

Media release

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Making pokies safer – we have the technology

Smart cards and pre-commitment systems for gaming machines could be the answer to making pokies safer, and the technology already exists.

Technology, and the part it plays in creating safer gambling environments, will be addressed at the 2010 International Gambling Conference - *Gambling in the 21st Century - the Implications of Technology for Policy, Practice and Research*, being held at Auckland's Crowne Plaza Hotel, from 24 to 26 February.

Graeme Ramsey, Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, says technology is one way of making electronic gaming machines safer.

"Pokies are dangerous products and we already know the harm they cause in our communities," he says.

"At PGF over 80 percent of people we see have problems from pokies."

"New Zealand would be better off if we threw them all in the sea but while they do exist, we need to use the technology we have available and make whatever changes we can to limit the impact of problem gambling."

"Player tracking and pre-commitment systems are a big part of this as it means gamblers can play within 'safe spending' and time limits that they set themselves," Graeme Ramsey says.

The Australian Productivity Commission Draft Report estimates that 40 percent of pokie revenue is from problem gambling and they propose that states should implement by 2016, a universal pre-commitment system for gaming machines that would allow players to 'pre-set' limits on the amount and duration of their gambling.

Gary Brown, CEO of Hapai Te Hauora Tapui Maori Public Health, says this system would go a long way towards making pokies safer.

"Norway already uses smart cards and the technology is a proven way to reduce the harm caused by problem gambling - this approach has to be smarter than being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff," Gary Brown says.

Recent research, conducted by Australian and New Zealand authors, including Professor Max Abbott, Director of AUT University's Gambling and Addictions Research Centre, shows a clear link between electronic gaming machine numbers, accessibility and problem gambling.

The 2010 International Gambling Conference is hosted by the Gambling and Addictions Research Centre, Auckland University of Technology, Hapai Te Hauora Tapui Maori Public Health and the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand.

Over 200 delegates are expected at the conference from around New Zealand and overseas, including Australia, USA, Singapore, Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

For further information about the conference and to view the programme visit:

www.aut-grc.ac.nz or www.pgfnz.org.nz

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