



## **Media release: Reforms needed to stem harm from increases in online gambling, say psychologists**

**March 2017**

### **Interactive Gambling Amendment (Sports Betting Reform) Bill 2015 reporting today**

A rapid increase in online sports betting is being fuelled by advertising and technology advances that make gambling easily accessible, and puts at serious risk young people and those pre-disposed to gambling problems, says the Australian Psychological Society (APS).

The APS supports the [Interactive Gambling Amendment \(Sports Betting Reform\) Bill 2015](#), which proposes harm-minimisation measures to help people better control their gambling and protects minors from exposure to gambling advertising.

A report on the Bill will be tabled in the Senate this afternoon.

Dr Sally Gainsbury MAPS, Deputy Director of the Gambling Treatment and Research Clinic at the University of Sydney, and co-author of the [APS submission to the Senate Inquiry](#), says that online gambling has grown substantially in the last decade or so.

"In the late '90s only 1% of Australians gambled online, but by 2011 8% of Australians were gambling online," she says.

Dr Gainsbury says online gambling poses risks due to convenience and accessibility.

"There are no bet limits, you can pay electronically, so psychologically you don't see the money leaving your hands as you do with cash and it's easy to gamble more than you intended. You can also bet any time from wherever you are."

She says one of the biggest risks factors is being able to bet in private, which allows people to hide their gambling from friends and family.

Online gambling is also a mode of gambling that is particularly attractive to young people, especially young men as they are most comfortable and familiar with online betting formats.

APS President Anthony Cichello, says young people are the next generation of gamblers and it is inevitable that they will be targeted to participate by increasingly sophisticated strategies.

"Children and young people must be protected from exposure to internet gambling and online advertising as a priority," says Mr Cichello.

In its [submission to the Inquiry](#), the APS urged government to support more independent research to inform future gambling reform policy development.

"Ongoing research into the impact of newly emerging digital and interactive forms of gambling is urgently required, as well as the identification of effective harm minimisation measures, given the

rapid shift towards online technologies,” says Mr Cichello. “Particularly among high risk groups such as Indigenous communities, rural and remote communities and young people.”

#### **Key recommendations from the APS submission:**

- The Government take a gradual, staged approach to regulation which includes rigorous, independent research and evaluation so that consumer protection mechanisms can be widely established before regulation is more widely implemented.
- The principles of harm minimisation and consumer protection are placed at the centre of any reform. Potential gains in tax revenue are not the driving force behind changes.
- Children and young people are protected from exposure to internet gambling and online advertising as a priority.

#### **Expert podcast:**

[Listen to Dr Sally Gainsbury MAPS talk about online gambling.](#) Dr Gainsbury is senior lecturer in the School of Psychology and the Gambling Treatment and Research Clinic at the University of Sydney. She is co-author of the APS submission to the Senate Inquiry and has been involved in several large scale gambling studies.

#### **For more information:**

The APS has developed a number of resources and information about gambling-related harm which can be accessed at the APS webpage: <http://www.psychology.org.au/Content.aspx?ID=5218>. This includes the [2012 Position Statement on Gambling-related Harm](#) and the [2010 Review Paper - The Psychology of Gambling](#).

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#### **Notes to editors:**

Online gambling fast facts:

- Expenditure on sports betting doubled between 2005-2006 and 2011-2012 and this growth has been largely attributed to the ease with which individuals can now place bets online.
- Problem online gamblers are more likely to bet on sports. The ease and availability of betting online means more frequent betting and related problems.
- Poor control of online gambling is worsened by: use of digital money, access to credit, lack of scrutiny and ready accessibility.
- Concerning practices in the sports betting industry include: the provision of unregulated credit and the exchange of customer account data by sports betting companies.
- Sports betting advertising on television and prominent display of internet signs on sports grounds contribute substantially to the normalization of gambling as a part of sporting activities, particularly influencing the attitudes of children and young people.
- Young people are at particular risk of online gambling-related harm. Their potential vulnerability at a point in time when addiction problems may commence warrants a conservative approach to drawing up legislation that protects their interests as a priority.

#### **For more information, or to arrange an interview contact:**

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*The APS is the largest professional organisation for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 22,000 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to people's lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.*