Gambling Harm Preventative Policy

Purpose

The *Gambling Harm Preventative Policy* aims to establish a comprehensive framework across all council functions, fulfilling the council's statutory responsibility of upholding community health and wellbeing by addressing gambling related harm.

The policy aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Articulate council's public health approach to gambling.
- Establish a robust, evidence-based, and consistent approach to planning and regulatory processes that effectively manage the location and operation of new and additional Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs).
- Build the community's capacity to engage in healthy lifestyles by facilitating a diverse range of non-gambling activities that cater to the interests and preferences of community members.
- Ensure the social and economic impacts associated with EGM's are considered with the goal of achieving net community benefit

The Gambling Harm Preventative Policy will serve as the foundation for developing and Implementing the Gambling Harm Preventative Action Plan tailored to engage the community and enact community action.

Scope

This policy applies to all the statutory responsibilities fulfilled by the council in protecting the community from gambling-related harm across various forms of gambling. While addressing all forms of gambling, the policy places particular emphasis on harm reduction related to EGMs.

While this policy provides support, it does not replace the processes associated with permit applications and planning scheme amendments governed by *the Planning and Environment Act 1987*, nor does it replace the submission procedures for EGM licensing applications under the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003*.

Definitions

Advocacy	Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy
Community	Refers to the people who have a stake and interest in the City of Wodonga and includes the following: • Those who live, work, study, conduct business or provide services in the municipality. • Those involved in local community groups or organisations. • Those who visit, use, or enjoy the services, facilities and public places located within the municipality. • Those who share an interest, a sense of identity or a shared common goal.
Council	Wodonga City Council
Council-owned land	Land owned by Council, including vacant land, discontinued roads, and any building and development thereon.
Electronic Gaming	Known colloquially as "pokies" or slot machines, electronic gaming machines are random number-generating computers designed to imitate

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Machine (EGM)	older lever-operated machines with physical spinning "reels". EGMs are often found in casinos or hotels and are legal in Victoria.
Equity	Equity means that available information, spaces, services, and programs should deliver outcomes that are equal for all. This requires that services be able to consider and respond to the intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination to truly cater to all diverse needs.
Gambling-related harm	Any initial or exacerbated adverse consequence due to an engagement with gambling that leads to a decrement to the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community, or population.[1] These harms include relationship breakdown, compromised mental and physical health and wellbeing, financial losses, demand for services, lost work productivity and crime.
Partnership	A relationship between Council and stakeholders, and between stakeholders themselves that involves shared responsibilities for implementing a range of actions that seek to achieve a common goal such as upholding community health and wellbeing.
Policy	Sets out Council's values with respect to a particular matter. It includes a set of principles or rules that provide a definite direction for the organisation.
Public Health Approach	A public health approach involves utilising scientific knowledge, evidence-based strategies, and community-based interventions to improve the health and well-being of populations by focusing on prevention, health promotion, and addressing the underlying determinants of health.
Stakeholder	An individual or group identified with a strong interest in a particular topic in regard to the decision-making of the Council and are directly affected by the outcome of any decisions.
Vulnerable groups	Groups within the community at an elevated risk of gambling-related harms because of their age, socio-economic status, gender, cultural and linguistic background, or exposure to opportunities to gamble.

Policy

As a leader, advocate, service provider, regulator and planner, council is committed to protecting the community from gambling related harm, whilst also acknowledging the importance of preserving the right to engage in legal recreational activities.

It is the position of Wodonga Council that gambling is a public health issue which impacts not just individuals but entire families and communities. In all decision-making processes regarding gambling, council will prioritise the health and well-being of individuals and the community. To achieve this, council will adopt a public health approach, which is underpinned by the following principles:

- Equity: Gambling-related harm should not be disproportionately experienced by vulnerable groups within the community. Efforts to address gambling-related harms will prioritise reducing health inequities.
- Prevention Oriented: Strategies will take a community-wide perspective on health, prioritising actions that aim to prevent harm from occurring in the first place, rather than solely addressing harm once it has already occurred.

[1] Browne, M, Langham, E, Rawat, V, Greer, N, Li, E, Rose, J, Rockloff, M, Donaldson, P, Thorne, H, Goodwin, B, Bryden, G & Best, T 2016, Assessing gambling-related harm in Victoria: a public health perspective, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.

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- Collaboration: While the council can offer leadership, preventing and minimising gambling-related harm requires the involvement of various stakeholders and agencies, underscoring the need for a collaborative and intersectional approach.
- Evidence based: Strategies and actions will be based on a robust and transparent evidence base.
- Social Determinants of health: Gambling-related harm is influenced by a range of factors, including socio-cultural, political, economic, environmental, and health-related determinants. Efforts to address gambling-related harm will consider the broader determinants of health.

In accordance with these principles, council is committed to fulfilling its legislative role and assuming a leadership position in an effort to address gambling-related harm, through its local government mechanisms, focusing on the following four key areas:

1. **Planning and regulation**

It is Wodonga Council policy to:

- Undertake social and economic impact assessments to understand potential impacts of proposals and inform decisions made on planning permit applications under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and Wodonga Planning Scheme.
- Undertake social and economic impact assessments to understand the potential for a proposal to result in a net benefit/detriment to the community and inform a submission to an application for a gaming licence submitted under the Gambling Regulation Act 2003.
- Formulate conditions to be included in planning permits considered under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and Wodonga Planning Scheme.
- Enforce planning permit conditions.

Council also has a duty of care and limited statutory role in protecting children, families and the community under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Council will only support any proposal for additional gaming machines or new gaming venues into the municipality should the following criteria be met:

- Electronic gaming is offered alongside other social and recreation activities for adults such as leisure, entertainment, food, community facilities and services. Location within or neighbouring an Activity Centre defined by council planning processes is preferred to promote protection of residential amenity, harm minimisation and provide community benefit.
- The venue is not located neighbouring or nearby an education facility or premise where the principal activities focus on persons under the age of 18 years.
- The rate of electronic gaming machines (EGMs) per 1000 adults in the region would not exceed the Victorian rate.

Council will prohibit EGMs within Council-owned facilities and on Council's technical assets. Additionally, any advertising that promotes gambling participation on Council-owned and/or managed facilities is also prohibited.

2. **Advocacy**

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Council plays a significant statutory role to act on the needs and concerns of the community and represent these views to the appropriate governing bodies. Council will advocate to State and Federal Governments for stronger harm minimisation measures that protect the community against the adverse effects of gambling-related harm and place effort in improving the accessibility and availability of non-gambling activities as viable alternatives. This includes advocating for future investments in community infrastructure, programs, cultural activities, and events that contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

3. Collaboration and partnerships

The Council is committed to fostering collaboration and partnerships to improve access to services, information, and activities that effectively address the impacts of gambling-related harm and enhance community awareness. This involves actively engaging with local organisations and other levels of government to expand the range of non-gambling activities that yield comprehensive benefits to the community. By promoting such collaborations, the Council aims to create a supportive community network that offers valuable resources, knowledge, and opportunities for the health and well-being of residents.

4. Capacity building

Council plays a key role in building the community's capacity to understand the risks and harms associated with gambling activities and to participate in non-gambling social, leisure, entertainment, and recreational activities.

Related legislation

Local Government Act 2020 (Vic), S. 8 & 9
Gambling Regulation Act 2003 (Vic) S. 3.3 & 3.4
Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission Act 2011, S. 8, 9 & 37
Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic), S. 4(2) (d), 6(2) (d) & 7(3) (b), 61
Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 (Vic), S. 24, 25, 26 & 27

Review

Council may review this policy at any time but unless otherwise requested at least every four years from date of adoption. Minor amendments to the policy may be authorised by the CEO at any time where such changes do not alter the substance of the policy e.g.: typographical errors, a change to the name of a related policy, or a change to the name of legislation.

Title:	Gambling Harm Preventative Policy
Reference No:	
Business Unit:	Population Health and Wellbeing
Category:	
Approved By:	
Next Review:	

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