
Agenda to tackle problem gambling

Problem gambling will be tackled head on in Tasmania's first whole-of-government strategy.

The Secretary to Cabinet, Cassy O'Connor, announced the development of the strategy during a roundtable, along with \$3.5 million in funding this financial year for harm minimisation measures.

Ms O'Connor convened today's roundtable which was attended by Independent South Australian Senator Nick Xenophon, Chris Jones from Anglicare, Noel Mundy from Mission Australia, Paul de Bomford from Baptcare, Stuart Foster from the Salvation Army and the Tasmanian Gaming Commissioner Peter Hoult.

"I am confident that a comprehensive reform agenda will be developed as part of the strategy," she said.

Ms O'Connor said the strategy will be developed in consultation with government and non-government representatives and will include the Government's response to the Productivity Commission's final report into gambling released last week.

"There is no doubt that problem gambling causes profound harm to addicts and their loved ones in Tasmania," Ms O'Connor said.

"The Productivity Commission estimates that for every problem gambler another 5-10 people are affected.

"We are committed to progressing reform while continuing to fund prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, research and community information on the risks of gambling.

"We know that problem gambling has a negative flow on effect for our other services, including child protection and the health system so it cannot be ignored."

Ms O'Connor said many recommendations outlined by the Productivity Commission, including enhanced training for venue staff to identify and respond to problem gambling, could be acted on immediately.

Ms O'Connor said that a reserve of funds in the Community Support Levy has been retained to fund a range of new initiatives.

The 2010-11 Department of Health and Human Services Gambling Support Program includes:

- A Tasmanian whole-of-government strategy to set the Government's clear agenda and position on reform and problem gambling;
- Continued funding for established Gambling Support services with \$695,000 in 2010-11

for "Break Even" services to help people affected by gambling, including face to face counselling, financial counselling and online help lines;

- \$626,000 for a new major mass media campaign to follow "the mask" campaign, and to extend the "at risk" communities strategy beyond the current four local government areas;

- Funding for research into issues relating to online gambling, community based alternative activities to electronic gambling and the effectiveness of prevention and intervention messages and

- A major grants round with \$1.22 million to be made available to charitable organisations for community based activities and projects late this year.

"One thing we do know is that gambling addiction is a serious problem for our community and one that we need to tackle strategically and compassionately through a range of initiatives," Ms O'Connor said.

"If we are to achieve healthy, happy and financially sustainable Tasmanian families, we need to minimise the harm caused by problem gambling," Ms O'Connor said. "I am determined to move promptly and decisively on this."

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