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Keep a lid on the number of pokies in Auckland City

Auckland City already has 3098 pokies and the Problem Gambling Foundation questions why the city needs so many of these harmful machines.

With the Auckland City Council currently reviewing their gambling venue policy, the Problem Gambling Foundation are calling for people to have their say and help keep the number of pokie machines down.

Graeme Ramsey, CEO at the Problem Gambling Foundation says they want the council to keep their existing sinking lid policy.

"Pokie machines are the most harmful form of gambling and most of these machines are located in poorer areas targeting the most vulnerable communities," he says.

"The proposed gambling venue policy the council has put forward for consultation is a 'claytons' sinking lid policy – they will still consider applications for the relocation of existing venues and/or machines which is not a sinking lid policy at all," Graeme Ramsey says.

Over the last year, in Auckland alone, nearly \$88 million was spent on pokie machines and that does not include casinos.

Graeme Ramsey says a 'true' sinking lid policy means the number of venues and machines are 'capped' and automatically reduce when venues close or relocate.

"We want to see a sinking lid policy and the number of pokie machines reduced," he says.

"While we are not anti-gambling, we are anti pokie machines – they are a dangerous product and Auckland doesn't need any more of them."

The Problem Gambling Foundation is encouraging people to have their say about the proposed gambling venue policy in Auckland City.

For people wanting further information about making a submission visit www.pgfnz.org.nz/AucklandCity or contact Raj at the Problem Gambling Foundation on (09) 369 0629.

Ends

18 September 2009

A decade of helping Asian communities with problem gambling

"When I was at the lowest point of my life, the only friend that I knew at that time encouraged me to call the Asian Services hotline at the Problem Gambling Foundation for help. This phone call has changed my life."

Asian Services at the Problem Gambling Foundation celebrate their 10th anniversary on 25 September and these heartfelt words from a client reinforce the need for the services they have been providing to Asian communities over the last decade.

John Wong, Asian Services Director says the number of Asian people seeking help for problem gambling has steadily increased over the years with many clients in desperate situations.

"The majority of the Asian population in New Zealand are recent migrants that don't have the support of extended family and friends. Alongside that is the language barrier which prevents many Asian people from seeking help from English speaking service providers," he says.

"There is also a very strong stigma associated with problem gambling and so often clients and their families don't seek help when the problem starts and it quickly escalates into a desperate situation."

Asian Services at the Problem Gambling Foundation started with only three part-time staff offering a telephone service in Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean.

John Wong says it is exciting to look back over the last ten years and see how much the service has grown and what has been achieved.

"The phone service we started with is now a national hotline with the service growing to meet the increased needs of Asian communities," he says.

Asian Services at the Problem Gambling Foundation provide free, professional counselling and support for problem gambling in Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Khmer, Thai and Hindi.

The 10th anniversary of Asian Services will be celebrated at a special event on Friday 25 September at 6pm at the Problem Gambling Foundation, 128 Khyber Pass Road, Grafton, Auckland.

Hon Pansy Wong, Minister for Ethnic Affairs will attend and speak at the event celebrating a decade of services to Asian communities.

Asian Services Hotline 0800 862 342

Ends

19 September 2009

Sports Clubs Suffering Unnecessarily

The Problem Gambling Foundation (PGF) believes that some pokie trusts are withholding funding to all sports in an attempt to gather support for changes that will enable them to continue to give money to horse racing.

As reported in the Weekend Herald several pokie trusts have stopped funding amateur sports following a recent Court decision.

The Travis judgement stated clearly that horse racing was not a charitable purpose. It also explained that some sports were not charitable, depending on their purpose.

In response some Trusts such as Eureka, which last year gave \$1.2 million of its total \$5.3 million grants to horse racing, have ceased giving money to both horse racing and all amateur sports.

"Each year pokie trusts give over \$25million dollars to horse racing. Was it ever envisaged that an industry that facilitates gambling would be propped up by charitable funds?" asks Problem Gambling Foundation CEO Graeme Ramsey.

Trevor Garrett, CEO of the Charities Commission, in a recent letter to the Christchurch Press states 'sport can be the means by which charitable purposes are carried out'.

'Sports and recreation organisations qualify for registration as charitable entities under the Charities Act (2005) if their purposes are charitable. The commission has already registered many sport and recreational organisations as charities and receives new applications every day'.

PGF challenges the decision by some trusts to stop funding all amateur sports.

"This looks to us like an attempt to gain grassroots support to influence Government to make the changes necessary for them to continue business as usual," Graeme Ramsey says.

PGF believes that pokie machines are dangerous products that New Zealand communities would be better without.

"While they do exist we all must ensure that New Zealand communities get the best possible return. The current structure of 50 trusts, with self-appointed trustees coupled with the massive amounts of money involved leads to ongoing rorts and questionable practices. The whole system is in urgent need of a fundamental review," says Graeme Ramsey.

Ends

10 August 2009

Eureka should reinstate grants to grassroots sport

Sporting organisations are rightfully upset that Eureka has changed their position of a week ago when they said they would stop donations to horse racing but continue to fund sport.

However, charitable sports organisations and amateur sportspeople should not need to lose out over Eureka Trust's decision to halt grants to 'non-charitable amateur sports bodies'.

Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, Graeme Ramsey says there is a big difference between a charitable amateur sports organisation and one that is not.

"It is well recognised that if an activity is of benefit to the wider community then it is charitable. The law is clear that this can be the case for sporting activities, especially when the activity is for youth or in respect of poor or otherwise disadvantaged groups."

"Likewise there are some sports organisations that are clearly not charitable such as professional sports teams," Graeme Ramsey says.

"If there is any genuine doubt about the legality of Eureka's support for any sport, then it would be highly desirable for the Trust or any of the sport bodies to seek a declaratory judgment from the High Court rather than simply cease all funding," he says.

"Eureka has got it wrong once again. This is further evidence that Government needs to step in and reform the pokie funding system and replace it with a more transparent system where everyone understands the rules," Graeme Ramsey says.

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24 August 2009

Restaurants support Gamble-Free Day

Over 190 restaurants around New Zealand are offering a discount for diners in support of the Problem Gambling Foundation's Gamble-Free Day campaign on the 1st September.

John Wong, Problem Gambling Foundation Asian Services Director says they have been overwhelmed by the number of restaurants that are supporting the campaign.

"The Gamble-Free Day dining discount campaign has grown every year since it started in 2007," he says.

"Each year we have more restaurants wanting to participate and we get fantastic support from a dedicated team of volunteers."

"We want to encourage people to get out with their families and friends and enjoy healthy entertainment not spend the money on gambling," John Wong says.

The Problem Gambling Foundation hopes the campaign will help to reduce the stigma associated with problem gambling by promoting open discussion on gambling harm within communities and encourage people who are affected by gambling to seek help.

On 1 September participating restaurants are offering 10% discount off meals on presentation of the special Gamble-Free Day Dining Discount voucher.

The Gamble-Free Day Dining Discount voucher and a list of participating restaurants can be found on the Problem Gambling Foundation website www.pgfnz.org.nz

Gamble-Free day is held on the 1st September every year to raise awareness about problem gambling in New Zealand. If you are concerned about your gambling or someone else's gambling, get free, professional and confidential help 0800 664 262 or email help@pgfnz.org.nz

Asian hotline 0800 862 342.

Ends

28 July 2009

A victory for community groups as Eureka commits to stop pokie grants to horse racing

The Eureka Trust has resolved to stop giving pokie money to horse racing stakes or promotion.

Eureka has made a number of substantial donations to horse racing over the past few years which the Problem Gambling Foundation (PGF) believes was in direct violation of its own Trust Deed.

“We were preparing to launch proceedings against the Eureka Trustees for breaching their own Trust Deed but Eureka has informed us that they will no longer donate to horse racing,” Problem Gambling Foundation CEO Graeme Ramsey said.

“While critical of donations to horse racing in the past, we congratulate Eureka for making a commitment to stop pokie grants to horse racing from now on.”

“We believe this decision is an admission that previous grants to horse racing have been in violation of their Trust Deed. We could still pursue legal action for past liability but have achieved what we wanted. This means that grassroots sports and community groups will get more money in the future,” Graeme Ramsey said.

“All other Pokie Trusts with charitable Trust Deeds should immediately follow suit and stop grants to horse racing”.

Graeme Ramsey said the Problem Gambling Foundation would also like Central Government to look at whether pokie trusts are the most efficient or transparent method of distributing hundreds of millions of pokie losses back to the community.

“Every day we see the harm caused by pokie machine gambling – child neglect, crime, desperation. The community deserves to be getting as much charitable funding as possible given this high social cost, especially during a recession when charitable groups are under enormous pressure. Instead this money is currently subsidizing another form of gambling,” he said.

Ends

9 June 2009

Gambling and Crime – is it on the increase?

New Zealand has recently seen a surge of gambling related crimes before the courts.

There is the mother in Whangarei who stole \$8900 after using pokie machines, the Real Estate agent in Wellington who stole \$66,000 to fuel his gambling problem, and the ongoing saga of the ex rugby players caught up in fraud related to a pokie charity.

David Coom, Communications Director at the Problem Gambling Foundation says all these stories hide the real misery that gambling is creating and the huge cost to society of this multi-billion dollar industry.

“The only winner in gambling is the \$16 billion annual turnover gambling industry. The cost for the rest of us is paying the costs of crime, paying the economic costs associated with relationship and family break-ups and mental health issues caused by gambling,” he says.

Research carried out by SHORE, Massey University, estimated that up to 10,000 New Zealanders within the last year are engaged in illegal activities because of their gambling.

Price Waterhouse Coopers Director of Forensic Services painted a poignant profile of who would be involved in fraud and it was “female, working in payroll or accounts payable positions, more often than not pokie machines.....”

David Coom says it is well known that the gambling industry are spending millions of dollars on advertising and most areas of gambling have shown an increase in returns.

“People who are facing huge financial pressures at the moment are falling prey to the deliberately designed ‘instant return’ pokie machines, the lure of the life-changing lottery products, and the slick campaigns of the casinos,” he says.

“In this financial recession we would expect more gambling related crimes as people are more desperate and the industry continues to aggressively pedal its products.”

Ends

11 June 2009

Record Lotteries Jackpot – a losing ticket.

Record jackpots are an insidious way of sucking people into gambling who can barely afford it says the Problem Gambling Foundation.

The Big Wednesday lotto jackpot has reached a New Zealand record of \$25.7 million and could go as high as \$30 million.

David Coom, Communications Director at the Problem Gambling Foundation says it is also a disaster for the wider community by creating a gambling culture.

"It creates a culture of envy and greed at a time when so many people are so vulnerable due to the fear and the reality of an economic recession," he says.

For next Wednesday's draw you can buy a losing ticket for the dream of winning \$24 million in cash, and an Audi R8, a Porsche Cayenne, a \$250,000 cash prize for travel, a powerboat, and a \$750,000 cash prize towards a bach.

"Sales can more than double during very large jackpots and we have had clients that have spent hundreds of dollars on tickets because they have been caught up in the hype that Lotto creates around their products," David Coom says.

"They spend millions of dollars annually on advertising and promotion of gambling which basically says to people 'if you are desperate, have major financial problems, or want your life totally changed, then this is the way to do it'. But for a significant number of New Zealanders, this selling of an impossible dream is just a 'cruel hoax'," he says.

David Coom believes Government should take a far more responsible attitude around gambling and there should be a review of lotteries which looks at sizes of jackpots, greater transparency of your chances of winning, and a review of selling online.

Ends

Tuesday 16 June 2009

Lotteries Commission the only ones smiling

The Lotteries Commission will be the only real winner from this week's record jackpot.

David Coom, Communications Director at the Problem Gambling Foundation says revenue from 2008 shows an increase of \$33 million from 2007 and on the back of these jackpots 2009 is bound to be another bumper year for them.

"The Lotteries Commission is showing a lack of responsibility as for some people, big jackpots create a gambling obsession. We know that problem gamblers are costing our community through crime and stripping money from poorer communities," he says.

"For this Wednesday's draw you can buy a ticket and a fantasy of winning a \$25.7 million cash prize plus the Audi, Porsche, travel, cash, bach and powerboat."

David Coom says the Lotteries Commission may argue that the money goes back into the community but that is not the reality.

"The bulk of prize money will go to a handful of people and if you add the \$300 million plus to run lotteries, you have a direct drain on our community. Whichever way you look at it, gambling at this level creates a net loss for our communities and creates a gambling environment with further costs for the taxpayer in dealing with problem gambling victims and their families," he says.

David Coom believes the Government needs to review the purpose of the state controlled Lotteries and what impact it is having on fuelling a gambling environment in NZ where only a few are real winners at the cost of the whole community.

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