



POSITION STATEMENT

Gambling and Impact on Health

Position

Gambling is known to cause negative health outcomes, including poor physical and mental health, due to links with unhealthy behaviours and additional stress, and may co-occur with other mental illness and substance abuse.

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia (the Guild) acknowledges that pharmacies are in some instances co-located with a newsagency that sells gambling products such as lottery tickets and instant scratch tickets. As the 2010 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling makes clear, given the significant negative impacts of gambling on the Australian community, even policy measures with modest effects are worthwhile.¹

The Guild believes that community pharmacists are health care professionals first and foremost and have a professional and ethical obligation to support consumers in achieving positive health outcomes. Likewise, community pharmacies are health destinations, therefore the sale of gambling products and services in community pharmacy is considered a conflict and incompatible with the role of pharmacies as healthcare providers. Even if the impact of community pharmacy provision of gambling products is judged to be small, the exclusion of gambling from pharmacies is still important, and supports a harm minimisation approach.

Given the harm gambling problem could cause to the person as well as others, such as family, friends, and their community;² pharmacists should encourage anyone identified as a problem gambler to seek help.

Physical layout

In cases where a pharmacy is co-located with a newsagency selling gambling products, it is recommended there is a clear demarcation between the community pharmacy and the outlet supplying gambling products. In these settings the division between pharmacy and the other entity needs to be abundantly clear to the consumer.

Business separation

Regarding the businesses themselves, the non-pharmacy entity should be operating as a separate business. The demarcation between the community pharmacy and the outlet supplying gambling products should extend to sales transactions to ensure healthcare products and services are not combined or promoted with gambling. Lottery tickets and instant scratch tickets are a casual gambling activity, and the provision of such services while sometimes viewed a 'harmless' or a service to the

National Secretariat

Level 2, 15 National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600
PO Box 310, Fyshwick ACT 2609
P: +61 2 6270 1888 • F: +61 2 6270 1800 • E: guild.nat@guild.org.au

www.guild.org.au



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community, is a promotion of an unhealthy behaviour and therefore antithetical to the purpose of community pharmacy.

Business model transition

The Guild encourages pharmacies that currently run lottery ticket or instant scratch ticket agencies as part of their business operation to consider transitioning to a new business model which excludes gambling products. The Guild acknowledges it will take time for business owners to undertake appropriate change management and transitions from a business point of view. The Guild encourages pharmacies to put in place a plan to separate gambling business operations and move towards a position where no association exist between community pharmacy and gambling products.

Background

Gambling and poor health

Gambling is associated with poor physical health as well as poor mental health. Gambling is linked with unhealthy behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption and heavy smoking.³ Pathological gambling was first included as a disorder in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) in 1977 and is included in the ICD-10 under impulse disorders.⁴ The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) included gambling disorder as a new category on behavioural addictions, reflecting research findings to suggest that gambling disorder is similar to substance-related disorders in clinical expression, brain origin, comorbidity, physiology and treatment.⁵

A Victorian population study in 2018-19 of over 10,000 participants showed that almost a third of moderate-risk and problem gamblers drank alcohol often, or always while gambling (29.2 per cent and 31 per cent respectively, compared with 9.5 per cent of non-problem gamblers). Additionally, moderate-risk and problem gamblers were far more likely than other Victorians to smoke daily (30.2 per cent and 39.4 per cent respectively, compared with 11.5 per cent of people overall).⁶ Research also shows that patients with problem gambling disproportionately suffer from symptoms such as headaches, stomach upsets, and stress-related symptoms of physical ill health.⁷

Poor health experienced as a result of gambling is not limited to individuals who gamble. Gambling is linked to poorer mental health and wellbeing of the individual who gambles, as well as the people around them including their family, and their community.⁸

The highest burden of problem gambling is experienced by individuals and communities who are more likely to be socially and economically disadvantaged, including First Nations people,⁹ people with pre-existing mental illnesses,¹⁰ cultural and linguistically diverse communities,¹¹ and people living in low socioeconomic areas.¹²

Gambling and financial stress

The reduced household financial means associated with problem gambling often negatively impacts the social, physical and mental health of people with gambling problems and their families. Studies show that gambling can lead to severe harm such as spending less on essentials such as food and household necessities, medication and health services. Gambling-related financial stress also leads to significant relationship conflict, family violence and not attending to children's needs.¹³

Gambling is a cause of financial stress at the national level. In 2018-19 Australians lost approximately \$25 billion on legal forms of gambling, representing the largest financial burden of gambling per capita losses in the world.¹⁴ Throughout the country, households of people with gambling problems have a much greater proportion of stressful financial events, including being unable to pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time, and needing to ask friends or family for financial help.¹⁵

Financial stress resulting from problem gambling makes violent households more violent. A 2020 report by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) shows that gambling is a contributing factor to intimate partner violence against women which exacerbates both intensity and frequency of violent attacks.¹⁶

Gambling expenditure

Gambling expenditure has increased dramatically every financial year between 1975-76 and 2018-19, except for three years (2007-08, 2009-10 and 2016-17), with each of these decreased profit years being followed by the highest profit years in the period.¹⁷ Access to gambling products and services is a major factor in this trend.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported that the main gambling activities that Australians spent money on in 2015, and 2018, were¹⁸:

- ¹⁹lotto or lottery games (30% and 27%, respectively)
- instant scratch tickets (8.5% and 6.3%)
- poker machines/pokies (8.1% and 7.4%)
- betting on horse or dog races (5.6% and 6.2%)
- betting on sports (3.3% and 4.6%).

Support services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Gambling Help: 1800 858 858

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Related Statements

Tobacco and smoking cessation in community pharmacy

Authority

Endorsed

National Council – June 2022

Reviewed

Policy and Regulation Sub-Committee – May 2022

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