



AUSTRALIAN
HOTELS
ASSOCIATION
(SA)

SUBMISSION TO

THE INDEPENDENT GAMBLING AUTHORITY

**INQUIRY INTO EFFECTIVENESS OF
GAMBLING REHABILITATION PROGRAMS**

21 March 2005

Introduction

The AHA (SA) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide its submission to the Independent Gambling Authority's Inquiry into the effectiveness of gambling rehabilitation programs.

The Authority has been asked to report on the effectiveness of each gambling rehabilitation program conducted or funded (wholly or partly) by the Government of South Australia.

- 1) What makes an "effective" program
- 2) How program effectiveness might best be measured
- 3) Whether programs are currently measured for effectiveness and if so how
- 4) Whether current measures of program effectiveness are adequate
- 5) Whether the breadth of South Australian programs as a whole, partly or wholly government funded is effective within the context of:
 - the funding provided
 - the needs of the target group
 - clinical approaches/treatment modalities available
 - all (including non-government funded) gambling rehabilitation programs available in South Australia
- 6) Where a program provision is said to be ineffective in any way identify gaps and what is needed to provide an effective program

Assist the Authority to understand the nature of gambling rehabilitation programs in South Australia.

Advise of any reviews, studies or research conducted which might be relevant to the terms of reference.

SA Hotel Industry Profile

The hotel industry in South Australia is one of the State's largest industries. We employ in excess of 24,000 people, with many thousand employed indirectly in ancillary industries. Over 4,400 of these jobs have been created as a direct result of gaming. Our annual support to charities, sport/community groups is in excess of \$9 million. (*Figures obtained from McGregor Tan Marketing Data*).

Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund

The Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund was established as a joint initiative between the South Australian Government, the Australian Hotels Association (AHA SA) and the Licensed Clubs Association (LCA) following the introduction of gaming machines to South Australia in 1994.

Currently the hotel and club industry voluntarily contributes \$1.5 million dollars to the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund to provide funding to counselling agencies through Break Even Service SA. The AHA (SA) is committed to the ongoing provision of these funds.

Effective Gambling Rehabilitation Programs

In the context of problem gamblers the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales (IPART) in its report “Gambling: Promoting a Culture of Responsibility” released in June 2004, considers that problem gambling counselling programs should be as efficient and effective as possible, producing positive client outcomes in a timely fashion. It also identified that the likelihood of this occurring is where clients of problem gambling programs receive appropriate and effective treatment by skilled counsellors and if services are provided within a clear and robust policy framework.

The following key elements have been identified as best practice for problem gambling counselling services:

- positive client outcomes
- client participation in realistic goal setting
- strong client-counsellor relationship
- multimodal (client-centred) treatment
- appropriate staff training
- outcome evaluation
- cultural appropriateness
- accessibility

Effective Models of Problem Gambling Treatment

There is currently no ‘one’ recognised model of counselling treatment for problem gamblers. Literature on problem gambling counselling suggests that a number of therapeutic models should be integrated into treatment of problem gambling. IPART recommends:

“that a variety of treatment techniques be employed by counsellors based on initial client assessment, and that treatment services allow for clients to participate in goal setting via a strong client-counsellor relationship.”

“A multimodal approach to treatment should assist in promoting positive outcomes for clients, as this approach allows treatment to be tailored to fit clients’ particular needs or issues and also allows for a range of therapeutic techniques and strategies to be used.”

South Australian Break Even Service counsellors incorporate a range of therapeutic, treatment interventions, practice and approaches in their work. These interventions often form part of a broader problem solving approach and usually include assessment, client involved goal setting and follow up.

However the Research, Analysis and Evaluation Unit Strategic Planning and Policy Division, Department for Families and Communities in its October 2004 report *'The Prevention and Treatment of Problem Gambling in South Australia Through the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund: Strategic Review* said that of interventions identified by Break Even counsellors some of the modalities are more evidence-based, robust and relevant than others, some are not models but rather forms of practice or approaches and some raise concerns about quality and standards. The key finding on this topic was that:

Therapeutic/counselling services should be able to articulate and demonstrate a clear model(s) of practice, using evidence-based and accepted techniques, which are then supported by expert supervision within the agency. The capacity of agencies in this regard should be a key consideration in the purchasing of services in the next funding period.

Early intervention

The AHA (SA) believes that effective gambling rehabilitation programs are a vital component in addressing problem gambling in this state. There are also additional strategies and initiatives that will complement the work being undertaken by counselling agencies, one of these being the expansion of the AHA (SA)'s responsible gambling initiative with the focus of early intervention.

As a continuing commitment to addressing problem gambling we have just announced the establishment of a new early intervention agency. One of the key aims of this initiative is to assist venues in the early detection of problem gamblers and to ensure they receive appropriate and timely counselling. It is intended to engage additional responsible gambling/venue liaison officers who will be linked to specific regions across the State. The roles of these officers will be to develop and/or maintain the relationship between the venues and local gambling counselling services, assist with barring and self-exclusion processes and ensure venues comply with Responsible Gambling and Advertising Codes of Practice.

This has been heralded by many Break Even Service counsellors as a positive and welcome move, building on the work currently being undertaken by the AHA (SA)'s Responsible Gambling Officer and further demonstrating the organisation's ongoing commitment to tackle problem gambling.

“The Early Intervention Agency is a constructive and proactive approach that will lead to a reduction in problem gambling in years to come.” Mark Henley, Heads of Churches Gambling Taskforce – 15th March 2005

Under the New South Wales *Gaming Machines Act 2001*, clubs and hotels are required to enter in arrangements with a recognised provider of problem gambling counselling services. The New South Wales IPART report states that links to counselling services are generally regarded as being integral to responsible gambling programs with Star City Casino stating, in the report, that establishing links with counselling services is one of the most important elements of self-exclusion schemes.

How program effectiveness might best be measured

The effectiveness of gambling rehabilitation services should, but not be limited to include:

- a) Ensure the delivery of services are embedded within a responsible gambling/problem gambling framework including accreditation of counsellors and standardised relevant and reliable data collection and analysis etc.
- b) At the agency level ensuring that the provision of services are delivered and measured against best practice model and principles.

Accreditation

There is currently no national accreditation of problem gambling services. Nationally and internationally this is seen as a way of providing a useful framework and foundation in the development of effective problem gambling counselling services.

“The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling in 2000 argued that states in the US should as a priority require gambling service providers to be certified under either state guidelines or national standards.”

In New South Wales and Victoria there is a move towards the development of accreditation for problem gambling service counsellors, with IPART recommending an accreditation program for problem gambling counselling services should be developed and introduced in NSW and phased in over approximately three years. Stakeholders who contributed to the IPART review supported the need to establish minimum competency standards and best practice for counsellors as a means of improving client outcomes.

The AHA (SA) believes there is merit in exploring this initiative further with the view to the development of a national accreditation program for problem gambling counsellors.

Current Measurement of Gambling Rehabilitation Programs

Individual Break Even Service SA counselling agencies work within a service agreement contractual arrangement with the Department for Families and Communities – Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund. We are not in a position to comment on those contractual arrangements.

The collection and analysis of client data from the Break Even services is currently the only means of measuring the effectiveness of programs on which we are able to comment.

Inadequacies within the current system

The AHA (SA) is represented on the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund Committee (GRF) and is therefore party to receiving Break Even service data. This has proven to be a very complex and problematic exercise with the limitations of the current Break Even data collection system significantly restricting its ability to provide information regarding details and outcomes of services provided.

Problems include:

- high levels of incomplete, missing or inaccurate data
- little outcome data
- inconsistencies and enormous variations in service output data

An injection of funds has been made to try to resolve this issue but we are not confident there will be a satisfactory outcome with the current system. The October 2004 review of GRF funded gambling treatment programs undertaken by the Department of Families and Communities states:

It is also not possible to make any comment about the effectiveness or efficiency of Break Even Services from the data. Although the system allows for information to be collected about client outcomes and satisfaction, the information collected at client exit is so minimal that it cannot be considered valid.

In terms of efficiency, if the existing data about number of clients in the service system is accurate, the service system could not be described as particularly efficient. Given what is known about the reliability of the data,

however, an assessment of efficiency is best deferred until a robust methodology is developed.

We believe that the measurement of effective gambling services through an efficient, reliable data collection and analysis system is a priority and is critical to effective measurement, program planning, monitoring and identifying emerging trends.

South Australian Programs

There are fourteen agencies that sit within Break Even Service SA (BESSA) and funded through the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund. It is our understanding that they deliver a range of services, including counselling, specialist treatment and community education across the state. Some of these services have a statewide focus targeting special groups including Indigenous, and culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

It is not possible for us to comment on the effectiveness of individual agencies. We are aware however, anecdotally, and via the review undertaken by the Department for Families and Communities in October 2004 of some of the issues and concerns experienced at the service provision level. To give the Authority an idea of the scope of some of these concerns they include:

- Many problem gamblers are reluctant to seek counselling – often by the time they finally see a counsellor they are at ‘desperation’ level and often experiencing a range of other co morbidity issues e.g. depression, marital or relationship breakdown, debt, bankruptcy etc.

We believe our early intervention initiative will go a long way in addressing this as the early signs of problem gambling are detected and gambling patrons are linked to support systems.

- Increasing difficulty in accessing financial counselling services due to the lack of accredited counsellors. People presenting to problem gambling agencies invariably also need assistance to enable them to address their financial situation.
- The challenging task of providing services to Indigenous communities where there are high incidences of other social and health problems.
- Regional issues and the difficulty in covering a wide geographical area with limited resources.
- Providing an appropriate service to vulnerable groups e.g. people with mental health problems and intellectual disabilities.

- Workforce training and skills development – the Department for Families and Communities Review identified considerable dissatisfaction with current workforce training and support arrangements provided by the GRF.
- A thinly spread workforce, especially in country regions.

Relevant Research

We highly recommend the Authority give consideration to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of New South Wales report – *Gambling: Promoting a Culture of Responsibility*, June 2004.

Summary

The effectiveness of gambling rehabilitation services is dependent on a range of factors, including well-resourced and targeted programs, a multimodal client centred approach, skilled workforce working with a policy framework of best practice and effective measurement systems.

Gaps in service delivery, issues and concerns as outlined in this submission are drawn to the attention of the Authority as needing priority attention.

We take the view that early intervention also provides the key to successful outcomes for gamblers exhibiting signs of problem gambling and believe that our early intervention initiative will go a long way to addressing problem gambling and complementing the services provided by gambling counselling agencies.

References

Gambling: Promoting a Culture of Responsibility. Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales. Final Report. June 2004.

The Prevention and Treatment of Problem Gambling in South Australia through the Gamblers' Rehabilitation Fund. Strategic Review. Summary Report. Research, Analysis and Evaluation Unit Strategic Planning and Policy Division. Department for Families and Communities. October 2004

