

TALKING ABOUT GAMBLING

Considerations for Community Workers



Context

This resource contains a list of considerations for community workers when talking to clients about gambling. The considerations listed have been identified by community workers at Whittlesea Community Connections, following a Gambler's Help training session for staff.

Considerations

1. Gambling is often viewed as a 'harmless' form of entertainment.

Gambling is extremely normalised in Victoria and viewed by society as a "harmless" form of entertainment. Electronic gaming machines in particular are highly accessible, contained within many hotels, clubs and bars – often within close proximity to major shopping precincts. It is rarely acknowledged that overexposure to gambling products and advertising can lead to individuals experiencing harm.

2. The difference between 'gambling' and 'gaming' is not widely understood.

Many people do not recognise the difference between gaming and gambling:

- Gaming – Generally refers to hobbies and social pass-time activities such as board games, video games and smart phone apps. They involve skill-based play and contextual indicators of progression and success. Gaming can be very popular in certain cultural groups.
- Gambling – Generally refers to betting and wagering, predominantly on chance based outcomes. Gambling also has monetisation features that involve risk and payout to the player. Types of gambling include casino games, lotteries, electronic gaming machines, bingo, Keno and TAB.

Gaming features are often used in the design of electronic gaming machines to make them more appealing to the user. Additionally, the Victorian Gambling Industry will often use gaming language to describe their gambling products – encouraging individuals to view gambling as a form of ‘entertainment’. This can lead to feelings of confusion over what is considered gaming and what is considered gambling – especially for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

3. Individuals are unlikely to admit to experiencing issues with gambling.

Individuals are unlikely to admit to experiencing issues with gambling due to stigma and feelings of shame. Additionally, many faiths forbid gambling behaviours, making it even more difficult for people to admit to experiencing harm. Different strategies to identify client gambling can include:

- Direct questioning, such as –
 - “Have you ever had an issue with your gambling?”
 - “Have you ever had an issue with someone else’s gambling? Tell me about your gambling behaviour? Do you enjoy gambling? Do you gamble regularly?”
 - “Tell me about your gambling behaviour? Do you enjoy gambling? Do you gamble regularly?”
 - “During the past 12 months, was there a time when you felt your gambling had a harmful effect on your relationships, physical health, social life, work, studies, or employment opportunities?”
- Circular questioning, such as –
 - “Are there any particular stresses that might be contributing to the way you feel (sad, angry, alone, afraid), such as financial problems?”
 - “Can you tell me about your daily routine?”

Individuals may also deny having issues with gambling due to fear it could impact upon their ability to access services and support from your agency. It is important to communicate to clients that their service access will not be impacted if they admit to experiencing harm from gambling.

4. It is commonly perceived that people who experience harm from gambling are ‘problem gamblers’.

Over 85% of people that experience harm from gambling are considered ‘low risk’ or ‘moderate risk’, not people experiencing significant issues with gambling. This contradicts common belief, which is that gambling harm only affects “problem gamblers”. Not only is gambling harm more common than we realise but in actual fact, it is affecting 1 in 10 Victorians. Further more the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation is encouraging community workers to no longer use the term “problem gambler” as it is damaging to the individual, encourages stereotyping and reinforces the false perception that gambling harm only affects a small sub-group of the population. An alternative term community workers can use is ‘a person experiencing significant issues with gambling’.

5. Harm from gambling is not merely financial.

It is widely understood that gambling harm can negatively impact upon a person’s finances. What is less understood is that harm from gambling can also have a detrimental effect on a person’s:

- Relationships – causing conflict and breakdown.
- Psychological and emotional state – causing shame and regret.
- Physical health – causing increased drinking, smoking and high blood pressure.
- Community and cultural practices – causing cultural based shame and social exclusion.
- Performance at work or study – causing absenteeism and job loss.

If you suspect a client may be experiencing harm from gambling, some ‘warning signs’ to look out for include:

- Frequently seeking unexplained emergency financial assistance.
- Ongoing financial problems that can’t be logically explained.
- Complaints about unexplained stress, anxiety or sleeplessness.
- Poor health or nutrition.
- Relationship issues that seem to involve a lack of trust in their partner.
- Feelings of guilt over mood swings, anger or frustration directed towards their family or friends.

6. Gambler's Help can provide support to individuals in many ways.

Gambler's Help North & North Western is the local provider of Gambler's Help services for people that live in the north western metropolitan region of Melbourne. They provide a range of support services, including:

- Counselling
- Financial counselling
- Peer connection
- Support for family and friends
- Community education

There are no waiting lists for appointments and all services are free and confidential. Gambler's Help can be contacted 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday on Western 1300 133 445 or ghnintake@bchs.org.au. Alternatively, community workers can refer clients to Gambler's Help North & North Western by completing this [E-referral form](#).

Outside of standard business hours individuals can call the Gambler's Helpline on 1800 858 858 for 24 hour assistance.

For more information

For more information about the tips contained within this resource contact Whittlesea Community Connections on 9401 6666 or admin@whittleseacc.org.au.