



## **Gambling is a public health emergency, and must be recognised by the Australian Centre for Disease Control.**

Here we go again. As the new footy season kicks off, millions of Australian fans will be inundated once more with gambling advertising at the ground, on the backs of players, on television and streaming services – despite the Murphy Report’s recommendation almost three years ago that online gambling advertising must be banned.

The review led by the late Peta Murphy into gambling found that the harm it causes is widespread and profound – that gambling contributes to financial ruin, relationship breakdowns, and domestic violence. Now, independent crossbench MPs, Senators, public health and gambling reform advocates argue, it is time to take a closer look at the health impacts of gambling. Gambling poses serious risks to Australians’ physical and mental health; it causes or exacerbates depression and anxiety, domestic violence, substance use, homelessness, and self-harm. People experiencing gambling harm are also more likely to experience other health issues.

When federal parliament returns on 2 March, Dr Monique Ryan, Independent Member for Kooyong, with support from members of the crossbench and public health advocates will introduce the Australian Centre for Disease Control Amendment (Gambling as a Public Health Issue) Bill 2026, officially defining gambling harm as a risk to public health.

### **What is the Australian Centre for Disease Control? What will this Bill do?**

The Australian Centre for Disease Control (ACDC) is Australia’s central authority for public health data, evidence and advice. The Act currently defines “public health matters” to include issues such as environmental health, health security, and the health impacts of climate change, but it does not recognise the harm associated with gambling.

This amendment seeks to broaden the definition of “public health matters” to explicitly include the health impacts of gambling harm and addiction, including financial distress, mental health impacts, and the impacts on families and communities. By doing so, the Bill formally recognises gambling harm as a significant public health issue, rather than treating it solely as a matter of personal choice or individual responsibility.

Gambling harm is preventable. Members of the crossbench, public health and gambling reform advocates are calling on the government to recognise it as a public health issue as the first step towards national action, better data collection, and more effective strategies to protect Australians and their families.

**Dr Monique Ryan, Independent MP for Kooyong:**

"We're about to kick off our third footy season since the Murphy Report shone the brightest possible light on gambling harm. That means another onslaught of ads hitting our screens and stadia aimed at getting more Australians hooked on gambling. But the Albanese Government continues to drag its feet. It has failed to respond to any of the report's 31 recommendations.

"More than 3 million adults in this country experience gambling-related harm. Experts have repeatedly documented the health impacts of problem gambling, but no Australian jurisdiction gives its health authorities responsibility for managing these issues.

"Classifying gambling as a 'public health matter' under the remit of the Australian Centre for Disease Control will kick off national action on a health emergency that demands the Albanese Government's full attention."

**Kate Chaney, Independent MP for Curtin:**

"For too long, gambling harm has been treated as a matter of personal responsibility rather than a public health crisis. That narrative suits the gambling industry; it's singing from the same song book as the tobacco industry a generation ago.

"The evidence we heard from experts during the Murphy Review was unambiguous: gambling harm should be treated as a public health issue, not a consumer issue. It affects a large population, directly or indirectly, and requires a more coordinated approach to address its harms.

"Australians lose more to gambling per capita than any other nation on earth. Behind that statistic are real people experiencing financial ruin, mental health crises, and family breakdown. This bill reframes the issue with the seriousness it deserves."

**Nicolette Boele, Independent MP for Bradfield:**

"Australia's epidemic of gambling harm is a public health emergency.

"For too long, powerful interests have made billions while ordinary Australians pay the price with their savings, their mental health and, in far too many cases, their lives. As many as 20% of suicides in Australia are caused by gambling, with irreversible impacts on families and communities.

"If we are serious about protecting people, then we must treat gambling harm as the public health crisis it is. Anything less is a conscious decision to put profits before people - and that is simply unacceptable."

**Dr Helen Haines, Independent MP for Indi:**

"When Parliament established the CDC last year, I was concerned it did not legislate a clear requirement for the agency to expand across the full spectrum of public health.

"Gambling harm is a health issue and should be recognised and treated as such - not left on the sidelines while the damage to families and communities continues."

**Dr Sophie Scamps, Independent MP for Mackellar:**

"Gambling harm is a whole of societal issue, not just an individual issue. It's been allowed to encroach into every aspect our lives. Gambling is the root cause of so many harms including family and relationship breakdowns, domestic violence, mental distress, job losses, crime, and of course suicide. How could it be treated as anything other than a public health crisis?"

**David Pocock, Independent Senator for ACT:**

“As the late Labor MP Peta Murphy found in her inquiry, gambling companies groom Australian children and cause a range of harms, from serious financial and legal harms to self-harm.”

“Gambling is a serious public health issue, and yet it is not treated as one in this country. The Bill would start to turn that around, by allowing public health experts to start to study this in more detail and to present independent recommendations to the Government on how to minimise harm.”

**Martin Thomas, CEO of Alliance for Gambling Reform:**

“We have long advocated that gambling harm must be treated as a public health issue.

“The harm gambling causes doesn't stop at the financial losses, a staggering \$32 billion a year, but greatly increases health and mental health issues, marriage break up, partner violence and even suicide.”

**Rev Stu Cameron, Wesley Mission CEO and Gambling Reform Advocate:**

“Unchecked gambling harm is fuelling a public health catastrophe in Australia, affecting millions of people and families. Our frontline teams see the daily toll, from housing stress and domestic and family violence to mental health distress and suicidal ideation. For too long gambling harm has been treated as purely economic and personal, allowing powerful interests to shape the narrative. Governments must act decisively to prevent and reduce gambling harm through strong evidence-based public health measures that will positively impact and save lives.”

**Professor Samantha Thomas, Professor of Public Health and Gambling Expert at Deakin University:**

“Gambling harm is engineered by powerful industries who use a range of tactics to extract money from individuals and communities and deflect and delay regulatory reform. With weak government regulation and saturated advertising, it is hardly surprising that we now face a public health crisis.

“Despite the clear findings of the Murphy Inquiry, the governments weak response sends a clear signal that they are prioritising the private wealth of a few, over public health for all.

“Australia's public health response to tobacco showed us the art of the possible. Things that once seemed unthinkable, such as bans on advertising, could be achieved with robust independent evidence and political will.

“The harms from gambling extend well beyond the individual, contributing significant health and social costs to our communities including housing insecurity, family violence, criminality, and mental health issues. Recognising gambling as a public health issue will help us to change how we understand and respond to gambling industry harm.”

**Nieves Murray, CEO of Suicide Prevention Australia:**

“Too many Australians are experiencing real distress because of gambling harm. From overwhelming debt to relationship breakdowns and a sense of hopelessness, the impact is significant. If the government is serious about promoting safety and preventing suicide, we must recognise and respond to gambling as a critical public health issue impacting individuals, families, and communities.”