



I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll bring the house down? Smoking and problem gambling

- In 2006 Ministry of Health statistics stated that 58% of problem gamblers smoked compared to only 23.5% in the rest of the population.¹ Problem gamblers were three times more likely to be daily smokers, and stated that they increased the amount they smoked while gambling.²
- The gambling industry claimed that smokers make up as much as 70% of gamblers. However, in Australia, a Tattersall's study suggested that it was as low as 36%, but that smokers contributed up to 50% of gambling revenue.³
- The Australian Productivity Commission suggested that if a person is a smoker they are five times more likely to gamble at the age of 21 years. They stated that evidence shows that a high percentage of pokie players smoke regularly so the likely hood is that gaming revenue would fall if gamblers are required to go outside.
- Gamblers who smoked on a daily basis gambled on more days and spent more money than non-daily smoking gamblers. They also 'craved' gambling more than non smokers and had lower perceived control over their gambling.⁴
- There is a strong link between problem gambling and the likelihood of tobacco use and tobacco dependence in pokie players.⁵
- New Zealand Gambling Helpline calls decreased by 33% when the smoke-free environment amendment was introduced in December 2004.

If smoke can be smelt it has the potential to cause harm

Smoke free legislation

When Victoria, Australia banned smoking in gambling machine venues there was an initial 30% drop in revenue. After remedial action the eventual loss was only a 11.6% drop.⁷ By 2005 revenue was up to \$100 million again.

There are three theories on why this happened: Was it because the industry revamped some venues and other venues tried to circumnavigate the law by designated sections of their gaming room non-smoking instead of smoke free, others set up smoking room closer to the gaming rooms and allowed

gamblers to reserve their 'lucky' machines?⁶ or because non-smokers were more willing to increase their gambling frequency in a smoke-free environment as the majority of pokie players are non smokers; or because the smoking community adapted to the new law?

New Zealander's gambling losses were \$2.037 billion in 2004 and after the smoke free legislation was introduced, this decreased to \$1.7 billion in 2006. But they returned to \$2.034 in 2008. This decrease coincided with a 12% drop in pokie machine revenue in 2005 and an 18% decrease in pokie machine numbers.⁸

A study in Nelson found that the number of smokers coming for problem gambling counselling dropped from 42% (2004) to 28% (2006)⁶, which suggests that the outcome of smoke free legislation is that the ban not only stops people smoking in prohibited areas but may also help some smokers to stop altogether. Because when they leave the machine for a smoke and 'break the trance' they decide its time to go home.

The number of smokers who reported they smoked more than normal when out at bars and casinos halved between 2004 and 2005 (from 58% to 29%).⁹

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2. Ministry of Health. (2006) *Problem gambling in New Zealand. Analysis of the 2002/3 New Zealand Health Survey*. Wellington: MOH.
3. S Wollard. (2002) *Market research briefing prepared for Tattersalls*. Melbourne: Barrington Centre. <http://www.gamblingwatch.org.nz/files/Tattersalls%20Report.pdf>
4. N M Petry & C Oncken. (2002) Cigarette smoking is associated with increased severity of gambling problems in treatment-seeking gamblers. *Addiction*, 97: 745-753.
5. S Rodda, SL Brown & James G Phillips. (2004) The relationship between anxiety, smoking, and gambling in electronic gaming machine players. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 20 (1): 71-81.

6. Simon Collins. (2006) Smoke ban deters gamblers. *NZ Herald* 5 August.
7. Jason Dowling (2005) Gambling up \$100 m after smoking ban. *The Age* February 20.
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9. G Thomson and N Watson. (2006) One year of smokefree bars and restaurants in New Zealand: Impacts and responses. *BMC Public Health*, 6: 64-73.
10. LL Mandel & SA Glantz (2004). Hedging their bets: tobacco and gambling industries work against smoke-free policies. *Tobacco Control*, 13: 268-276.
11. T Harper (2003) Smoking and gambling: a trance inducing ritual. *Tobacco control*, 12: 231-233.





The Australian gaming industry's bid to get the gamblers back in a smoke-free environment ³

The Australian gaming industries answer to smoke free legislation was a report on how venues could enhance their surroundings to encourage gamblers to stay and 'play'.

The report to Tattersall's (gaming organisation) suggested how to encourage people who are smokers to continue gambling in non-smoking environments by:

- Making pay out intervals shorter
- Positioning ATM and smoking facilities within view of the poker machines.
- Increasing the multiplier potential
- Darken rooms to make them warm and cosy
- Add Muzak style music which does not provide any competition to gambling.

- Providing baby sitting.
- Providing lending facilities.
- Adjust lights and sounds so they lead to more gambling and less social interaction.
- Providing free or cheap food.
- Providing Free stakes.
- Training staff to congratulate players after each win, to be aware of body language when a player makes a move to leave.
- Announcing wins over loud speaker accompanied by bells and flashing lights.
- Providing free transport to venues.
- Providing incentives ie loyalty cards.
- Flash up signs saying "you're a legend" .
- Increasing near misses.
- Having a reservation policy which allows smokers to reserve machines while they have a cigarette, thus enticing them to return to 'their machine'.

'Smoking is a powerful reinforcement for the trance-inducing rituals associated with gambling' ¹¹

Community activism against smoking and gambling

Gambling, drinking and smoking are behaviours which appear to complement each other. Therefore locating pokie machines in areas where the three activities can occur helps to reinforce this association. Harm caused by those smoking in public places became a public health issue and opposition to it brought about smoke-free environment legislation. Increased public awareness through anti-smoking campaigns which highlighted the need to protect hospitality workers and patrons, as well as the public resulted in positive health and social outcomes. Now it is the turn of those involved in problem gambling to help raise public awareness about the harms from problem gambling and to demand a gamble-free environment within clubs and bars.

Although pro-smoking and pro-gambling campaigns are well funded there are similar characteristics between tobacco use and gambling problems that can be utilized in community activism in opposition. The use of powerful slogans such as "Smoking kills" or "Every year thousands of people find an easy way to quit smoking. They die" were used in anti-smoking campaigns. The slogan "Problem gambling ruins Kiwi lives, and has a devastating impact on families and the community" has been used as part of a recent social marketing campaign to show the harm caused by gambling in New Zealand. This campaign has raised public awareness about the economic and social impacts of continuing to support the proliferation of gambling venues and of councils lifting the lid on pokie machine numbers.

The tobacco industry however, has allies in the hospitality industry and uses its connection with the gambling industry to keep control over gambling policy in New Zealand. ¹⁰ Because they have low public credibility they fought a rear guard battle to oppose smoke-free policies. In supporting them the gambling industry continues to focus on the revenue rather than the effects of gambling harm or harm from smoking.

Problem Gambling Foundation Hotline
0800 664 262