling impacts the physical, emotional and financial health of families.

*"I curse that win. It was the beginning of the life of a loser. That win led to the loss of my home, my children's inheritance, my quality of life: in fact, it cost me my future for years to come."*

**Lynette Whale**

**Author of POKIES: even when I win... My journey through problem gambling**

- 19% of New Zealand children reportedly live in poverty, to which gambling can be a major contributor.
- Many people with gambling addictions also have coexisting problems with substance use and many experience anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts because of gambling.
- Gambling is a significant driver of crime. It is the second largest cause of fraud in New Zealand and more than 20% of people in prison are pathological gamblers.
- This is not just an urban problem. It occurs all around the country.
- The strongest impact of gambling is felt in poor and minority communities, in particular Māori, Pasifika, and Asian communities.
- One in five regular pokie players has a gambling problem.
- Around 80% of those seeking help say pokies are the main way they gamble.
- New forms of gambling are emerging rapidly, particularly internet based gambling.

## TREATMENT WORKS

Studies show treatment of people with problem gambling can be effective. For treatments to be effective they must:

- be delivered by well-trained people who understand the cultural context of the gambler
- be able to successfully engage the person with the gambling problem
- involve the wider family and whānau
- adopt a range of interventions including self-exclusion, helpline and information services, peer support, short course interventions, community assessment and intervention services, community follow-up and support.

*"When I was at the lowest point in my life, the only friend that I knew at that time helped me to call the Asian Services Hotline at the Problem Gambling Foundation for help. That phone call has changed my life..."*

Shuang H

There are significant barriers to treatment which must be overcome. Gambling can be concealed for long periods and issues of shame and stigma prevent people seeking help.

## WHAT IS NEEDED

To deal effectively with people who have gambling addictions we must:

- improve the capacity of drug, alcohol and mental health service providers to recognise problem gambling disorders
- make sure services are integrated so people do not become lost between agencies or have just one addiction addressed in isolation from other issues



- make pokies only operational with pre-commit cards that have conservative default settings. This would help gamblers control their behaviour when using them
- take a cautious approach to internet gambling until its impact, regulation and treatment are better understood



- give local communities greater control over availability of and access to gambling in their areas, including the location of gambling premises and the introduction of new gambling products
- limit the expansion of casinos by maintaining the current moratorium
- ensure the staff in gambling venues receive quality training so that they can recognise people with gambling problems and intervene early
- restrict advertising that promotes a gambling culture or targets vulnerable groups
- make research into new and emerging forms of gambling a priority.

Primary care providers are the most likely health practitioners problem gamblers will contact first. As such they play an important role in early identification of and brief interventions with people with gambling problems.

NCAT continues to support people with gambling addictions as a specialist treatment area and recommends increasing the availability of effective local initiatives including those culturally responsive to Māori, Pacifica and Asian needs.

Maintaining the current public health approach of prevention and education about gambling harms and available services is important in overcoming barriers to seeking help and to reducing gambling harm.

'People impacted by gambling harm can contact the Gambling Helpline on **0800 654 655** or visit either **www.ourproblem.org.nz** or **www.gamblingproblem.co.nz**



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For more information contact [info@ncat.org.nz](mailto:info@ncat.org.nz) or [www.ncat.org.nz](http://www.ncat.org.nz). For media enquiries contact NCAT's co-chairs: Chris Kalin on 027 277 0323 or Robert Steenhuisen on 021 954213.