

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

October 2021

A need to ban gambling ads

Thank you, Madame Speaker and Minister Rattenbury.

I am very pleased to hear the update and progress of the Government's gambling reform agenda.

This time last year, I was Director of one of Australia's most prominent Centres for Gambling Research.

I spent 15 years of my life researching gambling.

When I started – I didn't understand gambling – I thought it was fun, and I didn't really understand how people became addicted or how it was harmful.

Year in year out, of story after story, a feeling of sickness grew in me. I began to see the harm – and the insidiousness of this activity in our community. Like with most things – once you see it, you can't go back.

I see the 47 000 people in this city that experience harm from gambling. That is 30,000 who experience harm themselves, and 17,000 who experience harm from a family member's gambling.

There has been lots of discussion this sitting on the 38,000 Canberrans living in poverty in the ACT. - There are more people in this city that are experiencing the impacts of gambling harm than there are people living in poverty.

In two weeks' time it is gambling harm awareness week in the ACT.

I stand here today to highlight the harm and the impacts that gambling causes in our community. Once again COVID-19 has seen Canberra's pokies fall silent. The lights are out.

However, as our venues have been shut and we have been in our homes for the last 8 weeks – we have been barraged day in day out on TV and social media by gambling ads.

Australia's experience of the pandemic has seen foreign-owned corporate bookmakers gain tens of billions of dollars in market value during the past year.

Global corporation Flutter Entertainment, the parent company of Sportsbet, gained almost \$30 billion in value during the course of last year's COVID-19 outbreak – and this largely came from their increase in market share in Australia.

This is not surprising as research from the Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) found that last year almost one in three participants in a survey of 2,000 people opened a new online betting account during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The gambling industry spent AU\$271.3m on advertising last year. And we know that advertising works. Which is why we don't allow cigarette advertising.

The advertising has become so bad that even Tabcorp chief executive in September this year, has said the Federal government should impose restrictions for TV gambling ads – particularly during prime-time to protect children and teenagers. He warned that a switch towards online gambling during the pandemic has brought about a need for greater government intervention.

The Free TV Code prohibits gambling and betting commercials from being broadcast in any program classified as G or lower between 6am and 8.30am and between 4pm and 7pm, as well as during any program broadcast between 5am and 8.30pm that is principally directed to children.

However, a loophole permits such advertising during commercial broadcasts in a news, current affairs or sporting program.

Although the Free TV Code and the ASTRA Codes were updated to prohibit the promotion of ads during live sporting matches, the loophole means that viewers, including children, are still exposed to gambling advertisements during these timeslots.

However, it should also be noted that it doesn't matter what time of day or night, live or not, any sporting footage has gambling advertising embedded in it – the games are shrouded in gambling advertising round the sports grounds and on the jerseys of our favorite players.

This all needs to change.

The Alliance for Gambling Reform, of which Former MLA Gordan Ramsay is now CEO – is a national advocacy organisation that works to prevent harm from gambling. They

are running a campaign calling for an end to sports betting advertising in Australia. I encourage everyone to sign their petition to 'Ban the ads'.

Reverend Tim Costello, chief advocate of the Alliance for Gambling Reform, said: "When you stop and take notice of how many gambling ads you see on television, it's really disturbing. Sometimes more than half the ads you see in a commercial break are for gambling. That's not right." And unfortunately – over this lockdown – the advertising has been invasive. It is wrong.

And you don't need to be an anthropologist or psychologist to see who these companies are marketing to. They are marketing to men, young men – the larakin, the good old Aussie bloke, the bloke with mates, the funny guy, the rich man, the happy, winning man.

We talk a lot about issues that are gendered in this place – and the harm that comes to individuals and families from online and sports gambling is gendered; and it is men who are experiencing that harm. Of course, the harm flows – which is why gambling is a public health problem because the harm that the young man experiences, also hurts his young wife and their young children.

I wish to thank Minister Rattenbury and the Community Clubs Ministerial Advisory Council for the work being undertaken to reduce gambling harm in our community. It is great to see the combined benefit of initiatives from this Government to address climate change while reducing clubs' reliance on pokies.

I look forward to continuing to offer my support to the range of gambling reforms and initiatives, as well as support for community clubs, moving forward.

As we move into Gambling harm awareness week – and as we move out of lockdown – I say to those people who are fighting that internal battle with themselves to call 1800 858 858 for a chat. Call that number and work out a plan for yourself. I say to men in the ACT, to men that gamble with mates – look after your mates.

Thank you