



The Hon Julia Gillard, MP, Prime Minister of Australia  
The Hon Tony Abbott, MP, Leader of the Opposition  
Senator Bob Brown, Leader of the Australian Greens  
Senator Nick Xenophon  
Mr Andrew Wilkie MP

Parliament House,  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

19 June, 2011

Dear Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and Parliamentarians,

**Re: Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform: recommendations for a mandatory pre-commitment system for poker machines**

We write in support of the implementation of a mandatory pre-commitment system for poker machines, including the introduction of low-impact poker machines, supported by a comprehensive package of complementary strategies and reform of gambling research funding. We urge you and all members of Parliament to serve the best interests of the Australian public by giving immediate support for the rapid introduction of these recommendations.

An effective response to the harms of problem gambling is required urgently. As we have learned from other successful public health responses, social marketing and education campaigns alone will not work. We cannot ask individuals to “gamble responsibly” unless we introduce structural changes to the gambling environment to support them to do so.

Problem gambling is a major cause of avoidable harms to health and wellbeing, with about 115,000 Australians experiencing a serious gambling problem, and another 280,000 with a moderate or developing problem. For every person with a gambling problem, between five and ten others are affected: children, husbands, wives, partners, employers, neighbours, family and friends.


Gambling’s harms include financial distress and ruin, and high rates of physical and mental illness, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicide. Gambling diverts household income away from food, shelter and other basic necessities. It puts strain on relationships and commonly leads to family breakdown and to the neglect of children. Theft, fraud and other criminal offences associated with financial desperation are common problems. Further, the burdens of gambling fall disproportionately on disadvantaged communities, entrenching inequity and disadvantage, and eroding social cohesion.

The overwhelming cause of gambling harm in Australia is poker machines. Accordingly, we urge you to promptly introduce legislation to give effect to the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform, which seek to implement recent recommendations of the Productivity Commission, in order to minimise and prevent avoidable harm experienced by individuals, families and communities.

The introduction of a mandatory pre-commitment scheme will further establish Australia as a world leader in public health. As was the case with tobacco, gun controls and seatbelts, when there is compelling evidence of serious and immediate threats to public health we are compelled to take action to minimise harm. There is good evidence that mandatory pre-commitment systems work to reduce harms from gambling.

Each year that we delay the introduction of effective measures to address harms derived from gambling on poker machines, hundreds of thousands of people will experience gambling problems. Millions of other innocent bystanders will be severely and adversely affected. We cannot afford to wait any longer before taking action on gambling to support health and wellbeing.

Yours Sincerely,



Professor Helen Keleher  
School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University  
President, Public Health Association of Australia

Professor Mike Daube, Public Health Advocacy Institute, Curtin University

Professor Simon Chapman, School of Public Health, University of Sydney

Professor Fiona Stanley, Director, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research

Professor Michael Levy, School of Clinical Medicine, Australian National University

Professor John Coveney, Associate Dean, Promotion, Prevention and Primary Care, Flinders University

Professor Fran Baum, Federation Fellow, Southgate Institute, Flinders University

Professor Ron Borland PhD, Nigel Gray Distinguished Fellow in Cancer Prevention, The Cancer Council, Victoria

Professor Vivian Lin, School of Public Health, La Trobe University

Professor Peter Howat, Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute, Curtin University

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Professor Helena Teede, Professor of Women's Health, and Director of the Jean Hailes Women's Health Research Group, Monash University

Professor Amanda Thrift, NHMRC Senior Research Fellow and Head of Epidemiology and Prevention, Stroke and Ageing Research Centre, Monash University

Professor Robert Power, Principal for Disease Prevention, Burnet Institute

Professor Jane Fisher, Professor of Women's Mental Health, Jean Hailes Foundation

Associate Professor Tony Butler, Justice Health Program, The Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales

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