

Media release

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Survey results show what people really think about pokies

Only 12 percent of respondents in a recent survey thought the responsibility for the distribution of gambling profits should remain with people who operate gambling activities, such as pokie trusts.

The 2010 Health Sponsorship Council 'Health and Lifestyles Survey' (HLS), collected opinions from 1740 New Zealanders including questions on people's attitudes, experiences and knowledge relating to gambling.

The Problem Gambling Foundation's National Public Health Practice Leader, Tony Milne, says the survey response about the distribution of gambling profits is not surprising given the ongoing rorts and misappropriation of public money by pokie trusts.

"Issues of non-compliance abound and it was recently reported that the Department of Internal Affairs is investigating dozens of alleged pokie machine rorts involving millions of dollars of public money that was destined for charitable purposes," he says.

The survey respondents were asked who they thought should be responsible for the distribution of gambling profits to charities and other community causes.

The Lottery Grants Board (or similar) was selected by 45% of respondents, Local Council by 42%, and only 12% of respondents thought the responsibility for the distribution of gambling profits should remain with people who operate gambling activities, for example pokie trusts.

Tony Milne says the survey responses also showed that awareness about the dangers of pokie machines was high.

"Pokies were deemed 'socially undesirable' by 50% of the respondents in the survey," he says.

"Two in three people also mentioned pokies as being a form of gambling that would attract people into playing more than they should."

The Problem Gambling Foundation says it is time to review the current system of distributing pokie money and take public opinion into account.

Te Ururoa Flavell's Gambling Harm Reduction Bill, commonly referred to as the 'People before Pokies Bill', proposes that the distribution of pokie funds through corporate societies or 'pokie trusts' will be phased out within a year.

The Bill, scheduled to have its first reading in Parliament on Wednesday, will also enable local authorities, in consultation with their communities, to reduce the

number, or even eliminate pokie machines from areas where they are particularly concentrated or doing particular harm.

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