

Gambler's Help - City and Inner North

A Therapeutic Perspective on Treating Gambling Related Harm During and Post COVID-19 Lockdown



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Acknowledgement of Country

- **I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you all work today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here**
- **I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the land of Victoria**



Presenter

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Gamblers Help City and Inner North

- Individual Therapy
- Couple Therapy
- Group Work
- Financial Counselling
- Community Engagement
- Venue Support



Gambling: A bio-psycho-social model: The hidden harms

- The role of neurotransmitters
- Mental health: Depression, Anxiety, suicidal ideation etc.
- External Stressors: grief and loss, family violence, relationship breakdown, social isolation

The Hidden Harms of Gambling

- Relationship difficulties
- Health problems
- Emotional or psychological distress (42% of people experiencing problem gambling have been diagnosed with depression.)

Hidden harms of gambling

- financial problems
- issues with work or study
- cultural problems
- criminal activity.

Intake and Assessment during COVID-19 Lockdown

- Increased stressors and anxiety
- Increased financial needs/concerns
- Increased use of other ‘coping’ strategies other than gambling
 - AOD use
 - Online shopping
 - Eating
 - TV
 - Other forms of gambling (scratchies, share trading, cryptocurrency)
- Online gambling increasing for some, including online EGMS.

Impact of lockdown

- Feelings of relief, increase in savings
- Some increase in awareness of urges and thoughts about gambling.
- Feelings of anxiety, anger, projected feelings if unable to gamble
- Anxiety about what will happen when gaming venues open back up
- Clients focusing on relapse prevention and development of positive coping strategies during this time.

Assessment: lockdown ending

- Heightened anxiety and urges leading up to lockdown ending
- Some clients experienced a 'floodgates' effect: immediate return to gambling venues
- Some clients spending all of savings in short space of time
- Some clients avoided venues or awareness of venue opening guidelines for some time (weeks or months)
- Spike in gambling spend a couple months after end of lockdown

Superannuation

- Persons struggling financially or having lost more than 10% of their income could access Super
- Persons who did access Super spent approximately \$3000 more per fortnight during lockdown than previous
- After paying debts, gambling was the next highest expenditure per fortnight
- We don't know how much of the debt was also gambling related

Support and treatment during COVID-19 lockdown

Move into remote work and lockdown

- Initial sessions with clients by phone only then via COVIU (online face to face platform)
- No casino, EGM and TAB venues open. No NBA or AFL for the first few weeks.
- Increase in alcohol use/ compulsive shopping
- Increase in illicit drug use

Availability

- No access to MAP forensic clients
- Groups for forensic referrals not running (offered individual counselling instead)
- Continued to offer counselling and couple therapy remotely.
- Continued to offer Art Therapy
- Continued to offer Mindfulness
- Financial Counsellors also still available

Post COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Benefits and negative impacts of COVID-19 restrictions.

Therapist perspective

- Clients at risk of homelessness return to rooming houses etc...and reduced incomes
- Relapses for EGM/TAB clients due to venues reopening
- Accessible counselling for a wider range of people.
- Decrease in DNA appointments

Trends in gambling related harm

- Gaming to Gambling
- Skills based EGMs
- Online Gambling
- Too early to tell..

Screening for Gambling

- **Have you ever had an issue with your gambling? or**
- **Has anyone in your family ever had an issue with gambling?**

References

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Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation:

<https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/gambling-victoria/gambling-harm-victoria/types-harm>



Many ways to get help

- Gamblers Help services provide support, advice and information for anyone affected by gambling, including friends and family;
- The services are free and confidential;
- Services are offered in City & Inner North, Southern, Eastern, Northern and Western Melbourne, Geelong and regional areas. Culturally and linguistically diverse services are offered and for Aboriginal communities.
- [Gambler's Help services \(responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au\)](https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au)



Phone



Face
to face



Help
yourself



Financial
counselling



Online
support



Peer
support



Young
people



Friends
& family

How do I refer clients?

- Gambler's Helpline 1800 858 858 (24 hours)
- Warm referrals are welcome by telephoning Gambler's Help City & Inner North directly on 9653 3250 or email our Intake Officer mcsintake@aus.salvationarmy.org



**Gambler's
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1800 858 858

gamblershelp.com.au



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Other resources

For research and further information refer to

[Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation](#)

www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/for-professionals



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gamblershelp.com.au



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Survey

Please complete the survey by following the Link

to https://fpc.syd1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6rRz8cWyHXvhAvY

Activity Code is: INNE23



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