

Draft Banyule Gambling Harm Prevention Policy

2024 – 2028



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Acknowledgement of Country

Banyule City Council proudly acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past, present and emerging, who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the region's history.

Diversity Statement

Our community is made up of diverse cultures, beliefs, abilities, bodies, sexualities, ages and genders. Council is committed to access, equity, participation and rights for everyone; principles which empower, foster harmony and increase the wellbeing of an inclusive community.

Glossary

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| Gambling | The Gambling Regulation Act 2003 defines gambling as an activity in which: a. a prize of money or something else of value is offered or can be won; and b. a person pays or stakes money or some other valuable consideration to participate; and c. the outcome involves, or is presented as involving, an element of chance. It includes any game in which the chances are not equally favourable to all the players, including the banker or other person by whom the game is conducted or against whom the other players stake, play or bet. |
| Electronic Gambling Machines (EGM) | Also known as poker machines or pokies. |
| Gambling harm | Gambling related harm can be divided into seven key areas: Financial harm, relationship disruption, emotional or psychological distress, decrements to health, cultural harm, reduced work or study performance and criminal activity. These harms can further be considered as general harms (which occur at any time), crisis harms, which are associated with attempts to seek help, and legacy harms, which occur long after gambling has ceased. |
| Responsible Gambling | Responsible Gambling in a Victorian context refers to both the ways in which individuals can be empowered to control their gambling activity in a way that does not harm others and provides entertainment and enjoyment and the ways in which broader society including gambling providers, government and sporting associations provide support, education and reduce risks associated with gambling at an organisational/systemic level. |
| Public health approach | An approach to health which focuses on populations rather than individuals. |

Legislative context

The following legislation guides the work that Council will conduct through this draft policy.

Gambling Regulation Act 2003 provides provisions for Council to make submissions to the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC) in the form of a social and economic impact assessment for potential new applications for EGMs within its municipality or a neighbouring municipality.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 creates an obligation for Council to secure a pleasant, efficient and safe working, living and recreation environment for community and to balance the present and future interests of all residents. It delegates responsibility to Council to require a planning permit for all gambling machines within the municipality. Gambling machines are prohibited in shopping complexes specified in the schedule to Clause 52.28-3 of the Banyule Planning Scheme; and strip shopping centres specified in the schedule to Clause 52.28-4.

Local Government Act 2020 requires Council to achieve the best outcomes for the community and future generations.

Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 outlines local government responsibility to create environments which support the health of community members and strengthens the capacity of people to achieve better health.

Gender Equality Act 2020 requires Council to conduct a gender impact assessment for new policies.

Purpose & Scope

Many activities like smoking, consuming alcohol and gambling can cause harm to individuals, families and communities. While gambling is legal, Council has a role under the Local Government Act 2020 and the Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to take reasonable steps to prevent harm within the community, advocate, address gambling activities in Council-owned facilities and educate and partner with local support agencies.

This draft policy position builds upon Council's previous policies, with the key update being a new focus on online gambling, as we recognise that these gambling harms are growing and evolving. Taking a public health approach aligned with contemporary research and best practice, this draft policy emphasises system level approaches to harm prevention and minimisation, rather solely addressing individual behaviour change.

The development of draft policy was informed by:

- An extensive literature and data review, including a targeted review for the draft policy's Gender Impact Assessment.
- Internal and external stakeholder consultations including a six-week community consultation process. A variety of engagement methods were used to gather perspectives from stakeholders including surveys, pop ups, engagement with Banyule's population and committees, targeted engagement with gambling venues, and a community workshop.

Background

Gambling in Banyule

Gambling is defined by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation as:

‘Gambling/betting requires a player to risk losing something of value (usually money) for the chance of winning more. Gambling outcomes may depend on correctly predicting an uncertain outcome (such as a particular horse coming first in a race), or luck (such as a winning combination of symbols on a pokie machine)’

For the purposes of this draft policy, the following types of gambling (Electronic Gambling Machines, online gambling and sports and race betting) have been identified as causing the most harm due to their extractive nature (focus on extracting financial gain for the business). These identified types of gambling are the primary focus of our attention.

Electronic Gambling Machines

Electronic gambling machines (EGMs) are often referred to as slot machines or pokies. They feature games of chance and are designed to keep people gambling and losing money. Individuals choose to use EGM's for different reasons, including for entertainment, to socialise, for financial reasons, for coping reasons or to escape.

EGM's are commonly found in casinos, hotels, registered clubs, and Returned & Services League (RSL) sub-branches. Unlike for-profit operators, the RSL sub-branches in Banyule have a social mission and provide care, commemoration and camaraderie to enable veterans, their families and other community members to live with dignity and respect.

In 2023, in the City of Banyule there were 635 EGMs that operated across nine venues. In the period between July 2022 - June 2023 the highest rate of EGM losses were recorded at the Ivanhoe Hotel. This venue had 100 EGM's and the losses totalled \$10,581,964. The West Heidelberg RSL has the least losses of the nine venues in dollar terms (\$1,298,530), however the population is one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged in Banyule. The impact of gambling in the suburb of Watsonia is one of growing concern for Council. Watsonia's level of disadvantage, coupled with the high number of EGMs at the Watsonia RSL, compared to the size of the local population make this a population that is at high risk of gambling harm due to the relatively high availability of local EGMs.

After reviewing the trends of EGM losses in Banyule, we identified losses have steadily declined since 2002 (Figure 1). At the same time losses are decreasing, our population has increased, and this has led to the expenditure per adult in Banyule reducing even more sharply (Figure 2).

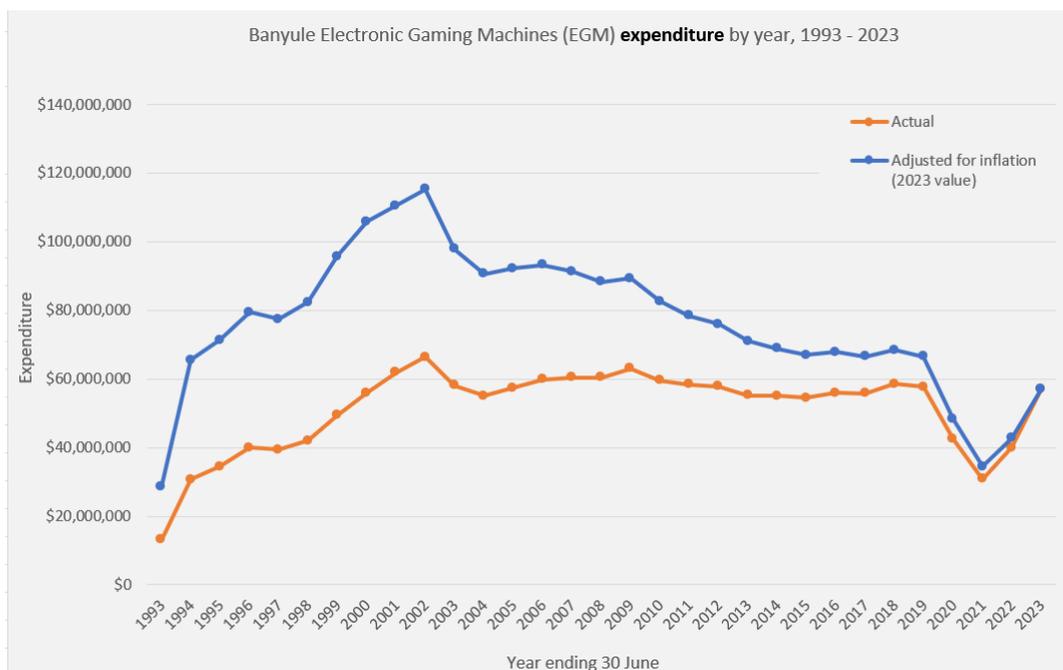


Figure 1: Banyule EGM expenditure by year

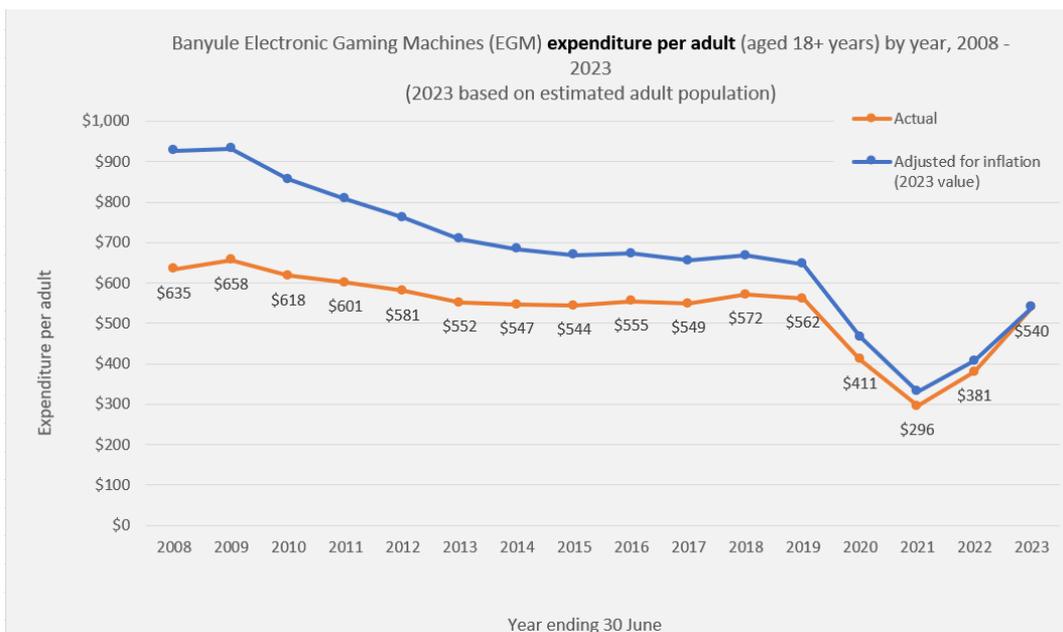


Figure 2: Banyule EGM expenditure per adult, by year

Data Sources: Expenditure (Victoria Gambling and Casino Control Commission); adult population (Victoria in Future 2019); inflation (Reserve Bank of Australia). Please note that the sharp decline and steep rise in EGM losses between 2020 – 2023 are the result of intermittent venue closures in 2020 – 2022 due to COVID, with 2023 being the first time since COVID that venues have been open across the entire year.

When comparing trends in gambling losses with reforms and other factors, we concluded that when access to EGM's is inhibited, gambling losses reduce. A key example of this was during the COVID lockdown periods in 2021, when losses significantly decreased due to extended periods where venue were closed. Further, we acknowledge the range and impact of Federal and State Government gambling reforms aimed at addressing gambling harm from EGM's over the past 20 years, and propose that these interventions have also contributed to the steady decline in losses in Banyule. In July 2023, the Victorian Government introduced new reforms, and it is hoped that these will lead to a further decrease in EGM losses in Banyule.

Online gambling

Various forms of gambling activities are available over the internet. This can include online versions of traditional casino games, sports betting platforms, virtual slot machines, games, and other digital gambling opportunities. Players participate through websites or applications.

While EGM losses are declining in our municipality, online gambling losses are generally increasing. In 2023, over 1 million advertisements were aired on television and radio mainly featuring online sports betting advertisingⁱⁱ. Further, we note the gambling-like elements that are becoming increasingly more widespread in videogames (especially mobile games).ⁱⁱⁱ Addressing online gambling is complex and requires interventions at levels beyond that of local government. These concerns have informed the advocacy priorities outlined in this draft policy.

Sports and race betting (including TAB)

Sports and race betting involves placing wagers on the outcome of sports events or races. People may bet on a variety of aspects, such as the winner, score, or specific occurrences during the event.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (2023) suggest that people are spending, and losing, more on sport and race betting in Victoria than ever before and estimate losses exceeded \$2.58 billion in 2021-22. Young people aged 18-24 seem to be overrepresented in sports betting, and factors include gambling advertising, inducements and incentives seem to be exacerbating the issue^{iv}.

Impact of gambling

Gambling can lead to harm, and this harm is preventable. In addition to financial implications, research shows that gambling that leads to harm can impact many aspects of life, including a person's health, wellbeing, work and relationships^v.

Evidence shows that gambling harm is not evenly distributed. While gamblers on higher incomes spend more money than those with lower incomes – something reflected in the gambling losses in Banyule– when considered in relative terms it is those on lower incomes who contribute the most to gambling losses.^{vi}

While many people experience gambling harm, it is more vulnerable and disadvantaged groups that tend to experience greater impacts associated with gambling.^{vii} These groups include women and gender diverse people, multicultural communities, people experiencing homelessness, unemployed people, people experiencing mental health issues, alcohol and drug users, and people with lower incomes and socio-economic status generally.

Research shows that gambling affects lower-income and vulnerable groups more than others, and for every person who struggles with gambling, there are six people affected.^{viii}

Gambling harm extends further than the individual gambler. We know that people with severe gambling problems on average affect six other people,^{ix} and the harms experienced by affected others are comparable to the harms experienced by the person gambling.^x While gambling does not directly cause intimate partner violence, research indicates it can intersect with and amplify various forms of abuse and control perpetrated by men against women.^{xi} There is also evidence to indicate that gambling venues may act as safe spaces for people escaping violence, which can entice people experiencing vulnerability to attend gambling venues.

Gender and Gambling

A Gender Impact Assessment was conducted as part of developing this draft policy. This revealed that women may experience increased gambling tendencies as their caregiving responsibilities decrease, leading to heightened vulnerability due to loneliness and social isolation^{xii}. Women, often in part-time or lower-income roles, are more susceptible to financial harm from gambling^{xiii}. Individuals with significant gambling issues negatively affect approximately six others, primarily spouses and children^{xiv}. Gambling impacts will often intersect with family violence, and the majority of victims are female^{xv}.

Social and Economic Impact Assessment

According to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC) must not grant an application for approval of premises as suitable for gambling unless it is satisfied that the net economic and social impact of approval will not be detrimental to the wellbeing of the community in the municipality in which the premises are located.

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate a considered planning approach to internal venue design, with clearly defined activity separation and compatible land uses within and external to the building envelope.

Under Sections 4(2)(c) and (2)(d) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, Council can undertake a Social and Economic Impact Assessment. Section 60(1A)(a) of the Act allows the Council as the Responsible Authority to consider "any significant social and economic effects of the use or development for which the application is made".

The following factors will be considered to determine whether harm caused by the application on the health, social and economic wellbeing of the Banyule community:

- The degree of the density of gambling venues and EGMs in the local area (10 km radius);
- Whether the relocation of EGMs would result in a reduction of EGMs in an area of socioeconomic disadvantage;
- The degree to which the community has choices of other types of recreational activities and entertainment facilities in the venue and the local area;
- The degree to which established social infrastructure, services and networks exist within the local area for community members to engage with for support when required; and
- The extent to which the applicant has demonstrated a commitment to the Industry Code of Practice for Responsible Gambling.
- The impact on gender and intersectional considerations for the local community and surrounding neighborhood

Furthermore, new gambling venues and additional EGMs should not be:

- In areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage.
- In strip shopping centres and shopping complexes.
- Where they are convenient to core retail areas, supermarkets, community facilities and services or bus interchanges where large numbers of pedestrians are likely to pass by in the course of their daily activities, increasing the likelihood of impulse decisions to play gambling machines.
- Within 400 metres of key support services, welfare agencies, gambler support services, schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, medical or health centres, libraries, community halls, supported or special accommodation or social housing developments.

Draft Policy principles

This draft policy is based on five guiding principles.

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| A public interest approach | Council's role is to plan for the best outcomes for our community, including future generations. We will concentrate on prevention and harm minimization by addressing the broader context and circumstances that contribute to gambling-related harm. This includes the role of the gambling industry and the distribution of gambling revenue through communities. |
| Evidence-based policy and initiatives | Our policy position is intentional, feasible and aligned, and addresses the drivers of gambling harm. In addition to research and data analysis, we value the input and feedback from the community to tailor our actions according to the unique experiences and requirements of our residents. |
| Uplifting safe and healthy community | Like other forms of harm, the negative impacts of gambling don't exist in isolation. This policy position closely aligns with our other community wellbeing approaches including Resilient and Safe Banyule, Inclusive Banyule, and our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. Our policy position does not address individual behaviour change, as these initiatives are best managed by specialist services. |
| Social justice | We understand that gambling harm disproportionately affects individuals who are already facing disadvantages or other hardships. Our efforts focus on providing support to the populations and areas that are in the greatest need. |
| A collaborative approach | To enhance our capacity to make positive change in Banyule, we prioritise collaborative efforts. To support health promotion and gambling prevention locally, we partner with local organisations. To amplify our influence and strengthen our ability to advocate for regulatory changes at both the state and federal levels, we focus on collaborative action with partner organisations including the Alliance for Gambling Reform, peak bodies, community partners and other councils. |

Priorities

To reduce and prevent gambling harm in Banyule, Council commits to taking action on four key priorities.

1. Direct interventions

Council will:

1. Block online gambling on Council Wi-Fi.
2. Prevent gambling advertising on council-owned and operated community buildings. This applies to all forms of direct gambling advertising, particularly sports betting and online gambling.
3. Not hold council-run events and meetings in gambling venues.
4. Review Council grants and awards programs to prevent Council funds being used to promote gambling activities.
5. Offer support to community-based organisations who want to reduce their reliance on gambling-based income streams.

2. Advocacy

Because many regulations on the gambling industry are set and managed by State and Federal Government, as a leadership Council with the Alliance for Gambling Reform, Council will advocate to address harmful practices in the gambling industry, to achieve the following community outcomes:

1. Reduced levels of gambling harm in Banyule.
2. Increased understanding of the nature and extent of harm from all forms of gambling by improving the evidence and data landscape.
3. Stronger regulations of online gambling, including addressing the prevalence of advertising.
4. Ensure that measures to reduce gambling harm do not have a negative gender impact.
5. Proceeds from gambling are directed towards programs and interventions that demonstrably increase community benefit.

3. Planning

As a responsible authority in accordance with the Planning and Environment Act 1987, Banyule City Council will:

1. Monitor the implementation of State Government reforms to track emerging trends, including gambling losses in Banyule.
2. Require a Social and Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) for each EGM application.
3. Oppose the transfer of machines between venues within the municipality where a negative social and economic impact will result.

4. Community wellbeing

Council will:

1. Support partner organisations to raise awareness of gambling harm support programs, promote contemporary gambling education, and improve local support services.
2. Explore and understand the accessibility of local gambling-free community spaces that promote community connection and are open outside regular business hours.
3. Monitor emerging research and evidence related to the harms associated with gambling, with a focus on the impacts related to gender and intersectionality.

Monitoring and evaluation

Banyule's Draft Gambling Harm Prevention Policy 2024 – 2028 will be monitored by the Community Impact Team in Council's Community Wellbeing directorate. An annual Gambling Harm Prevention Action Plan will outline activities that will deliver our commitments and will provide more detail on our primary prevention activities.

The Action Plan will be reviewed annually and updated as required. At the end of the four-year period, the annual reports will inform a four-year evaluation of the draft Policy.

The gambling losses and venue data will be monitored on an annual basis.

| Indicator | Source | Catchment |
|---|---|------------------|
| Overall losses by gambling product | VGCCC Annual report State Revenue Office -financial statements | Victoria |
| Losses per adult by gambling product | VGCCC Annual report State Revenue Office -financial statements | Victoria |
| Banyule EGM losses by venue | Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission | Banyule |
| Banyule EGM venues, population and SEIFA | Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission ABS Census | Banyule |
| EGM expenditure data by local government | Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission | Banyule |
| EGM expenditure data by population density | Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission | Banyule |

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- ⁱⁱⁱ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. (2023). *You win some, you lose more: Online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm*. Parliament of Australia. Canberra.
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