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Andrew Wilkie MP

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) is the peak body representing the interests of the Tasmanian community mental health sector. The MHCT supports individuals to pre-set limits on their expenditure or playing time, through a full pre-commitment system.

The MHCT welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform on the design and implementation of a pre-commitment scheme for gaming machine players to pre-set limits on how much they are prepared to lose.

The MHCT endorses the Productivity Commissions' Report into Gambling<sup>1</sup>, which concluded that pre-commitment 'is a strong, practicable and ultimately cost-effective option for harm minimisation'.

Figures from the Department of Treasury and Finance<sup>i</sup> indicate that during 2010, Tasmanians lost between \$16 and \$19 million dollars to the pokies each month. Around 40% of that money was lost by people with a gambling problem. Anglicare Tasmania's report "Nothing left to loose"<sup>ii</sup>, found people may turn to gambling to relieve stress from work and family pressure, or to escape long-term hardship. Tasmanian Council of Social Services Inc (TasCOSS) media release "Parties must support \$1 bet limit"<sup>iii</sup> said that problem gambling can result in increased anxiety, depression and family breakdown.

The MHCT would like draw to your attention to Anglicare Tasmania's report entitled "House of Cards: Problem Gambling and low income earners in Tasmania" (2005)<sup>iv</sup>, which found that gambling problems may precede depression or anxiety or be a result of it.

The MHCT also makes reference to The Productivity Commission Report (1999)<sup>v</sup> which found that about 50% of people with gambling problems had experienced depression in the previous year, with 22% of

people reporting 'often or always' feeling depressed because of gambling. The Commission (1999) also found that almost all people seeking counselling help for their gambling experienced depression.

Anglicare Tasmania's report "Thin Ice: Living with serious mental illness and poverty" (2004)<sup>vi</sup> found that people living with a mental illness are particularly vulnerable to being trapped in a cycle of social disadvantage. Anglicare's research into the issues of poverty and mental illness found that often people with a serious mental illness experience a high level of social isolation and find it extremely difficult to participate in the community. The research also found that many participants with a serious mental illness valued gambling as a social activity, an escape from loneliness and often their only chance for social interaction. Participants with medically diagnosed mental illness reported that the stress of coping with gambling problems exacerbated their experiences of anxiety and depression, increasing their need for medication and support from mental health services.

The Productivity Commission (1999) found that problem gambling is not considered to be a mental illness, but the impacts on health may be compounded for people with a mental illness, causing prolonged episodes of acute illness and a greater reliance on medication.

In its national survey of gambling, the Productivity Commission (1999) found that 9% of people with significant gambling problems and 60% of those in counselling had contemplated suicide because of their gambling. The Commission estimates that the risk of attempting suicide increases the more a person by adverse impacts of gambling.

The MHCT calls on the Government to execute a full pre-commitment system that would allow binding limits to be set by individuals which they cannot increase. This in turn will significantly reduce the harm that a gambling problem can cause to individuals experiencing a mental illness and their families.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Swallow  
CEO

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<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/domino/dtf/dtf.nsf/all-s-v/CD36BFC11D136484CA2575E10006E703>

<sup>ii</sup> "Nothing Left to Lose", January 2010, Margie Law, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania

<sup>iii</sup> "Parties must support \$1 bet limit", 3 June 2010, Media Release, TasCOSS

<sup>iv</sup> "House of Cards", June 2005, Margie Law, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania

<sup>v</sup> Productivity Commission, 1999, Australia's Gambling Industries, Report No. 10, Ausinfo: Canberra

<sup>vi</sup> "Thin Ice: Living with serious mental illness and poverty", May 2004, Prue Cameron and Jo Flanagan, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania

<sup>vi</sup> [www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/gambling-2009/report](http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/gambling-2009/report)