

The Queensland Responsible Gambling Strategy

A partnership approach



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Foreword

It is timely to present the Queensland Responsible Gambling Strategy, which consolidates the significant achievements already made towards responsible gambling in Queensland and provides the framework for future action. The proactive measures contained in the Strategy aim to minimise the likelihood of social problems arising and provide support for those who encounter problems with gambling. Above all, the Strategy contributes to the balance between the social and economic benefits and costs of gambling in Queensland.

In April 2000, we released the *Policy Direction for Gambling in Queensland* following extensive public consultation. The Policy Direction highlighted the need for an overarching strategy to address social issues that had arisen from the rapid growth of gambling in Queensland. The initiatives outlined in the Strategy reflect the Government's response to public concern about the potential adverse impacts of gambling.

The Strategy includes problem gambling prevention initiatives, community education, an industry code of practice, early intervention approaches, expanded treatment and support services and a comprehensive research agenda. In many areas substantial progress has already been made, while in others new measures are required.

In Queensland, the unique partnership established between the community, gambling industry and the Queensland Government is the cornerstone of our approach to responsible gambling. The Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee provides a forum for diverse interest groups to work together to achieve ethical and responsible approaches to gambling. This partnership is essential to our future achievements in responsible gambling.

The Queensland Responsible Gambling Strategy is a firm foundation for us to continue to work together in the interests of all Queenslanders.



Honourable Terry Mackenroth MP
Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport

Why do we need a responsible gambling strategy?

For many people, gambling is an enjoyable leisure and entertainment activity. For others, participation in gambling can lead to problems. The Strategy was developed to minimise harm caused by problem gambling.

The Strategy provides the framework to develop and deliver responsible gambling initiatives in a planned and coordinated manner. It addresses the impacts of problem gambling on individuals, families and communities. There is a focus on preventing problem gambling arising, as well as on developing treatment and support options.

Defining problem gambling

The Productivity Commission's report, *Australia's Gambling Industries (1999)*, identified the impacts of gambling on a continuum ranging from no adverse consequences to severe problem gambling. Severe problem gambling affects not only people who gamble, but also extends to partners, families and the broader community. Some of the consequences of problem gambling can include guilt, depression, suicide, debt, poverty, divorce and involvement in crime.

Problem gambling exists when gambling activity results in a range of adverse consequences where:

- the safety and wellbeing of gambling consumers or their family or friends are placed at risk, and/or
- negative impacts extend to the broader community.

Defining responsible gambling

Responsible gambling refers to a safer approach to gambling involving informed and educated decision making by consumers. Responsible gambling also incorporates harm minimisation approaches. This means developing initiatives designed to improve the health and wellbeing of people affected by problem gambling.

The following definition highlights the concepts of social responsibility and informed decision making as central to a responsible gambling approach.

Responsible gambling occurs in a regulated environment where the potential for harm associated with gambling is minimised and people make informed decisions about their participation in gambling. Responsible gambling occurs as a result of the collective actions and shared ownership by individuals, communities, the gambling industry and Government to achieve outcomes that are socially responsible and responsive to community concerns.

How will we achieve responsible gambling outcomes?

The overarching objective of the Queensland Responsible Gambling Strategy is to minimise the harmful impacts of problem gambling. This requires specific actions to reduce the prevalence and impacts of problem gambling.

Approaches

The Strategy is based on a public health approach which views problem gambling as a complex issue requiring multiple solutions. It includes prevention, protection and rehabilitation initiatives. The Strategy will be delivered through partnerships between community, industry and Government on responsible gambling issues.

Priority Action Areas

Six areas are identified for priority action. Each of these contributes to reducing the prevalence of problem gambling and the impact of problem gambling when it does arise.

These are:

1. enhance responsible gambling policies and programs through research;
2. increase community knowledge and awareness of the impacts of gambling;
3. reduce the risk factors for problem gambling through early intervention;
4. develop a statewide system of problem gambling treatment and support services;
5. ensure gambling environments are safer and more supportive for consumers; and
6. promote partnerships to address statewide and local gambling issues and concerns.

Priority Action Area 1 *Enhance responsible gambling policies and programs through research*

Queensland is currently developing an integrated research program to examine the social and economic implications of gambling for Queensland. The program will be aimed at developing new knowledge related to prevention, protection and rehabilitation initiatives.

We need to know more about gambling and its effects on Queenslanders and the most effective prevention and treatment approaches available. A key study to provide this information is the Population Baseline Study, due for completion in April 2002. This will establish baseline data related to the prevalence of problem gambling in Queensland. It will also further expand the national body of knowledge in respect of the impacts of problem gambling.

The research program will also evaluate the effectiveness of responsible gambling initiatives including the impact of responsible gambling information campaigns, the impact of introducing responsible gambling into the school curriculum and the effectiveness of the Queensland Responsible Gambling Code of Practice within the gambling industry.

In addition, Queensland contributes to the development of the national gambling research agenda through participation in national bodies such as the Ministerial Council on Gambling Research Working Party.



Priority Action Area 2
Increase community knowledge and awareness of the impacts of gambling

This is a preventative approach which aims to influence community attitudes. Information is provided to alert people to the risks of problem gambling and to inform them about responsible gambling approaches. Community education and awareness strategies will be targeted to the whole population, as well as to specific groups or communities.

Community education and awareness strategies will include a multilevel approach targeted at specific groups including:

- young people, through the development of curriculum modules in responsible gambling; and
- health and social welfare professionals, through education and training for early identification of problem gambling.

Responsible gambling community education programs in Queensland will complement any national programs undertaken as well as those developed to meet specific local community needs.

Priority Action Area 3
Reduce the risk factors for problem gambling through early intervention

Early intervention is a key risk reduction strategy. Problem gambling treatment outcomes can be improved through early intervention, as help is received before problems become entrenched. It involves identifying groups who are at risk and targeting those groups through communication and outreach activities.

Promoting public perception of problem gambling as a health issue will also encourage help seeking and lead to improved rates of early presentation for treatment.

Some examples of early intervention initiatives which contribute to risk reduction include:

- the development of problem gambling assessment tools for use in health and other community settings for early identification of problems; and
- outreach initiatives that provide information, screening for problem gambling, referral or brief treatment.

How will we achieve responsible gambling outcomes?

Priority Action Area 4 ***Develop a statewide system of problem gambling treatment and support services***

The Policy Direction outlined a commitment to expand support services for people adversely affected by problem gambling. A subsequent study examining the need for gambling-related support services across the State provides the framework for an expanded service system.

Specific issues in relation to the further development of the service system include:

- the availability of treatment and support services in regional, rural and remote locations;
- the need for a broader range of treatment and support interventions; and
- the need for standards and specialised training for counsellors in problem gambling interventions.

Support and treatment services need to be effective, accessible and culturally appropriate. In addition, treatment options and supportive interventions need to be available and tailored to meet the individual needs of each client. This can be through providing brief intervention, longer-term treatment or a case management approach.

Interventions can include:

- problem gambling assessment and needs assessment;
- telephone and crisis counselling;
- counselling including addictions, financial and relationship counselling;
- individual advocacy and practical support;
- education and support groups; and
- information, advice and referral, including access to other services.

Priority Action Area 5 ***Ensure gambling environments are safer and more supportive for consumers***

Responsible gambling practices within the gambling industry act as prevention and consumer protection measures. This approach aims to reduce the likelihood of gambling consumers moving from recreational gambling to involvement in problem gambling.

A key strategy is the development of an industry code of practice to promote responsible practices by operators as well as informed decision making by consumers. It incorporates practices including provision of information to consumers and responsible advertising provisions. These aim to create gambling environments where harm to individuals and the broader community is minimised.

Priority Action Area 6 ***Promote partnerships to address statewide and local gambling issues and concerns***

In Queensland we share the challenge of responsible gambling in a unique partnership between the community, gambling industry and the Queensland Government.

The Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee is the statewide body which brings together diverse groups to achieve sustainable and responsible approaches to gambling. Consultation mechanisms are also required at the regional level to guide the implementation of the Strategy and ensure it is responsive to local needs.

The Strategy takes account of the important differences between regional, metropolitan, rural and remote communities in Queensland. The effects of gambling will differ between regions and communities and responses are required to meet local conditions. Regional implementation of the Strategy will focus on building the capacity of communities to promote responsible gambling practices and respond to local gambling issues.

Partnerships with Indigenous communities, with culturally diverse communities and other target groups are also critical to the success of the Strategy.



Principles and practices for implementation

Consultation and monitoring

The Strategy outlines future directions in responsible gambling. Advisory mechanisms will be established to inform implementation and monitor the progress of the Strategy. These include local consultative arrangements and Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee reference groups. Implementation of the Strategy will also be underpinned by the following principles and practices.

Access and participation

All people will have access to assistance and support programs for gambling problems regardless of their individual circumstances, characteristics or backgrounds. Utilisation rates of support services will reflect the prevalence of problem gambling within specific groups in the community.

Equity

Help with problem gambling is provided on the basis of recognition that different groups may need different levels of support to achieve equitable outcomes.

Cultural appropriateness

Initiatives are responsive to the needs of diverse communities and take account of cultural diversity in the community.

Early intervention

Early identification and assistance is provided to support people in dealing with problem gambling.

Evidence-based practice

Policy and practice interventions are outcome-focused, based on research into what works best, and informed by ongoing evaluation.

Flexibility and diversity

Flexible interventions are developed under this Strategy including problem gambling treatment and support options.



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