

**Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention  
and Awareness Network Inc**

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The Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention and Awareness Network (SSPAN) is a network of representatives from the Shoalhaven community, government and non-government organisations. We have worked closely with the community since 2007 to raise awareness of suicide, promote recovery from mental illness and build individual and community resilience. Our aim is to reduce the impact of suicide in the Shoalhaven.

**Position Paper - Gambling Impact on Suicide in Australia**

The relationship between gambling and suicide is a significant public health issue in Australia. Gambling addiction can lead to severe financial, emotional, social and psychological stress, which in turn can increase mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, and the risk of suicidal ideation and behaviours.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), other gambling-related harms, including financial distress and relationship breakdowns, contribute to higher rates of suicidal behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

Research with young people has shown:

- In 2020 almost 30% of young people aged 12 to 17 had gambled in the past year.
- They first gambled when they were 11 or 12 years old and
- 3% to 4% have a gambling problem or are at risk.<sup>3</sup>

Almost one in five people presenting with suicidality also experience problems with their gambling.<sup>4</sup> Protective factors, such as social and financial supports, are compromised by the financial harms of gambling and this leaves people vulnerable to risk factors of suicide.<sup>5</sup>

The substantial financial losses associated with gambling can result in

- Debt and consequent bankruptcy
- Social isolation, withdrawal from family and friends to conceal gambling behaviour
- Homelessness
- Feelings of guilt, shame, entrapment as the cycle continues
- Feelings of hopelessness and despair, which are strong predictors of suicidal behaviour<sup>6</sup>

In 2021, sports betting companies spent a collective \$287.2 million on advertising in Australia.<sup>7</sup> Gambling advertising in Australia is out of control with one million gambling ads being aired on free-to-air television and radio in just one year. Gambling is leading to \$25 billion in annual losses.<sup>8</sup>

Gambling addiction should be seen as a public health priority. Although the Australian government has implemented various measures to mitigate gambling-related harms, these do not go far enough!

Continuous evaluation and strengthening of government policies are crucial to effectively addressing the impact of gambling on mental health and suicide.

**SSPAN's Call for action:**

- That the Government and the Opposition publicly commit to the adoption and implementation of **all 31 Recommendations** of the Murphy Report parliamentary inquiry into online gambling, **including a blanket ban** on all advertising for any gambling related activity including online.
- That the **voices of lived experience** are used in the ongoing shaping of government policy
- That the percentage of **income returned to the community** for support from gambling be increased to 50%, with funds from profits to be used to create non gambling club events like live music.
- That using underage children to promote pubs and clubs is not okay, nor is normalising **gambling behaviours in children**. The sponsoring of underage sport teams should not promote clubs or venues that support gambling, for example on sports jerseys.
- That investment should be made in **supporting and promoting pubs and clubs without poker machines**. There are multiple success stories of such pubs and clubs across NSW, including the Tathra Hotel on the Far South Coast.
- That the government considers implementing the mechanisms for **NSW Local Councils** to be able to regulate and remove poker machines in their LGAs.
- That the government continue to support **gambling awareness programs** and support initiatives with long term funding

Robust collective efforts from government, healthcare providers, and community organisations could create a supportive environment for individuals at risk and contribute to the overall well-being of the community. By better understanding and addressing the complex relationship between gambling and suicide, we can work towards reducing the prevalence of these tragedies and supporting those affected by gambling addiction.

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<sup>1</sup> Financial Counselling Australia and Suicide Prevention Australia, January 2022 GAMBLING AND SUICIDE PREVENTION A roadmap for change <https://www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au/docs/gambling-and-suicide-prevention-a-roadmap-for-change/>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). Gambling in Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/gambling>

<sup>3</sup> Hing N, Russell A, King D, Rockloff M, Browne M, Greer N, Newall P, Sproston K, Chen L and Coughlin S (2020) NSW Youth Gambling Study 2020. Sydney: NSW Responsible Gambling Fund [Latest Research On Young People Gambling In NSW](#)

<sup>4</sup>Problem gambling in people presenting to a public mental Health Service (De Castella, Bolding, Lee, Cosic, & Kulkarni, 2011). <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/91/Research-report-gambling-in-people-presenting-mental-health-service.pdf>  
[https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/1788056/Framework\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1788056/Framework_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Orygen. Australian University Mental Health Framework report. Melbourne: Orygen 2020 (Life in Mind, 2020) (Browne, et al., 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Alliance for Gambling Reform, 2024 <https://www.agr.org.au/resources>

<sup>7</sup> GambleAware, 2024 Sports and race betting, [What Makes Racing And Sports Betting So Risky For Men \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> Alliance for Gambling Reform 2024 CALL TO BAN Gambling Ads - Open letter to the Prime Minister & Opposition <https://www.agr.org.au/open-letter-to-the-prime-minister-oppo>