

Pokie playgrounds: normalising dangerous habits, indoctrinating children

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) believes that a decision by the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation to permit a poker machine gambling venue to build a children's playground with unrestricted vision of the gambling room is irresponsible, dangerous and damaging to children and their families.

Dr Charles Livingstone, the PHAA spokesman, said "Exposing children to gambling in this way will normalise the activity even more than is already the case. Many existing venues offer inducements to families to pursue their highly dangerous activity, including free or discounted children's meals, play areas and electronic amusements. This insidious development goes one step further in directly exposing children to the sight of their parents engaged in pokie gambling".

"The danger of this is that it reinforces the idea that this most dangerous form of gambling is a perfectly normal, family friendly activity that can be safely pursued. In fact, pokie gambling is responsible for at least 80% of Australia's problem gamblers, and problem gamblers or those at risk account for 60% or more of the revenue from poker machines", added Dr Charles Livingstone.

This adds to the pressure already being exerted on children, who are currently exposed to unprecedented levels of gambling promotion and marketing. Popular activities such as football are now regularly utilised as marketing platforms for gambling businesses, bookmakers' odds are cited as evidence in news bulletins, and gambling venues promote themselves as family friendly.

"In reality, gambling, particularly pokie gambling, tears families apart and exposes children and the community to extraordinary stress and anxiety" according to Dr Livingstone.

Available evidence indicates that children exposed to risky activities including smoking, drinking alcohol to excess, gambling and drug use are much more likely to adopt these behaviours in later life, with considerable impacts on health and well being.

"Pokie venues are not focused on looking after children's needs," said Dr Livingstone, "in reality, children are simply being used as a marketing tool by these businesses. Their sole concern is maximising revenue, and children are simply a way of achieving this goal".

According to the PHAA, pokie gambling is an adult activity and pokie venues should be restricted to adults. Marketing incentives for gambling which exploit children should be prohibited.

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