## To Reduce Community Harm from Gambling, the ACT Government must:

* Reduce the number of electronic gaming machines (EGMs, also known as pokies) to 2,500 by 2025.
* Introduce a bet limit of $1 on all EGMs in the ACT and limit ‘loadup’ (the amount of money that may be pre-loaded into a machine) to $50.
* Limit access to cash in EGM venues across both ATM and EFTPOS withdrawals to a daily limit of $250.
* Introduce mandatory pre-commitment in all venues. Pre-commitment enables an individual to set an upper limit of money they are planning to bet to reduce harmful overspending.
* Ban EGM operation between 2:00am and 10:00am each day.
* Increase transparency of the community contributions scheme and prioritise actions that reduce gambling harm.
* Improve the transparency of the gambling ecosystem in the ACT via more granular public reporting by the ACT Racing and Gaming Commission in line with the relevant legislation, including venue data on losses by consumers.
* Implement a centralised monitoring system (CMS) that ensures the transparency of the gambling ecosystem in the ACT and enables leveraging of the CMS to implement further reforms such as Territory-wide self-exclusion regime.
* Ensure the EGM regulatory regime in the ACT respects the rights and privacy of people experiencing gambling harm and supports the rights of all Canberrans to access community club spaces without being exposed to gambling harm.
* Support national and local efforts to ban sports gambling advertising and explore the possibility of replicating the Victorian “Love the Game Not the Odds” program in the ACT to encourage local sports clubs to take a stance against sports betting sponsorship.
* Implement the [Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance’s](https://www.cbrgamblingreform.com.au/) program for reducing gambling harm.

## The Justification

* The following key findings from the [2019 ACT Gambling Survey](https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/cgr/2019-act-gambling-survey) show that electronic gaming machines (EGM) cause significant harm to individuals and communities:
* One in five (20%) ACT adults used EGMs in the past year. A smaller proportion of the population reported betting on horse or greyhound races in the past year (14%), followed by sports betting (10%).
* EGM gamblers were more likely to be male (59%) and skew demographically young (below 30 years) compared with gamblers who do not use EGMs.
* People spending more than 1 hour in a typical session at an EGM were more likely to be at risk than not (57.9%), whereas people spending less than 10 minutes in a typical session had significantly lower risk.
* EGM gamblers under the age of 45 were significantly more likely to be at risk at all levels of EGM playing time per session.
* EGM participation is the single most effective predictor of problem gambling (as defined by the Problem Gambling Severity Index).
* 70.9% of high-frequency EGM gamblers under the age of 45 experienced harm from gambling (i.e., twice the rate of people aged over 45).
* Significant predictors of the number of gambling harms experienced were participation in EGM gambling, sports and special events betting, informal games, and online casino and poker games. Being male and under the age of 45 were also significant predictors of the number of harms experienced.
* 33% of people surveyed had heard of the ACT self-exclusion program, and less than half of EGM gamblers had heard of the program (48%).
* EGMs were the least popular form of gambling activity in the ACT, with 64% of the ACT adult population agreeing that they do more harm than good for the community.
* The survey found strong support for precommitment in the ACT, with 71% of the ACT adult population surveyed in favour (compared with 13% disagreeing).
* ACT adults were asked about attitudes towards withdrawal limits at ATMs (current limit: $200) and EFTPOS machines (current limit: $250). Of respondents, 46.1% believed that the ATM limit should be changed, while 48.6% believed that the EFTPOS limit should be changed. Of those supporting changes to the limits, the mean response for the new limits were $136 (ATM) and $147 (EFTPOS).
* Nearly half (49%) of the ACT adult population believed that the maximum bet on EGMs should be changed. For those who believed the limit should be changed, the average suggested limit was $6.92. The suggested limit changes were not significantly different between gamblers and non-gamblers, nor between EGM gamblers and non-EGM gamblers.
* Australians spend the most money on gambling per capita in the world. Gambling and associated losses have negative impacts on a user’s relationships, work, psychological wellbeing and general health.[[1]](#footnote-2)
* Early results from a new study seeking to further understand the landscape of the online gambling habits of young people in Canberra have found that children may begin gambling online as young as 11 years old, and that exposure to online gambling through social media sources that present gambling as a game may characterise avenues of harm to young people and children.[[2]](#footnote-3)

## The Issues

* The current evidence suggests that the regulatory regime is failing to adequately protect Canberrans from gambling harm, necessitating reform. The ACT Government should implement the proposed program by the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance, including the following measures:
  + Implementing limits and controls on Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) in venues, such as mandatory pre-commitment for all EGM venues, $1 bet limits on all machines, aligning EFTPOS machine rules with ATMs, and reducing the number of poker machines in the ACT by half
  + Enhancing the Community Contributions Scheme to deliver more value to the community, by overhauling the Gambling Harm Reduction Scheme with funds administered by ACT Health, focusing on monetary contributions only
* Community clubs often rely excessively on gambling income, which hinders efforts to address problem gambling. By reducing gambling harm, we can create safer, more inclusive, and welcoming spaces in community clubs. Although challenges may arise due to varying club sizes and financial success, it is important to note that some clubs are already EGM-free, and we encourage wider participation in the government's EGM surrender initiative.
* While transitioning to an EGM-free environment may pose financial challenges for smaller clubs, it is crucial for clubs to take responsibility in minimizing and preventing gambling harm. ACTCOSS recommends offering targeted support to small community clubs that deliver clear social benefits, with the definition of a small club determined through consultation with the industry and community sector.
* Additionally, discussing the introduction of a central monitoring system (CMS) to track problem gambling behaviour in clubs can help establish effective harm mitigation strategies and empower individual problem gamblers to manage their addiction.
* During times of bushfires or extreme heat, using community clubs as heat and smoke refuges while also providing gambling poses significant risks to Canberrans. This exposes individuals to gambling harm, especially when combined with alcohol use. It is important to consider alternative options for heat and smoke refuges, such as EGM and gambling-free clubs or ceasing gambling and alcohol services in clubs used as refuges. This approach ensures that the most vulnerable Canberrans are not excluded from seeking refuge based on cultural, religious, or moral beliefs or existing gambling harm.

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| Delivering commitments in the ACT Parliamentary and Governing Agreement |
| The Government should prioritise some of its commitments **under the** [**Parliamentary and Governing Agreement**](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1654077/Parliamentary-Agreement-for-the-10th-Legislative-Assembly.pdf) for this term of Government as they relate to community harm stemming from Gambling and the role of Community Clubs as gaming venues   * Establish a Community Clubs Ministerial Advisory Council with government, industry and unions to build a long-term, sustainable clubs sector in the ACT * Target a further reduction in the number of electronic gaming machine licences in the ACT to 3500 by 1 July 2025, and support this through the introduction of incentives for Clubs to consider, including additional incentives to move to zero machines within a venue location * Establish a rigorous, across-venue self-exclusion regime across the ACT for people experiencing harm from gaming, with significant penalties for breaches. This exclusion regime will align with or exceed reforms currently progressing in NSW to allow exclusion by family members * Match or exceed any further harm reduction gaming reforms commenced in NSW, such as cashless gaming * Introduce the harm reduction measures of $5 bet limits and $100 load-up limits following a thorough review and transitional plan to manage impacts on clubs, particularly smaller clubs that upgrade machines less regularly. A staged rollout of this reform should commence by the end of 2022 at the latest * Facilitate planning and other processes to allow clubs to diversify to other revenue generating streams, particularly development of available land for social housing and land supply purposes, that are supported by the community * Provide a just transition for workers in the community clubs and gambling industry by:   + Ensuring that new or transferred employment is on permanent and secure terms;   + Providing support and retraining for employment in new jobs of their choosing;   + And ensuring worker entitlements are secure in business transfer or winding up. * Conduct a review into water costs for high-intensity club users of non-potable water in 2021, with the goal to allow clubs to maintain operations while not requiring cross subsidisation by other ACT water users * Establish a five-year $5 million Building Energy Efficiency Upgrade Fund, to be accessed by community clubs * Support clubs to become heat and smoke refuges for local communities. This will include ensuring appropriate air filtration systems, and financial payments for venues designated as official extreme weather refuge sites. |

1. Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), [*Understanding Gambling Harm and Ways to Identify Those at Risk*](https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/understanding-gambling-harm-and-ways-identify-those-risk), AIFS, December 2021, accessed 30 March 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Travis Radford, [*Concerning Initial Observations: ANU Study Probing Online Gambling Habits of Young Canberrans*](https://rsss.cass.anu.edu.au/news/concerning-initial-observations-anu-study-probing-online-gambling-habits-young-canberrans), ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, 9 May 2023, accessed 22 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)