Facts at a glance

Demographics: 02

Gambling and older Australians

wesley mission
driven to do more good

OVERVIEW

Gambling harm among older Australians is a growing concern, as this group of people face unique vulnerabilities, including a range of social, psychological and financial factors. Industry tactics such as targeted venue incentives and making venues accessible increase the risk of gambling harm in older people.

RISK FACTORS

Individual risks [1 2 3]

- Unmet psychological needs from significant life events, the need to reduce stress or escape bereavement.
- Change in income and/or professional status may result in gambling to supplement income.
- Perceptions of personal safety at gambling venues. Venues being accessible (close to home, easy to get to) and having security guards have an impact on older women choosing to visit gambling venues. Older women can also see gambling venues as a refuge from violent home environments.

Social risks [4]

- Maintaining social connections and reducing social isolation. Electronic Gaming Machines are seen by many as mainly a social activity.
- The belief that gambling on EGMs is supporting the local community through giving money to the local clubs.

Environmental risks [5 6 7]

- Older people are sought after by venues due to their increased free time in retirement as a means to “fill the floor during off-peak hours”.
- Venues often attract older people to engage with gambling through incentives such as discounted or free meals and drinks, and some offer free transport to and from the venue. This practice increases risk of gambling harm as it may attract older people who would not necessarily have gone to the venue.
- In regional/rural communities older Australians do not have many other entertainment or socialising opportunities “but to go to a club”.
- Gambling and homelessness are often linked. Gambling can cause sudden homelessness for older people and is at the same time attractive to people who are homeless as venues offer comfort, safety and the hope of sudden winnings.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

In addition to ordinary feelings of denial, shame or guilt, which stop many people seeking help, older people are often isolated and lack access to other forms of support services, which might refer them to gambling counselling. If they do contact trusted services, GPs, home care or homelessness intervention services often don't screen for gambling harm. Older people are also more likely to find it a challenge to access gambling help information via online services. Support includes simply providing a wider variety of activity options for older people, so they don't have to rely on gambling venues for social links. Older people can benefit from receiving information on how poker machines work, explaining perceptions of chance and luck, and learning about features that are risky. Community education campaigns should always include components directed at older people. [9]

Advocating for reform

Wesley Mission has put this fact sheet together as part of our advocacy for reform to minimise gambling harm. Our current campaign goals are to:

- implement universal cashless gambling with harm reduction measures built-in
- power-down poker machines after midnight
- fund an independent state-wide self-exclusion register
- let communities have a say
- have greater transparency in NSW – publish venue data.

Contact us: gambling.reform@wesleymission.org.au

For more information: https://tinyurl.com/PutPokiesInTheirPlace

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