

Responsible Gambling Strategy

Introduction

The Strategy for Responsible Gambling has been developed in consultation with members of the Australian Gaming Council (AGC) to promote the responsible service and delivery of gambling products.

The intention of this document is to establish principles and benchmarks to be adopted and operationalised on a voluntary basis by members of the AGC according to their particular circumstances.

The AGC's first Responsible Gaming Code, A Framework for Responsible Gaming, committed to ongoing improvement in the service and delivery of gaming, based on targeted research and expert opinion into the definitions, extent, causes and protective measures for the reduction of problem gambling.

The document has been revised in four fundamental areas.

Firstly, the Strategy extends beyond the responsible service and delivery of gaming machine play. The measures within this revised document now encapsulate the responsible service and delivery of gaming machines, wagering and table games.

Secondly, rather than prescribe practices in detail, many of which are already part of States' legislation, the Strategy aims to improve the overall standard of customer care by encouraging a responsible culture that seeks to reduce problem gambling behaviours.

Thirdly, the Strategy aims to improve customer care by promoting initiatives based on the advice of scientific research and expert opinion.

Finally, the Strategy commits the AGC to further research to guide industry practice in the areas of primary and secondary measures to reduce problem gambling and self-exclusion and other safety net options.

The findings of work in these areas will be reviewed and incorporated into the Strategy, which will be revised in consultation with key stakeholders.

The AGC believes that the informed customer, improved customer care, targeted responsible gambling policies and practices and effective treatment are essential elements that may reduce gambling related problems in the community.

The AGC welcomes ongoing, constructive and informed dialogue with all stakeholders on the objectives, principles and measures in the Strategy with a view to achieving a common goal of reducing the incidence of problem gambling.

Objectives[^]

The Strategy aims to:

- reduce the incidence of problem gambling by aiming to discourage consumers from developing problems with their gambling; and
- reduce the prevalence of problem gambling by making available assistance to customers who may have a problem with their gambling.

To achieve these objectives, the Strategy recognises the responsibilities of each of governments, industry and individuals:

- To reduce gambling related problems through public awareness and attempting to assist patrons identify indicators of problem gambling behaviour at an early stage.

- To promote informed and balanced attitudes and behaviours towards gambling and gamblers both by individuals and by communities through increased knowledge, responsible choices and community participation.
- To reduce gambling related harm through responsible gambling policies, community support programs and the provision of effective treatment services.

Principles

The Strategy explicitly recognises that:

- gambling provides recreational, social and economic benefits to individuals and the community;
- a proportion of participants can suffer significant harm due to their gambling behaviour; and
- responsible gambling is the responsibility of each of governments, industry and individuals.

Research and Consultation

The Strategy has been developed in consultation with industry and other stakeholders who:

- Commit to the objective of reducing the incidence of gambling related harm;
- Recognise that the causes of problem gambling have not yet been definitively determined by experts, and are not uniform and therefore, treatment requires a multi-faceted approach;
- Agree that strategies to address problem gambling should be based on scientific research, including the potential for unintended consequences;
- Commit to monitoring and evaluating the impact of responsible gambling measures.

The AGC welcomes ongoing, constructive and informed dialogue with all stakeholders on the objectives, principles and action areas in the Strategy, with a view to achieving a common goal of reducing the incidence and prevalence of problem gambling.

The Strategy will continue to be improved by research, expert opinion and community consultation.

Action Areas

Primary Measures

Primary measures to reduce problem gambling are targeted at the broader community, including consumers, and involve the promotion of informed attitudes, behaviours and policies regarding gambling.

Awareness, Education and Player Information

The decision to gamble lies with the individual and represents a choice. To properly make that choice, individuals must have the opportunity to be informed.

The AGC and its members commit to providing appropriate information to individuals, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds so they are able to make informed decisions and exercise choice regarding their gambling participation and expenditure, consistent with their personal preferences and individual circumstances.

Expert opinion suggests the provision of information about probabilities and payouts might not be sufficient to influence gambling behaviour. Values, attitudes and beliefs also play a key role in influencing gambling behaviour. For example, individuals should not be encouraged to gamble with the aim of creating wealth or income, to spend time and money that is required to meet other responsibilities and commitments or that encourages gambling to become a disproportionate part of their life.

The AGC will facilitate research and gather expert opinion on primary measures, and, in particular, the most effective way to inform community attitudes and beliefs towards gambling.

Informed choice is critical to reducing problem gambling but little is known about risk and protective factors and ways to ensure more effective consumer protection. Accordingly, the AGC will facilitate research to understand “informed choice” – what information, how and to whom, consumer information can be targeted to reduce problem gambling.

Secondary Measures

Secondary measures aim to reduce problem gambling behaviours.

Industry and Workplace Culture

The AGC is committed to social responsibility and a culture that encourages a high standard of customer care.

An environment of open communication amongst AGC members should be encouraged so that staff will feel comfortable in discussing customer care issues, and in referring them to the appropriate person or responsible gambling manager.

Industry should not exploit individuals manifesting characteristics commonly associated with gambling related problems. Consistent with this principle, customers should not be encouraged to:

- re-stake their winnings – it should be their own decision;
- increase the amount they have decided to commit to gambling activity;
- chase their losses;
- continue playing when they have indicated they wish to stop; or
- enter into continuous play for an excessive period of time.

Staff Training, Industry Policies and Procedures

The 2001 Strategy committed the AGC to facilitate research to guide policies and procedures and staff training so that venues can improve the way they go about providing a responsible environment for gambling and customer care.

Current Issues Related to Identifying the Problem Gambler in the Gambling Venue* was released in August 2002. It summarises the opinions of experts regarding potential behaviours and situations staff may be required to deal with, where customers may have a problem with their gambling or because a customer is experiencing difficulty for a variety of reasons.

The paper has several important implications in the responsible service and delivery of gambling.

Accordingly, members commit to:

- Establishing appropriate policies, procedures and lines of responsibility to provide and support customer care. These should include house policies, clear accountability, reporting mechanisms and follow-up procedures for dealing with responsible gambling issues.
- Measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of house policies, staff training and customer assistance.
- Staff training, so that senior staff, charged with customer assistance, can deal with situations and respond appropriately to customer queries and responsible gaming issues.

Staff training should provide competences, skills and knowledge in the following areas:

- The requirements of relevant state legislation and regulations, licensing authority regulations and policies, industry codes of practice and house policies in relation to responsible gaming products.
- An understanding of the possible indicators of problem gambling.
- An awareness of customers displaying observable signs of distress or seeking assistance.

- The action to be taken in such circumstances.
- The ability to respond appropriately to customer requests by offering the opportunity to contact available support services.
- The ability to deal tactfully with gaming related incidents or situations including:
 - Requests for self exclusion
 - Underage gambling
 - Disputes or complaints
 - Concerns expressed by families and friends
- Awareness of support and counselling services available to customers.
- Not to attempt to diagnose or counsel customers.
- Not to be judgemental.

Safety Net

Safety net measures are targeted at customers who seek assistance or indicate they have a problem with their gambling.

Support Services

In order to raise awareness and improve customer assistance, senior staff should be knowledgeable about and have a working relationship with gambling support services in their region.

Gambling venue operators should obtain and retain contact information of appropriate treatment providers in their region.

Contact material for treatment providers should be made available to people seeking information or assistance.

Self Exclusion

Where provided, self exclusion is an important program offered by the gambling industry for customers who recognise they have problem gambling behaviours and want to cease gambling.

The AGC facilitated a research project to examine self exclusion from first principles to ensure that the programs offered ensure the best possible outcome for problem gamblers.

The AGC supports a system of self-exclusion that encompasses the following overarching principles:

- Self-exclusion provides an integrated individual-centred focus where the emphasis is directed toward a gateway for education and rehabilitation.
- Self-exclusion processes are monitored, reported and assessed to improve transparency and measure program and management effectiveness.
- Self-exclusion is supported through procedures, policies, training and appropriate infrastructure to effectively meet program objectives.
- Program understanding and availability is promoted through consumer and public awareness efforts.
- Gambling venues will endeavour to observe self exclusion arrangements entered into, acknowledging that to be effective, self exclusion also requires an individual commitment to the program.

Venues should be accountable by public reporting of data, that they have adequate staff training and allocation and surveillance to provide a workable infrastructure for gamblers who desire to self-exclude. Accordingly, members of the AGC facilitating self exclusion will develop systems and programs that seek to meet these principles in consultation with the appropriate treatment services and other relevant stakeholders, and according to their own particular and jurisdictional circumstances. These venues should:

- provide employee education and infrastructure support needed to initiate the self exclusion

- process and facilitate contact with the educator;
- educate clients on the availability and public value of self-exclusion based on empirically-derived information;
- devise and institute protocols for identifying and managing individuals who breach self-exclusion agreements; and
- display adequate signage regarding self-exclusion options.

Monitoring and Assessment

Gambling venue operators should periodically review their level of compliance with this strategy or arrange for an independent person to do so. To facilitate transparency, results should be made publicly available.

^ Korn D., & Shaffer H., Gambling and the Health of the Public: Adopting a Public Health Perspective, Journal of Gambling Studies, Volume 15, No. 4, p. 289. and Blaszczynski, A., Ladouceur, R., & Shaffer, H. J. (in press). A science-based framework for responsible gambling: the Reno model. Journal of Gambling Studies.

*Allcock, C., Blaszczynski, A., Dickerson, M., Earl, K., Haw, J., Ladouceur, R., Lesieur, H., McCorrison, T., Milton, S., & Symond, P. (2002). Current issues related to identifying the problem gambler in the gambling venue.