



DISCUSSION PAPER

ADDRESSING PROBLEM GAMBLING HARM: WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

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FOREWORD



There is widespread acceptance that gambling has negative impacts on individuals, communities and society more broadly.

This is nowhere more keenly felt than within the families and close knit friendship circles of people with gambling problems.

Mothers and fathers of gamblers say they sometimes feel responsible because they might have introduced gambling into the household.

Partners report feeling isolated, ashamed and sometimes angry when the gambler doesn't share where they've been and the shopping money is inexplicably gone.

Children are confused by the sudden changes of fortune, which can mean changing schools, or missing out on after school activities.

The literature is clear. Problem gambling is multi-generational. The impact cascades to the next generation.

Young people with a parent who has a problem with gambling are more than twice as likely to develop problems with gambling themselves (Dowling 2010).

The focus of this paper is to highlight the need to take a bigger picture view of the issue of problem gambling.

The number of people in Victoria who are clinically categorised as having a problem with gambling is 30,000.

However, when you consider an estimated five to 10 other people will be significantly affected by one person's gambling, the numbers start to add up.

Think of the MCG on grand final day with a capacity crowd of 100 thousand - now multiply that by three.

An estimated 300 thousand Victorians are significantly affected by someone else's gambling.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation provides services to family members and close friends of gamblers for the following reasons:

- involving families and friends can help the gambler successfully overcome the problems
- providing help directly to affected others can help reduce the harm stemming from problem gambling
- providing help to affected others, especially children, may help reduce their risk of developing gambling problems.

I am very proud of the work of the foundation and our funded Gambler's Help agencies, along with The Bouverie Centre, in putting families and friends at the forefront of our thinking.

This strategy is in line with the foundation's commitment to a public health framework with it's multi-faceted, multi-layered and evidence-based approach.

I commend this paper to you.

Serge Sardo
Chief Executive Officer
Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

FOREWORD



The impacts of problem gambling are keenly felt by family members and significant others and this background paper provides a context for addressing their needs so better outcomes are possible for both the gambler and for those important in their lives.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation provides services for affected others regardless of whether the person with a gambling problem is currently in treatment. This sensitive and responsive approach ensures family members have access to the support they need.

People with gambling problems are frequently motivated to seek help because of concern for how their children, their partners and other significant people in their lives are affected.

Encouragement from family to seek help, together with family sensitive services, can also provide a powerful context for addressing gambling issues.

Importantly, if families have access to the resources they need, the negative effects of problem gambling can be significantly reduced and prevented from being passed down to future generations.

The Bouverie Centre has been working with the state's Gambler's Help services for five years to support the development of family-based approaches. Many agencies have embraced this work, responding to the needs of families, creating family sensitive practice cultures and conducting an increasing number of family sessions.

Engaging all those affected by problem gambling has the potential to significantly improve relationships, increase the efficacy of treatments and reduce the harm due to problem gambling felt across the community.

I recommend this paper to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Young'.

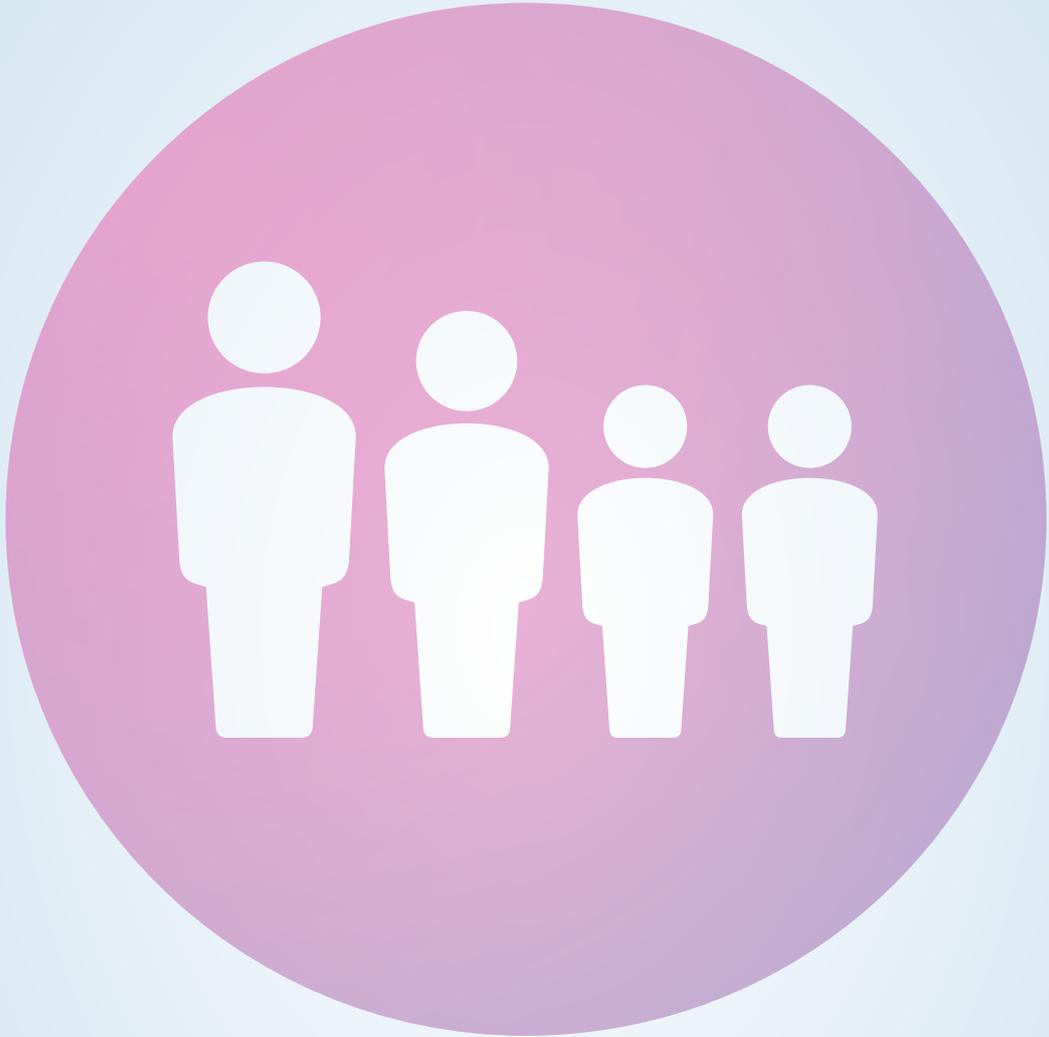
Dr Jeffrey Young Director

The Bouverie Centre: Victoria's Family Institute

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FOR EVERY PERSON WITH A GAMBLING PROBLEM,
IT'S ESTIMATED THERE ARE FIVE TO 10 OTHERS
WHO ARE AFFECTED.
(PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION 1999)



INTRODUCTION

WHY INVOLVE FAMILIES?

For every one person with a gambling problem, it is estimated that five to ten others are affected (Productivity Commission 1999).

Many of these people are the families and friends of the gambler. It is also the work colleagues, the local shopkeeper, the teachers at the kid's school and others in your local community.

For the purpose of this discussion paper, however we are focusing on the closer relationships, direct family members and close friends while also acknowledging the impact problem gambling has on the broader community.

Approximately 20 per cent of people who use gambling support services across Australia are family members of people who have a problem with their gambling while seven in 10 'significant other' clients to Victoria's Gambler's Help services between 2008 and 2012 were direct family members.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation provides a range of counselling and support services to people with gambling problems as well as families and close friends affected by their gambling.

Established in 2012, the foundation has three legislated objectives:

- reducing the prevalence of problem gambling
- reducing the severity of harm related to gambling
- fostering responsible gambling

Families are a critical element of the foundation's treatment and prevention strategies to addressing problem gambling related harm.

Partners, siblings, parents and children can play a significant role in encouraging people with gambling issues to seek help (Ciarrochi, 2002) and can also help them stay in treatment (Ingle et al, 2008).

There is also evidence treatment will be less successful if the person's relationships are not effectively taken into account.

Research suggests harm associated with problem gambling may be reduced through interventions involving family members (Cunha and Relvas 2014, Hodgins et al., 2007).

Research also shows that the children of people with gambling problems are at greater risk of going on to develop their own problems with gambling (Dowling et al., 2012).

A person's family and social relationships are a key domain in recovery-oriented practices across a number of sectors. These relationships play an important role in client recovery within their multiple roles as individuals, family members and parents (Victorian Government, Department of Health, 2011).

In mental health, well-researched family interventions have provided strong evidence for improved outcomes for both the person with the diagnosis and other family members (Carr, 2009).

There is also a robust evidence base indicating similar benefits arise from involving families in the treatment and care of individuals with a substance use problem (Copello et al., 2006).

In Victoria, mental health and alcohol and other drug services increasingly work collaboratively with the families and social networks of clients.

In the problem gambling area, there is a growing body of literature on the harmful impacts of problem gambling on families.

This provides an impetus for the problem gambling service system to be responsive to the needs of families, improving outcomes for both individuals and families.

While research into family inclusive approaches to treatment is limited, there is emerging evidence that involving families can have a range of benefits including:

- Family and friends can benefit from help to deal with the effects that someone else's gambling has on them (Orford, et al., 2013)
- Family and friends can be significant in assisting gamblers seeking help (Delfabbro and Evans, 2005) and for retaining them in treatment (Ingle et al., 2008)
- Harms associated with problem gambling may be reduced through including family in treatment (Cunha and Relvas, 2014)
- Through gaining the perspective of significant others, a more accurate picture of the gambling problem and other related issues can be developed (Ciarrocchi, 2002)
- Family members can increase their awareness of their contribution to the maintenance of the problematic gambling pattern and ways they could effect change through modifying their own behaviour (Hodgins et al., 2007).

DEFINITION OF FAMILY

In this paper, family includes the client as well as those with a significant, personal relationship with the client. This might include biological relatives, partners, ex-partners, flatmates, children, parents, siblings, friends, carers and others who play a significant role in the person's life. The term refers equally to same-sex partners and same-sex-parented families.

The terms family member, affected other or significant other are used depending on the context.

IMPACT OF PROBLEM GAMBLING ON FAMILIES

While specific research into the experiences of families of problem gamblers is limited, there is a growing body of evidence pointing to significant impacts that have yet to be adequately measured.

Orford et al., (2013) refer to the impact of gambling addiction generally on the family as 'a major but neglected contributor to the global burden of adult ill health'.

Family members very frequently refer to their own general poor health, disturbances sleeping and eating, increase or instability in their own use of substances including tobacco smoking and use of prescribed medication, as well as symptoms of physical illness including headaches, back pain, hypertension, asthma, palpitations and migraines.

Lorenz and Shuttlesworth (1983) observe that over half of the partners of people with gambling problems in their study had resorted to excessive drinking, smoking, eating or spending as a way of coping with their circumstances.

The partners of gamblers with problems often face significant economic stress linked to gambling (Kalischuk et al., 2006).

Family members report having to cut back on spending, making significant lifestyle changes such as returning to work or selling property and other household items to cope with the losses associated with problem gambling.

The resulting financial squeeze can also trickle down the generations, forcing changes to childcare, school or after school activities which may have ongoing effects on the children involved.

Additionally, family members frequently make the difficult decision to take up the role of managing family finances and controlling the gambler's access to money. They often take on this role either to help the gambler, or to gain as much oversight as possible to aid their family's financial recovery (Velleman et al., 2012).

In the medium to long term, family members may have to cope with the often-lengthy process of paying back debts. There is also the ever present threat that any pay-day may trigger a return to gambling behaviour.

In addition to economic stressors, partners commonly report experiencing a range of interpersonal and relational difficulties as a direct result of the gambler's behaviour.

Family members report:

- feelings of betrayal
- a loss of respect for and isolation from their partner
- negative and unproductive communication with their partner
- recurring cycles of blame,
- placating, avoidance and withdrawal
- confusion of roles and responsibilities
- less satisfying sexual relations
- long-standing distrust and resentment (Dickson-Swift et al., 2005).

Many family members report feeling guilty because they thought they might be the reason for their partner's gambling problems or because, despite their best efforts, they were unable to do anything to stop the behaviour (Velleman et al., 2012).

The Productivity Commission (1999) found that 32 per cent of people with gambling problems had reported a relationship break up related to their gambling.

Some studies suggest the rate of divorce is higher in families with gambling problems than in the general population (Suomi et al., 2013).

In one study, 86 per cent of partners reported having considered leaving a gambling spouse and in 29 per cent of cases separation had actually occurred (Lorenz and Yaffee 1998).

THE HIDDEN ADDICTION

One feature of a gambling problem, compared to other addictions, is the absence of obvious physical signs and symptoms, rendering it easier to hide from family members.

Even if family members do notice changes in behaviour such as irritability, decrease in sleep or less time at home, they might attribute this to other difficulties such as stress at work.

A feature of problem gambling is that the person struggling will try to hide or be in denial about the extent of the problem.

The wider community also appears to be generally in the dark about the nature, extent and impact of problem gambling in general.

All of these factors combine to make it much more likely that the disclosure or discovery of a gambling problem is 'sudden, devastating and traumatic' for a family member (Velleman et al., 2012).

CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS OF PROBLEM GAMBLING

Problems with gambling often occur alongside other co-occurring conditions such as depression, anxiety or substance use disorders, which can mean the family is involved with multiple help services.

As well as having strong associations with mental illness, problem gambling has also been linked to suicide. The Productivity Commission (1999) found that one in ten problem gamblers had contemplated suicide as a result of their gambling.

However, There is little available research on how these co-occurring issues impact on family members and how they cope (Velleman et al., 2012).

FAMILY VIOLENCE

There is emerging evidence that problem gambling may be a specific risk factor for family violence.

In a study, which screened 120 help seeking family members of gamblers with problems, more than half reported some form of family violence in the previous 12 months (Suomi et al., 2013). In this study, gamblers were both the perpetrators and the victims of family violence.

Although most of the evidence relates to intimate relationships, there is some evidence that victimisation and perpetration of violence extends to children and other members of the broader family (Dowling et al., 2014).

Despite the association between problem gambling and family violence, a literature review conducted by the foundation on co-occurring conditions of problem gambling did not identify any studies examining the prevalence of problem gambling in relationship or family counselling services.

It would be beneficial for future research projects to examine prevalence of problem gambling in the family support and family violence service sectors (Miller, 2014).

IMPACT OF PROBLEM GAMBLING ON CHILDREN

Being a parent with a gambling problem is not necessarily an indicator of poor parenting or lack of child wellbeing however, research indicates that children of people with gambling problems are often exposed to a range of family stressors.

These include financial and emotional deprivation, physical isolation, inconsistent discipline, parental neglect or abuse, rejection, poor role modelling, family conflict and reduced security and stability (Dowling, 2014).

Children growing up in a home affected by parental problem gambling may experience feelings of abandonment, isolation, anger, hurt, rejection, depression, anxiety and inadequacy.

Poor interpersonal functioning, inadequate coping skills, engagement in substance abuse, overeating and running away from home have also been observed among this group (Lesieur and Rothschild 1989).

The effects on children with a parent with gambling problems are very similar to those found in the children of parents with other addiction problems. However, unlike alcohol and drug misuse which are more likely to be recognised as being problematic for family members, gambling is less widely recognised as such and therefore children and other family members may find it more difficult to access support (Velleman et al., 2012).

There is consistent evidence that children of problem gamblers are far more likely to have problems with gambling themselves (Dowling et al., 2014).

The Children at Risk Project revealed that children with a family history of problem gambling were between two and ten times more likely to develop gambling problems in later life.

The findings suggest that gambling is a socially normed behaviour for children living in families with gambling problems and that parental problem gambling can affect offspring gambling problems through observation of parental gambling, exposure to gambling role models, increased access to gambling opportunities and peer influence (Dowling et al., 2010)

BARRIERS AND MOTIVATORS TO HELP SEEKING

Only about 10 per cent of people with gambling problems seek formal help however as many as half reportedly rely on informal help from family or significant others (Hing et al., 2013)

Similarly, although families are profoundly affected by problem gambling, comparatively few family and friends use counselling and support services despite their availability (Rodda et al., 2013).

The barriers to help seeking by family members are similar to those reported by gamblers themselves. Family members say they want to solve the problem on their own or feel ashamed for themselves or their family.

Other barriers to getting help include a lack of information about the services available including not knowing that gambling help lines cater for family members or that they are free of charge (Rodda et al., 2013).

Factors which motivate family members to seek help include having concerns about the welfare of dependents, the potential breakdown of family relationships and concern for the person with gambling problems (Hing et al., 2013).

Researchers have advocated for greater support and assistance for families to both better equip them to assist the person with gambling problems (Evans and Delfabbro, 2003), and to ensure their own physical, emotional, social and financial well being (Hing, et al., 2013).

Though there are a few Australian based studies aimed at understanding the constraining factors for gamblers and family members, there is scope for further work to explore barriers to help seeking.

Some research also points to family members possibly benefiting from lower intensity interventions such as self-help resources, telephone or online support. It's suggested these options may be more attractive to family members due to the ease of access, anonymity and discretion they afford (Rodda et al., 2013).

This approach was outlined in a recent paper published by the Australian Gambling Research Centre which recommends the development of new interventions for family members that can be administered across self-help, face to face, telephone and online (Dowling et al., 2014).

In 2010, the Productivity Commission also recommended that awareness campaigns should focus on raising the community understanding of what behaviour indicates problem gambling.

The aim of such a strategy would be to encourage family members and friends to seek help earlier for themselves and the gambler.

In summary, the best approach to meeting the needs of families of gamblers with problems would address a range of issues including financial and relational issues as well as offer a range of interventions to meet their diverse needs (Rodda et al., 2013).

WORKING WITH FAMILIES IN THE GAMBLER'S HELP SECTOR

While individual clients are one focus of Gambler's Help services, it is important to give families a voice in the care and treatment of the gambler. As practitioners acquire the skill of being able to provide support both for their client and the client's family, all family members will likely derive benefit (Bouverie Centre, 2015).

Working with families as part of a treatment program is not new. Involving families to encourage gamblers to seek treatment is also not new.

There is now however growing recognition of the need to respond more directly to the needs of these affected others. This approach recognises their need for help in their own right, regardless of whether the gambler is in treatment.

It is also an approach which seeks to minimise harm by addressing the ripple effect of problem gambling which cascades beyond the individual to their circle of family and friends and across generations.

Gambler's Help services across the state respond to the needs of families by including these approaches in their service response.

None of these approaches in isolation is likely to meet the diverse and changing needs of families. Different families require a range of approaches and most will experience, and benefit from, acknowledgement, information sharing, short-term planning and problem solving (Bouverie Centre, 2015).

PROMOTING FAMILY SENSITIVE PRACTICE

'The aim of family sensitive practice is to promote family involvement in the treatment and care of an individual in order to achieve better outcomes both for clients and for families.'

Family sensitive practice is 'any work role that is performed in a way that is inclusive, understanding and respectful to families and other carers, including their social and cultural role' (Bouverie Centre, 2015).

In practice, this means:

- formal as well as incidental contact between a counsellor and the clients' family,
- asking clients' questions to create awareness of the importance of family and other relationships,
- where appropriate and timely, involving family in treatment.

The particular contribution of family sensitive practice is that it is flexible and adaptable. For counsellors, it doesn't require advanced training and for agencies, it doesn't require major changes to work roles.

A family sensitive approach can be helpful in encouraging family members, including those who might be reluctant to attend formal meetings or participate in family based therapy, to get involved on some level.

Family sensitive practice promotes mutual respect and trust between practitioners and families creating a context to engage families in more structured ways, providing the foundation on which other services to families can be built.

EXAMPLES OF FAMILY SENSITIVE PRACTICE THAT ARE AVAILABLE IN GAMBLER'S HELP SERVICES:

- A practitioner may ask a client about their family, who they might look to for support and how family members might understand the client's difficulties.
- A practitioner may ask about the cultural identity of the client and their family as a starting point for talking about how to offer culturally sensitive family visits.
- Information about peer support and practical help such as financial advice is routinely offered to families.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF WORKING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

- A client's preferences are the starting point for family involvement, however family members have rights to the information they need to carry out a caring role and to have their own needs acknowledged and addressed. This is particularly important in assessing the needs of vulnerable children.
- Hearing everyone's experiences and points of view contributes to a broader understanding and hence more effective treatment.
- Working with family members and significant others is an essential part of client care rather than an 'add-on' or exclusively specialist activity, especially where children are involved.
- A non-pathologising and non-blaming approach, combined with natural curiosity about each person's experience, an open mind and human warmth are fundamental to working effectively with distressed families in a client-centred way.
- Issues of privacy and confidentiality are addressed in a way that facilitates family involvement.

(Bouverie Centre, 2015)

A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

The foundation's provision of programs targeting families and friends of gamblers is part of its overall public health approach to reducing harm related to gambling.

The foundation is progressively developing and using evidence-based approaches including:

- population-wide (universal) strategies as well as initiatives targeting groups at high-risk or experiencing disadvantage
- interventions delivered across a range of settings
- strategies which are tailored and delivered to people across their lifetime, that is, at key ages, stages and at transition points
- the planned and deliberate utilisation of a selection of multi-pronged interventions (complementary and synergistic) that are implemented simultaneously rather than sequentially

The two key areas outlined below, services and service promotion targeting family and friends are best described as:

- secondary prevention strategies - seeking to reduce gambling-related harm through the early identification of at-risk gamblers (children), and
- tertiary prevention strategies – seeking to minimise the impact of gambling-related harm through increasing access and treatment, services and support.

SERVICES FOR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

The foundation funds Gambler's Help services to provide support to problem gamblers as well as family members.

This means:

- family and friends of the gambler are able to access support, advice and counselling
- services are available independent of the person experiencing problems with gambling and regardless of whether that person is in treatment themselves
- the estimated 300 thousand people in Victoria who are directly affected by someone else's gambling have access to the support and advice they need

Significantly, not all health and human service organisations in Victoria are required to provide support to family members as clients in their own right.



Phone

The Gambler's Help telephone line (1800 858 585) is a state-wide telephone service providing brief counselling, support, information and referrals. The help line provides 24 hour, seven day assistance to people with gambling problems, family members, affected others and the general community.



Young people

A special Gambler's Help Youthline (1800 262 376) provides a differentiated and additional point of access for young people who have questions or concerns about their own gambling or someone else's gambling.



Online support

Gambling Help Online is another service funded by the foundation, in partnership with other Australian states and territories which provides support to gamblers who are experiencing issues and their families and friends.

Two of the foundation's funded agencies, Banyule Community Health and the Chinese Peer Connection Program delivered by Eastern Access Community Health (EACH) provide a Peer Connection service.



Financial counselling

Many families affected by problem gambling have financial issues arising from gambling losses. The Recovery Assistance Program (RAP) can help stabilise the finances of individuals and families. Through the program, help is available under strict criteria including:

- funds must not be used in a way that facilitates or subsidises gambling
- a genuine need must be established
- funds can only be used for essential basic needs (food, stable housing, cooking, heating, lighting, medical, clothing)

SERVICE PROMOTION

In the current financial year (2014-2015), the foundation is spending around \$11 million on campaigns promoting Gambler's Help services and responsible gambling to the community. This is in direct response to a significant increase in gambling promotion in recent years.

The campaign investment is approximately one quarter of the foundation's annual budget and an integral component of the organisation's public health approach.

Two new campaigns will run this year specifically targeting families and friends of people with gambling problems.

The first is a targeted 'family and friends' campaign aimed at increasing awareness of the services available to those affected by someone else's gambling.

Airing during April and May 2015, this campaign is taking a different approach to previous significant other campaigns, which have focused on how they can help the gambler into treatment.

This campaign will highlight the support and services available to the families and friends themselves.

With a tagline 'it's not just gamblers who need support, it's those around them', the campaign includes a television commercial as well as radio, print and online advertising.

The commercial features three generations of one family, a mother, a wife and a daughter who are all affected by one person's gambling.

It illustrates how gambling harm extends beyond the immediate family, showing the impact is multi-generational.

A new section on the foundation's website with information for families and friends as well as a detailed content strategy using social media will also support the campaign.

During the campaign, the foundation is also launching a new Facebook page to reach out to family and friends as this social media platform is popular among our target audience.

The second campaign to reach out to this group will be a dedicated youth campaign promoting the foundation's Gambler's Help Youthline (1800 262 376).

To run during May and June 2015, the youth engagement campaign will target young males and females aged between 15 and 18.

Primarily a digital (online) campaign, the focus will be on raising awareness of support services for young people who are affected by someone else's gambling.

It will promote the Gambler's Help Youthline.

As with all of the foundation's awareness campaigns, these campaigns are based on solid evidence. Target audiences are selected on the basis of a robust market segmentation study (2008), a comprehensive epidemiological study (2009), previous campaign benchmarking and tracking research and a variety of national and international research.

This information, along with data on service demand and take up, gambling expenditure habits, gambling type and media consumption allow the foundation to identify specific target audiences for each campaign.

The timing of campaigns reflects peak gambling periods including key times of the year when major sporting events mean gambling is at the forefront of community awareness.

The creative approaches to campaigns are also tested with focus groups to ensure they will resonate with the target audiences.

Many ways to **get help**

If you or someone you care about is experiencing problems with gambling, help is available.

We understand that gambling affects people from all walks of life and in different ways. That's why we offer many ways to get support.

Find the support that's right for you.



Talk to someone

You can call Gambler's Help 24 hours a day, seven days a week for free, confidential information, advice and counselling.
Call **1800 858 858**



Talk to people like you

We can help you find support from other people going through the same problems, either in a group setting or one on one.
Call **1800 858 858**



Meet a counsellor

Gambler's Help offer face-to-face counselling either on a one-off basis or ongoing.
Call **1800 858 858**



Are you under 25?

Call our dedicated Gambler's Help Youthline for a confidential chat or for information about gambling.
Call **1800 262 376**



Get help with your finances

Financial counsellors can give you confidential advice and help you sort out your financial problems.
Call **1800 858 858**



Get immediate help online

Email or chat live with a counsellor 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
Visit **gamblinghelponline.org.au**



Concerned about a loved one?

If someone else's gambling is affecting you, we offer free, confidential information, advice and support. Or you can attend counselling with your partner or family.
Call **1800 858 858**



Tools to help yourself

Self help tools can help you build confidence and work through your issues in your own time, at your own pace.
Visit **gamblershelp.com.au**



**Gambler's
Help**

1800 858 858

gamblershelp.com.au

DEVELOPING A FAMILY-READY SECTOR

The Gambler's Help sector has been working with The Bouverie Centre since 2009 to develop family inclusive practices across the state.

Under The Bouverie Centre's workforce development strategy (known as the Beacon Strategy), a large body of practical knowledge about family approaches and how to implement them has been developed.

This approach involved training more than 300 clinicians since 2010 in conducting single session family consultations.

Clinicians reported significant gains in incorporating family sensitive practice within their agencies as well as increasing their confidence in working with families.

WHAT IS A SINGLE SESSION FAMILY CONSULTATION?

Single session family consultation is a structured process for meeting with a client and the family. It is focussed on achieving realistic and negotiated goals and recognises that most families benefit from attending one or two counselling sessions but usually do not want to attend regularly.

Developed by The Bouverie Centre, this approach combines a family consultation model developed to meet the needs of families affected by mental illness, with single session therapy that focuses on maximising the value of one or more counselling sessions (Jewell et al., 2012).

(Bouverie Centre, 2015).

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The foundation established the Professional Development Centre in October 2013 to provide a comprehensive approach to supporting the gambling help sector's workforce.

This includes:

- clinicians working in the funded Gambler's Help agencies across Victoria
- clinicians working in other help services including mental health, community health and private practice
- general practitioners

The Bouverie Centre is continuing its work with the foundation to develop new programs to further promote family sensitive practice across the Gambler's Help network.

Two new family specific training programs are currently being piloted with a view to expanding them in the Gambler's Help sector.

Family Practice Champions Program (*Launched 2014*)

This program involves training selected Gambler's Help practitioners to become family practice champions. The aim of the program is to build capacity across the sector for working with partners, children and significant others. The program involves:

- the champions being observed in live therapy sessions with families by an experienced family therapist :
- talking over their experiences with other champions to develop new insights and awareness of different approaches
- advanced training in family work skills
- developing a practitioners' checklist for working with family members

Let's Talk Parenting Program (*Launched 2015*)

'Let's Talk About Children' (Let's Talk) is another pilot project which aims to help make talking about children and parenting issues a natural part of the alliance between parents (clients) and clinicians.

This approach was originally developed for working with parents with a mental health issue and is being adapted for the gambling sector by The Bouverie Centre.

The model uses conversations with the parent to:

- help both the parent and practitioner explore the needs of the child
- discuss how the parent's issues may be affecting their parenting
- identify the support they may need in their parenting

Let's Talk originated in Finland and is currently part of a major research study which is assessing its suitability for inclusion as standard practice within mental health services in Victoria.

Importantly, this approach seeks to address the ripple affect of gambling problems by focusing on the children of gamblers, identifying their needs and vulnerabilities and developing strategies to address the impact of the parents' gambling.

Three Gambler's Help services including two metropolitan and one regional service are involved in the current pilot which is expected to be completed later this year (2015).

WHERE TO FROM HERE

This section outlines a number of further approaches the foundation is undertaking to improve services for families affected by problem gambling.

1. All Gambler's Help agencies are encouraged to create a family sensitive culture within their organisation
2. A comprehensive strategy is being developed to inform family sensitive practice in the Gambler's Help sector
3. A standard practice checklist is being developed to help clinicians incorporate families and others in treatment
4. A new case management system is being implemented across the Gambler's Help service system which will support family sensitive practice

CREATING A FAMILY SENSITIVE CULTURE

A family sensitive culture creates an environment that unambiguously welcomes all family members, including children, and encourages a range of thoughtful responses to families.

This applies whether practitioners are working systemically with individuals or seeing several family members, whether they are doing assessment interviews or discharge planning.

It influences the design of core services such that they are family sensitive physical environments which are mindful of families and organisational policies and procedures are developed to ensure involving families is standard practice.

The following are examples of family sensitive practices that are not specific to the treatment of a particular individual:

- A welcoming waiting room stocked with drinks, snacks, magazines for men and women, children's books, toys and games and a change table in the toilets or parents' room.
- Administrative staff members are always courteous and warm to family members.
- Consumer consultants are welcomed within the organisation's decision-making processes and have a clear role endorsed by managers and practitioners.
- Organisational processes include families and the client's social networks, for example key performance indicators and outcome measures, data collection and resourcing.
- Consumers and families are involved in governance and service development.

A STRATEGY TO INFORM FAMILY SENSITIVE PRACTICE

The foundation is working across the sector to develop a comprehensive strategy to guide family sensitive practice.

The strategy will identify gaps and consider workforce development initiatives and service delivery approaches to build the capacity of Gambler's Help services to be more responsive to the diverse and changing needs of families.

This will include the introduction of group programs for family members (facilitated by professionals and consumers) to ensure statewide access in Victoria.

A STANDARD 'FAMILY-FRIENDLY' PRACTICE CHECKLIST FOR CLINICIANS

Informed by the Family Practice Champions Program, the standard practice checklist for clinicians will be available for all Gambler's Help clinicians in their day-to-day work with clients.

A NEW CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM TO SUPPORT FAMILY SENSITIVE PRACTICE

The new case management system for Gambler's Help agencies will help clinicians support families by:

- encouraging the recording of information about the gambler's family
- enabling the recording of co-counselling, where more than one counsellor including financial counsellor and therapeutic counsellor, are involved
- enabling the linking of family records (where consent is provided by both parties) to assist in the definition and management of the client as a family unit rather than an individual.

CONCLUSION

Families play an important part in a recovery and prevention response to addressing problem gambling.

Family members play a significant role in motivating and assisting problem gamblers to seek help as well as for retaining them in treatment

An individual gambler's treatment is also likely to be less successful if the person's relationships are not effectively taken into account.

Family members can also benefit in their own right from access to resources and services which enable them to protect their own emotional, social and financial wellbeing.

In other areas of addiction, well-researched family interventions have provided strong evidence for improved outcomes for both the person with the diagnosis and other family members.

There is a growing body of evidence of the harm problem gambling can have on families including immediate adverse effects on children in terms of financial insecurity and family stress as well as the increased risk they have of going on to develop their own problems with gambling.

Research shows that harm associated with problem gambling may be reduced through including family in treatment. It also shows that by gaining the perspective of significant others, a more accurate picture of the gambling problem and other related issues can be developed.

The foundation will continue to build on workforce development initiatives and service delivery responses to meet the needs of families of people with gambling issues.

By adopting a family sensitive approach to practice as outlined in this paper, we believe better outcomes will be achieved for individual clients, for their families and the community as a whole.

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Many ways to **get help**

When someone close to you has a gambling problem, it can be overwhelming and isolating. It can affect your trust, confidence and finances.

Gambler's Help provides free, confidential support to anyone affected by gambling, not just gamblers.

There are many ways to get support including online, telephone and face-to-face counselling, financial counselling, support for young people and peer support.

We can help you to get perspective on the situation, explore your options and look after yourself.

Call Gambler's Help 1800 858 858 or go to gamblershelp.com.au to find out more



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