



## A Public Health Approach to Reducing Gambling Harm

This position statement outlines HealthWest Partnership's commitment to a public health approach to reducing gambling harm.

### **Why is this a priority?**

Gambling causes significant harm to individual gamblers, their families, their relationships, and the communities they live in<sup>i</sup>. Gambling has a significant negative impacts on physical, social, financial and emotional wellbeing. Gambling harm can be long term and multi-generational, with the capacity to be experienced many years after the activity has ceased.

The historic focus on gambling as an individual problem has led to widespread stigma and shame. It is now widely acknowledged that gambling is a complex public health issue, requiring a broad range of approaches and collaboration across sectors.

HealthWest recognises that it is not only frequent, or gamblers with high losses, who are at risk of harm. 50% of the total population harm from gambling is attributed to low risk gamblers, 35% of harm is attributed to moderate risk gamblers and only 15% to problem gamblers<sup>ii</sup>.

HealthWest has led projects in gambling harm reduction since 2008. Reflecting the substantial financial losses from electronic gaming machines (EGM) in our catchment, the current focus of HealthWest activity is on reducing harm from EGM's.

### **What will HealthWest do?**

HealthWest is committed to a public health approach to gambling harm reduction.

HealthWest will work in partnership with a range of stakeholders to develop public health responses to gambling harm that reflect the needs and strengths of our diverse communities.

HealthWest supports the need for a full spectrum of public health initiatives to reduce gambling harm including but not limited to:

- Addressing the social determinants of health
- Provision of safe alternative forms of recreation
- Education and awareness raising
- Regional and statewide campaigns
- Regional and statewide policy and practice improvements
- EGM and venue reform
- Improved access to support services for gamblers and their families

Recognising that 'gambling as a public health issue' is as an emergent field, HealthWest will advocate for continued development of research, policy and practice models that reduce gambling harm.

## Endorsed by the HealthWest Partnership Board

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<sup>i</sup> Browne, M, Langham, E, Rawat,V, Greer, N, Li, E, Rose, J, Rockloff,M, Donaldson, P, Thorne, H, Goodwin, B, Bryden, G & Best Victorian (2016) *Assessing Gambling-Related Harm in Victoria: A Public Health Perspective*, Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.

<sup>ii</sup> Browne, M, Langham, E, Rawat,V, Greer, N, Li, E, Rose, J, Rockloff,M, Donaldson, P, Thorne, H, Goodwin, B, Bryden, G & Best Victorian (2016) *Assessing Gambling-Related Harm in Victoria: A Public Health Perspective*, p.133, Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.