

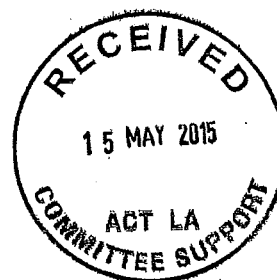
INQUIRY INTO ELEMENTS IMPACTING ON THE FUTURE OF THE ACT CLUBS SECTOR

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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 A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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In the ACT, Clubs have long been, and in our view will remain to be, a traditional meeting place for people within our community and we would firstly like to acknowledge the many great things that these clubs are able to provide to the community and its many members.

We would also like to make clear that we are very much in support of the need for the clubs industry to ensure their own financial viability. We also understand the need for businesses to diversify their revenue streams so as to avoid a reliance on, or an over reliance on any single or majority funding source.

Since taking over the management of the ACT Gambling Counselling and Support Service in July of 2015, Relationships Australia have strived to develop strategies which are most likely to positively impact the lives of those struggling to control their gambling along with their family and friends, as well as those individuals at risk of developing such problems.

The provision of gambling counselling and financial counselling (provided by our partner organisation Care Financial Counselling Service) is of course an important part of our service delivery in achieving those goals, but if we truly intend to achieve these goals, there needs to be an equally strong consideration of the impact of gambling on the entire community and on all gamblers, not just 'problem gamblers'. What this means is a focus on prevention and early intervention, rather than treatment alone.

That is, to reduce harm from poker machines, a comprehensive public health approach to gambling is necessary.

With this in mind we need to look at a range of strategies targeting each area where the impacts of "problem gambling" may be felt, namely, individuals, family and friends, workplaces, community groups, the gaming industry and of course government.

For the purpose of responding directly to the topic of this enquiry we will briefly discuss our community work and our work with clubs in the ACT (including ClubsACT).

Our work in community has a strong emphasis on education and reducing stigma with particular attention to target groups highlighted through ACT prevalence studies and through feedback from both clients we are already engaged with, and through community feedback and requests.

With a goal of enacting actual and lasting changes within organisations, we complete evidence based surveys on employees to observe changes in knowledge and general understanding,. We also encourage organisations to include new screening questions around gambling risk and develop new referral pathways for fast and easy access to our services.

We look to up skill staff in target community organisations so they are both better able to identify risk factors and to then have the confidence and ability to speak with at risk populations or indeed individuals to get them the help which they so sorely need.

We also spend a great deal of time and resources working directly with clubs in the ACT and ClubsACT. With our strong focus on early intervention, and the high prevalence of problem gambling within poker machine players (compared to other gambling modalities), it has always been clear for us the benefits of building and maintaining strong working relationships with the clubs and ClubsACT.

In this regard we should also repeat that the clubs of the ACT and ClubsACT have been very welcoming and we have been able to build a relationship where we are able to work together on creating and implementing genuine and evidence based solutions to target those patrons who need help. This has involved building upon existing strategies, as well as introducing completely new harm minimisation strategies.

With early intervention being the priority that it is, we are very pleased to have such a willing partner in the clubs of the ACT and ClubsACT. Those 'at risk' individuals within clubs are a priority for us to be able

support and it should be no surprise that the clubs share genuine concern for their patrons in getting them the help that they need.

A few examples of such work include:

- Exploring options around outreach gambling and financial counselling locations easily accessible to club members and the ability for club staff to make bookings on behalf of at risk clients to one of our available services.
- Providing training programs to Gambling Contact Officers from clubs to assist in building knowledge and confidence around speaking with patrons they perceive as being at risk. This extends to amending the trainings to meet the needs of individual clubs and to reflect requests from clubs and new information from research and community.
- Working together with the clubs and the Gaming and Racing Commission to improve the outcomes of referrals in terms of successful contact whilst ensuring client confidentiality
- Working together on clubs specific involvement in Responsible Gambling Awareness Week 2015
- Reviewing materials available for clubs to ensure that they are having the intended impact and then working together on either amending existing materials or creating new materials. This includes materials available to both patrons and club staff.

We should also mention that ClubsACT have also sought our advice on harm minimisation strategies which they themselves are looking to independently develop and implement. As part of this process they have shared their thought processes and research background into the development of such strategies and have sought our explicit advice as to how we would view such strategies.

We have also received positive feedback from organisations such as the Gambling Impact Society NSW in relation to the receptive nature of ClubsACT in regards to working on new harm minimisation strategies for the ACT clubs industry. For clarity, this was in relation to extending the recent introduction of aspects of the Gambling Impact Society's "Consumer Voices" program with Relationships Australia's industry and community programs, to include independent work between the Gambling and the clubs in the ACT.

Problem Gambling is a pervasive issue within our community and is an addiction with broad ranging affects for both the individual, their family, friends and work colleagues and the broader community and we welcome all harm minimization strategies with a proven track record or evidence base. We greatly value the strong relationship we have with the ANU Centre for Gambling Research for this exact reason.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the issue of problem gambling in the ACT and we would welcome the opportunity to share more about the work that we have done and plan to do in the future.