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A big increase in the number of people seeking help for problem gambling

The latest figures released by the Ministry of Health indicate a dramatic increase in the number of people seeking help for problem gambling.

The data shows that 6,673 clients presented for treatment for problem gambling in 2009, a 25 percent increase on the previous year. Since 2006, the number of clients helped by specialist treatment providers has risen by nearly 60 percent (from 3,930 people per year to 6,673).

Graeme Ramsey, Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, says this data indicates that advertising and health promotion is working.

"The Health Sponsorship Council has run very effective advertising campaigns. In addition we spend as much as we can on advertising, as do other providers, although this is limited for us and contributed to a deficit this year."

"We can see by these statistics that raising awareness about the issue of problem gambling, letting people know how they can get help and that treatment works, is definitely the right approach," he says.

"As a nation we are making progress in getting on top of this major social issue."

"There is a lot of shame attached to problem gambling but advertising and education is obviously helping to overcome these barriers and encouraging people to seek help for themselves or someone they know."

Graeme Ramsey says the Ministry of Health data also indicates the number of Maori seeking assistance is significant.

"The statistics, reflecting the number of clients assisted by ethnicity for the 2009 calendar year, show that 34 percent were Maori," he says.

Maori are a high-risk group, and are two to three times more at risk of problem gambling than non-Maori.

"However, despite the increase in people seeking help and decreases in pokie machine numbers and spending, we know that large numbers of people with gambling problems still do not seek professional help. Our challenge as providers is to improve this further," Graeme Ramsey says.

The Ministry of Health intervention client data represents the number of clients who have received problem gambling treatment services and who have

identified to the service provider a primary problem gambling mode causing them significant harm.

Ends

To view the Ministry of Health service user data – intervention client data – click on the link below:

<http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/problemgambling-userdata-clientdata>

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