

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

PAEC Hearing – 24 July 2023

Questions on Notice – Responses

Questions on notice and further information

At the hearings witnesses took questions on notice or agreed to supply further information about particular issues. These questions on notice are as follows:

QON 1

Michael GALEA: *And I would like to come back to online gambling shortly too. Has the VRGF done any research into the correlation between gambling and family violence?*

Shane LUCAS: *Not that I can recollect specifically. I could come back to the committee. We have done a lot of research over 11 or 12 years. I do not believe we have done specific research in the 4½ years that I have been in the role, but I can go and obviously look at our research library and come back to the committee on that.*

Further to the above, the Committee also requests further information to answer the following questions:

- 1. Under the legislation, the VRGF is responsible for:**
 - reducing the prevalence of problem gambling
 - reducing the severity of harm related to gambling
 - fostering 'responsible gambling'.

Since the VAGO audit, what progress has been made on these three metrics, expressed in percentage terms?

- 2. As a result of the audit, the VRGF began a process of reviewing its prevention, early intervention, treatment and support services. What are the outcomes of the review?**
- 3. VRGF's Annual Plan states that a new evaluation process is used for prevention programs in response to the VAGO audit. What is this process and how is it different from the previous process?**
- 4. VRGF's Annual Plan states that a sector-wide development strategy was commenced in response to the VAGO audit. What are the findings from this strategy and outcomes to date?**

Please email responses to questions on notice and additional information to paec@parliament.vic.gov.au by 5.00 pm, 11 August 2023.

If you require any clarification, please contact the Committee Secretariat on (03) 8682 2867.

QON 1: Has the VRGF done any research into the correlation between gambling and family violence?

Foundation-commissioned research published as [The social cost of gambling to Victoria](#) (Browne et al, 2017) included a section on the calculations and considerations of gambling-related violence in determining the total social cost of gambling within Victoria.

In 2017, the Foundation's Grants for Gambling Research Program (round 9) funded two projects specifically related to the link between gambling harm and family violence.

- Cowlshaw, S., O'Dwyer, C., Sbisa, A., Metcalf, O., Couineau, A., O'Donnell, M., Suomi, A., 2021, [Recognition and responses to Intimate Partner Violence \(IPV\) in Gambler's Help services: A qualitative study](#), Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.

This study recognised that intimate partner violence often co-occurs with gambling problems and is a common issue among clients in gambling help services. The study explored the potential role gambling help services can play in identifying and responding to clients who have either experienced or used violence in their intimate relationships.

- Suomi, A., Lucas, N., Dowling, N., Delfabbro, P., 2021, [Gambling harm experienced by children of parents who gamble](#), Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.

This study found that harmful levels of regular parental gambling were associated with reported family violence and parental conflict, child abuse and neglect, and intergenerational transmission of problem gambling.

The findings of these studies, along with other interstate and international evidence, have been used by the Foundation to inform targeted prevention programs that seek to address the connection between gambling and family violence. For example:

- Gambler's Help services in Wodonga and Wangaratta (provided by Gateway Health) have, since 2019, integrated a gambling harm component into their men's behaviour change program
- in May 2023, Gambler's Help counsellors were provided training by Financial Counselling Victoria in family violence awareness, which looked at intake, assessment and referral pathways.

1. Under the legislation, the VRGF is responsible for:

- **reducing the prevalence of problem gambling**
- **reducing the severity of harm related to gambling**
- **fostering ‘responsible gambling’.**

Since the VAGO audit, what progress has been made on these three metrics, expressed in percentage terms?

The Foundation’s [Reducing gambling harm in Victoria: Outcomes framework](#) was published in March 2022. The framework comprises seven outcomes against which Victoria’s progress in preventing and reducing gambling harm can be measured. The Foundation has completed a baseline report against the framework, but it has not yet been published.

A range of factors affect gambling harm, some of which the Foundation has limited or no ability to influence. Accordingly, the outcomes framework and our public health approach recognise that minimising harm is a collective responsibility that sits across multiple sectors and organisations.

It was the Foundation’s intention to regularly report on progress against the outcomes framework measures. We anticipate that this responsibility will shift to the Foundation’s successor agencies.

Reducing the prevalence of problem gambling

To estimate the prevalence of problem gambling requires large, well-designed, representative population level studies:

- [The most recent Victorian study was undertaken in 2018–19](#) (Rockloff et al, 2020). It estimated that the prevalence of problem gambling, as measured by the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), was 0.7 per cent of the total Victorian adult population.
- The 2014 [Study of gambling and health in Victoria](#) (Hare, 2015) estimated the prevalence of problem gambling was 0.81 per cent, which was not a significant change from the 2008 study.

The fieldwork for the 2023 Victorian gambling population study has been completed and the report will be ready for release in 2024. This is the first problem gambling prevalence study since VAGO’s audit of the Foundation in 2021.

The studies demonstrate that population levels of PGSI problem gambling have remained relatively consistent over time. However, we know that for each person who experiences problem gambling, up to six others are negatively affected ([A typical problem gambler affects six others](#), Goodwin et al, 2017). This provides further evidence that a public health approach is required to reduce gambling harm at a population level.

Reducing severity of harm related to gambling

The Foundation-commissioned research – [Assessing gambling related harm in Victoria](#) (Browne et al, 2015) – determined what constituted gambling harm and established a taxonomy of harms.

The 2018–19 population study (Rockloff et al, 2020) used a validated scale and measure of the experience of gambling harm to estimate that 30 per cent of total gambling harms relate to PGSI problem gambling. These were also the most severe harms, such as spending less on essentials like medication, health care and food, being a victim of family/domestic violence or experiencing greater conflict in relationships.

However, the majority of harms – the remaining 70 per cent – were experienced by those in the PGSI-defined moderate-risk, low-risk and non-problem gambling categories.

The 2023 gambling population study will be the second to measure gambling harm at a population level in Victoria. The findings will allow comparison with any changes from the 2018–19 baseline measures.

Foundation-funded Gambler's Help services conduct client outcomes surveys at regular intervals during treatment. For the most recent reporting period (2021–22), after three months in treatment:

- 71.2 per cent of surveyed clients reported a reduction in psychological distress
- 67.2 per cent reported a reduction in relationship, financial and productivity harms
- 65.8 per cent reported a decrease in the amount of money or time they spent gambling.

Fostering 'responsible gambling'

There is no workable definition of 'responsible gambling' and therefore no metric for measuring it. As a proxy, the Foundation tracks community understanding of gambling harm (outcome 3 in the outcomes framework), and capacity to prevent it (outcome 6).

The results of the Foundation's Community Attitudes Survey¹ are weighted to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures to reflect the Victorian population. In 2022, it found 70 per cent of Victorian adults recognised that gambling more than four times a month could lead to harm.

Also in 2021, 87 per cent of people who attended a Foundation-funded gambling harm prevention activity and responded to a survey about it said they were either 'likely' or 'very likely' to put what they had learned into practice. This increased to 98 per cent of professionals who attended events, such as gambling treatment and prevention workers.

2. As a result of the audit, the VRGF began a process of reviewing its prevention, early intervention, treatment and support services. What are the outcomes of the review?

In September 2002, the Foundation engaged Impact Co to review the gambling harm service system, which comprises prevention, early intervention and treatment and support, and to develop recommendations for strengthening services for Victorians at risk of, or affected by, gambling harm.

The treatment system review has been completed and recommendations for a new model are at an advanced stage of development. Impact Co concluded that a universal stepped model of care should be at the centre of gambling harm treatment and support services.

A prevention programming framework has also been developed in collaboration with Latrobe University. It sets out the evidence base that underpins the Foundation's prevention approach and the basis upon which we determine priority groups and activities.

The Foundation intended to finalise these projects and start implementing a new service delivery model from mid-2024. As part of a new approach, we planned to apply the programming framework to the prevention and early intervention elements of a selection of programs and grants. It is anticipated that responsibility for progressing this work will move to successor agencies.

¹ This Foundation-funded annual survey is undertaken by a commercial survey provider. The survey is conducted online with a sample supplied by a consumer panel as well as via intercept interviews at venues that focus on people experiencing problem gambling or who are at moderate risk of doing so.

3. VRGF's Annual Plan states that a new evaluation process is used for prevention programs in response to the VAGO audit. What is this process and how is it different from the previous process?

The Foundation has developed an evaluation framework that sets out the principles and general approaches to be used in designing future program evaluations. The framework has broad application for campaign activities alongside prevention programs.

Procurement documentation has been updated to specifically include cost-effectiveness in evaluation projects. And implementation of an automated contracts and grants lifecycle system with enhanced evaluative oversight processes such as performance-related checklists and reviews will soon be completed.

The Foundation's newly developed prevention programming framework provides firm evidence upon which to base the assessment of any proposed prevention activities into the future.

These frameworks represent significant improvements to current processes. A major difference will be the inclusion, following the completion of recently commissioned research to provide specific measures of cost-effectiveness in the evaluation of prevention (and other) programs and activities.

Combined, they provide a more purposeful, evidence-based approach to assessing prevention activities, with a requirement to clearly identify the risk and protective factors a project aims to influence and a greater ability to report on cost-effectiveness in evaluation.

4. VRGF's Annual Plan states that a sector-wide development strategy was commenced in response to the VAGO audit. What are the findings from this strategy and outcomes to date?

The Foundation has developed an intentional approach to ensuring that knowledge gained through our research and evaluation activities is used to strengthen and improve programs and services.

The sector development strategy describes our approach to enhancing professional capability and building community capacity to prevent harm. Pillars include professional development sessions, communities of practice and conference participation.

The strategy focuses on mobilising research findings and new knowledge into prevention and treatment service design and delivery. And it prioritises upskilling people who work in the sector and supporting them to implement and use evidence-based best practice.

While implementation has begun, the strategy was to be associated with the revised structure of prevention, treatment and support following the implementation of a new service system. As such, it is difficult to measure significant outcomes at this time.