



Restraining Greed – Reforming the pokie venue Code of Conduct

February 2019

Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity.

1 John 2:15-17

Greed is never good, nor does it serve any good purpose. Since we will never be able to attain everything we desire, greed offers us dissatisfaction. Our greediness ultimately destroys us spiritually as we harden our hearts, ignoring the needs of others.

Eighty per cent of people who gamble on pokies weekly suffer as a result and about one in three people who do so less frequently also experience some level of harm.

The harms inflicted by pokie businesses include

- Severe financial harms
- Damaged personal relationships,
- Harms to mental well-being with high rates of depression and anxiety; and
- Suicide risk.

The greed of owners of pokies means they refuse to do everything they reasonably could be expected to do to reduce this harm. In fact some venue owners have had staff who have actively targeted people to get them to lose more, without regard for the well-being of the people in question.

Whistleblowers who worked in venues in NSW and Queensland owned jointly by Woolworths and the ALH Group revealed staff were required to harvest personal information about people to bond with them and keep them gambling to maximise their losses. In one case staff discussed how to encourage a grieving woman they nicknamed “Queen Bee” to put her inheritance into poker machines after the death of her parents.

Woolworths and the ALH Group own more pokies in Victoria than any other venue owner. Nationally, they own 12,000 pokies installed in 330 venues.

We need the Victorian Government to step in and restrain the greed of the pokie owners to reduce the harm they are causing.

It has established a Code of Conduct for pokies venues, to set a minimum standard they should comply with in reducing harm, but the current Code is weak and has done little to reduce the harm pokies have caused in our community.

When I was a gambler, I was hooked. When I lost, I always said that I will win next time. It's the free spins that gave me enjoyment. I did win a few times but I lost more money than what I won. I just couldn't leave the pokie machine until I won. So my heart aches when I deposit the last note. Now there is nothing left. I used to get the urge to play the pokies.

I no longer have any urges for 5 years to gamble. I hate the bastard that stole all my money. I think I lost \$30,000–\$40,000 in 20 years.

Mary's story from Gamblers' Help

<https://gamblershelp.com.au/learn-about-gambling/personal-stories/mary-25092018/>

The Victorian Government must strengthen the Code and insist all pokie venue staff not engage in activities that seek to encourage people to lose more on the pokies. All pokies venue staff should be required to intervene when people are displaying signs that their gambling is causing them harm.

In New Zealand, by comparison, pokie venue owners are required by law to implement a mechanism to identify people being harmed by their gambling. All venue staff must speak to a person they suspect might be being harmed by their gambling and offer assistance and access to the self-exclusion program that allows the person to exclude themselves from gambling on the pokies.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters and e-mails to:

The Hon Marlene Kairouz MP

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming & Liquor Regulation

Level 26, 121 Exhibition Street

Melbourne VIC 3001

Salutation: Dear Minister

E-mail: marlene.kairouz@parliament.vic.gov.au

Points to make in your letters or e-mails:

- Express deep concern at the level of harm that pokie venues continue to do in Victoria, with eight in ten people gambling on the pokies on a weekly basis being harmed according to research by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.
- Ask that the Minister reform the existing Code of Conduct for pokie venues so that staff are prohibited from engaging in activities aimed at increasing the amount of money people lose.
- Ask that the Code also require venue staff to monitor people gambling to identify signs a person is being harmed by gambling. Further, venue staff should be required to intervene and offer assistance to people displaying signs they are being harmed by their gambling, as is already the case under laws in New Zealand and Switzerland. This should include asking someone who has displayed significant signs of gambling harm to have to leave the venue and not come back for at least 24 hours.
- The Code should also forbid the provision of free or discounted drinks and food in the pokies area of the venues, to encourage people to take a break by having to go to other parts of the venue for free or discounted drinks and food.
- The Code should require pokie venues to assist in any research around reducing gambling related harm that has been approved by the Victorian Government.