



**ALLIANCE FOR
GAMBLING REFORM**

AGAINST THE ODDS

GAMBLING REFORM IN 2019





ALLIANCE FOR GAMBLING REFORM

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is a collaboration of more than 60 organisations with a shared concern about the deeply harmful and unfair impacts of gambling and its normalisation in Australian culture. We campaign for reforms of the gambling industry that reduce the harm it causes.

The Alliance is proudly independent. We do not, and will not accept money from any organisation or individual with a financial interest in any part of the gambling industry.

Alliance for Gambling Reform Inc is a registered charity with the ACNC. All donations to the Alliance are tax-deductible.

The Alliance respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are based, the Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) peoples of the Kulin Nation, and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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An annotated versions of this report is also available at pokiesplayyou.org.au/2019_annual_report



ALLIANCE FOR GAMBLING REFORM

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A message from Rev Tim Costello, the Alliance for Gambling Reform's Chief Advocate

What an amazing year 2019 was for gambling reform. We literally had weeks where three or four big gambling issues were running simultaneously. So much of this momentum can be attributed to our supporters, our Champions for Change, and our dedicated staff.

It's hard to pick a highlight for gambling reform from 2019 as there were just so many. This document will explore these highlights and more in much greater detail, but I'd like to give you my top 10, in no particular order of importance because they were all important.

1. The Alliance made a powerful submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, including stories from those with lived experience of the connections between mental ill-health and gambling in our submission.
2. Many Leadership Councils were represented at our community event on the steps of Victoria's parliament to mark the state's Gambling Harm Awareness Week, further highlighting the connections between mental ill-health and gambling.
3. We had a massive win with Woolworths joining Coles in divesting its poker machine interests. We also reached a critical mass with more AFL clubs either out of the poker machines business, or in the process of getting out, than those that are still fleecing their supporters and communities.
4. Following a landmark agreement between state and federal governments, we saw the introduction of legislation to establish a National Self Exclusion Register for sports gambling. The Alliance was consulted on the draft bills and amplified the voices of those with lived experience to inform this important policy outcome.
5. A seemingly small but important shift in language occurred in NSW, with the Upper House supporting a motion to change the name of the former Responsible Gambling Awareness Week to Gambling Harm Awareness Week. We also worked in the Fairfield and Blacktown council areas to support emerging networks of local organisations coming together to address gambling harm.

WHAT AN AMAZING YEAR 2019 WAS FOR GAMBLING REFORM.

**WE LITERALLY HAD WEEKS WHERE THREE OR FOUR
BIG GAMBLING ISSUES WERE RUNNING SIMULTANEOUSLY.**

6. Cricket Australia confirmed it had refused to take gambling sponsorship for the Big Bash League, citing the game's family-centric nature being incompatible with gambling. We also ended up in the New York Times shining a spotlight on the concerning relationship between other forms of cricket and gambling sponsorship.
7. Several motions on gambling reform were passed at the Australian Local Government Association's National General Assembly, including to advocate for a Royal Commission into the gambling industry.
8. Mid-way through the year, Macquarie Bank announced it would no longer extend credit for customers to use for gambling. As the year came to a close the Australian Banking Association flagged it would conduct important community consultation around gambling with credit in the first quarter of 2020.
9. It has been fantastic to watch our Champions for Change program go from strength-to-strength, with lived experience advocates bringing their vital perspective to our work, speaking out in the media and communicating with decision-makers directly.
10. Finally, a personal highlight of the year for me was being at Government House to witness Anna Bardsley honoured by the Governor of Victoria as the recipient of the 2019 Healthy and Active Living Award for Victorian Seniors. Anna has been relentless in advocating for gambling reform for many years as someone with lived experience of gambling harm. It has also been a delight to welcome her on the staff of the Alliance as our Victorian Champions for Change Coordinator.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank our incredible Board, especially our outgoing Chair, Cr Geoff Lake, and incoming Chair, Cr Susan Rennie. The Alliance could not exist without their wise counsel and governance.

I encourage you to read further about all of these gambling reform achievements, and many more, in this report.

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is a relatively small organisation, but thanks to the strength of will demonstrated by all of us working in this important space, we are making critical ground. This can only lead to more reform, and better outcomes for our communities.

I thank everyone who supported the Alliance in 2019 whether that be through membership of the Alliance, awarding grants, writing to or meeting with members of parliament, signing petitions, attending events, making personal donations, or sharing our social media posts. Everything counts towards change for the better, and we could not do it without you.



REV TIM COSTELLO
Director and Alliance Spokesperson

THE POKIES

PLAY YOU

POKER MACHINES IN VICTORIA IN 2019

Poker machine losses in Victoria were up \$3.5 million from 2018, totalling \$2.7 billion dollars. This figure does not include the money taken by Crown Casino (exempt from mandated 6 monthly reporting), which would bring Victoria to more than \$3 billion lost in 2019. Each day, the gambling industry takes \$7.4 million in poker machine losses from Victorians.

Data shows that the gambling industry exploits communities that are already highly stressed, and can least afford the additional problems poker machines create.

In Victoria the Alliance is actively campaigning for reforms that prioritise harm minimisation and prevention, and works to empower communities and those with lived experience of the harm caused by gambling.

We're joined by our 22 Victorian Leadership Councils, who are working with us to regulate an industry that preys on our communities. Victoria likes to consider itself "the progressive state",

but with addictive poker machine features such as losses disguised as wins still in play, Victoria is trailing behind its Queensland and Tasmanian counterparts.

In 2020, the Alliance will continue our advocacy across the political spectrum, including working with allies in Parliament to ensure that gambling harm is included in Victoria's next Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. Inclusion of gambling harm in this plan will give a mandate to the public health system in Victoria to work toward gambling reform.

**EACH DAY, THE GAMBLING INDUSTRY TAKES \$7.4 MILLION
IN POKER MACHINE LOSSES FROM VICTORIANS.**



ROYAL COMMISSION INTO THE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM IN VICTORIA

Ahead of the landmark Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, the Alliance decided to put a much-needed spotlight on the established link between gambling harm and mental ill-health.

We made a substantial submission to the Royal Commission detailing the urgent need for gambling harm to be addressed through effective harm minimisation and prevention methods, supported by a strong public health mindset. Our submission included powerful testimony from people with lived experience of gambling harm.

We also took to the steps of Parliament House in Melbourne to highlight the urgent need to address gambling harm through a public health lens (see pages 12 and 13 for more on this).

Despite significant evidence highlighting the association between gambling harm and mental ill-health, gambling harm remains separate from most mainstream discourse on public health in our communities.

Gambling harm is not mentioned in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019, the government's mental health plan, or its suicide prevention plan. It is also not mentioned in the Royal Commission's terms of reference. Omissions such as these wrongly suggest that gambling is caused by the weakness or personal failings of a gambler, rather than as a result of the intersections between underlying social determinants, individual characteristics and circumstances (including mental illness), and gambling products and environments.

In 2020, the Alliance will be working with allied organisations in the public health sector to respond to the Royal Commission's Interim Report, which again fails to mention gambling harm.



**DESPITE SIGNIFICANT EVIDENCE
HIGHLIGHTING THE ASSOCIATION
BETWEEN GAMBLING HARM AND
MENTAL ILL-HEALTH, GAMBLING
HARM REMAINS SEPARATE FROM MOST
MAINSTREAM DISCOURSE ON PUBLIC
HEALTH IN OUR COMMUNITIES.**

THE POKIES PLAY YOU



NSW: The pokie state

\$6.4 billion taken by
poker machines annually

POKER MACHINES IN NSW IN 2019

New South Wales maintained its unenviable position as the state experiencing the highest amount of gambling harm in Australia in 2019, and is highly unlikely to be challenged for that for many years to come.

In the 2471 venues in NSW with poker machines, including the casino, 92,920 machines took a total of more than \$18.5 million every single day of 2019.

Legalised in NSW since 1956, poker machines are totally normalised, and massive clubs with 500-700 machines have taken over the provision of social infrastructure. This embeds the clubs and their largesse even more deeply into communities, presenting a wicked problem for reformers.

Pubs quietly hide behind the clubs, even though on average a poker machine in a NSW pub takes double the money that one does in a club.

All this makes working for gambling reform in NSW quite different to other states.

Building a supporter base in NSW is a priority.

Sadly, only 2 out of 128 councils in NSW have a gambling policy.

We're also pushing for a change in the language used in NSW — there is still too much discussion about “responsible gambling” instead of gambling harm.

NSW is notorious for a lack of data transparency, reporting a bare minimum of pokies losses data and never releasing information on what is lost at individual pubs and clubs.

So much of this landscape can be attributed to the huge influence of the industry in NSW, and we're working tirelessly to reduce that.

While this is an intimidating background, the Alliance was instrumental in some significant positive changes in NSW in 2019.



IN THE 2471 VENUES IN NSW WITH POKER MACHINES,

INCLUDING THE CASINO, 92,920 MACHINES TOOK A TOTAL

OF MORE THAN \$18.5 MILLION EVERY SINGLE DAY OF 2019.

SOME NSW SUCCESS STORIES

NSW is undoubtedly the epicentre of gambling harm in Australia.

That's why our work with community groups and front-line services in NSW is so important. When we speak to them about what we are doing to fight for gambling reform in the state, they're delighted to hear there is an organisation dealing with an issue that makes the lives of their members and clients so much harder.

This engagement has energised many of these groups and services to create their own alliances, with support from their CEOs. We are harnessing their frustrations and turning it into a political base for state reform.

A lot of what we are doing in NSW is similar to how we have built grassroots support and foundations in Victoria. It just takes longer in NSW because of the political landscape and how deeply ingrained the gambling industry, and particularly pokies, are in the state.

Through building that body of public support we are able to increase our influence.

We are also building constructive relationships with Ministers, staff and advisers with the aim of influencing them on reform. We are getting wins there, one of which is the shift towards a name change away from Responsible Gambling Awareness Week to Gambling Harm Awareness Week (see page 13 for more on that).

In 2019 the Alliance made a particularly concerted effort to establish networks in the western suburbs of Sydney, including:

- Mentoring networks of concerned community service organisations in Fairfield and Blacktown
- Running stalls at events, including the Fairfield Multicultural Eid Fair and at the Legal Aid Expo in Cabramatta
- Having several organisations, including the Arab Council, adopt versions of the Alliance's drafted internal gambling impact policy.

In a slow-moving campaign in the key Inner West Council area we have been working with progressive councillors to achieve action. While the original attempt to have council adopt a policy was unsuccessful (by 1 vote), that council is taking practical steps. Councillors agreed to apply annually for funding for a gambling harm minimisation project, and to hold an annual harm awareness forum. We will continue to work to put these actions within a policy framework, similar to Victorian council models.

The Western Sydney Community Forum, a peak body for social services across half of Sydney, has also adopted gambling reform as a key action in its 2036 vision statement. Building on that support, and the interest from service organisations, we are finding positive responses to gambling harm awareness raising from council staff in Blacktown, Liverpool and Cumberland. Together with Fairfield, nearly 1 million people live in these council areas, so with their support, we hope to reach many more people over the next year.



Our NSW Campaigner Dr Kate da Costa spoke at the Australian Local Government Women's Association 2019 Conference to build further support for gambling reform in NSW, and around Australia.



THE POKIES PLAY YOU

COUNCILS IN ACTION



In 2019 the Alliance reached 23 Leadership Councils, with the addition of Whitehorse Council and the joining of our first Queensland council in Noosa. That's 23 councils at the forefront of leading local movements of reform within the gambling industry.

Several councils had successes in local fights in 2019, including:

- Darebin winning its legal battle against a planned Darebin RSL expansion
- Moreland Council winning a similar battle against the Glenroy RSL
- Greater Dandenong Council defeating the Player's Hotel
- Mitchell Shire deciding to take the Hogan's Hotel application to VCAT.

These councils successfully mobilised their communities to protect them from gambling harm in 2019. Congratulations to these councils and their local communities for standing up against the harm that poker machines have on their area.

Building relationships with local media also proved successful with articles published in the Frankston, Whittlesea, Moreland, Darebin, Mitchell, Brimbank, Dandenong, and Kingston council areas all creating awareness around pokies losses in their local government areas.

ADVOCACY

Throughout 2019 we continued our advocacy around the Venue Code of Conduct review, with many councils writing to the Minister around ensuring better protections for Victorians.

Similarly, several of our Leadership Councils put up motions at Australian Local Government Association calling for the Federal Government to establish a Royal Commission into Gambling, to recognise the harms of gambling, and to provide better data across emerging modes of gambling.

Several Leadership Councils also revised their Council Gambling Harm Minimisation Policies to ensure council policies are in line with accepted best practice minimisation strategies.

A MESSAGE FROM CR SUSAN RENNIE, ALLIANCE CHAIR AND MAYOR OF DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL

I am very proud of everything the Alliance achieved in 2019. Many strands of work came together thanks to the efforts of all our teams and also the extraordinary contributions of our partners, especially local governments.

The value that our movement gains from the pooling of collective effort and resources to advocate for change cannot be underestimated. Councils are at the forefront of winning battles against gambling harm, whether through successfully opposing applications for more poker machines, introducing gambling policies that take a tougher stance against the predatory gambling industry, or looking at ways to leverage their position as landlords and grant makers -- councils have shown that they can make a difference. All councillors who have made sometimes tough decisions to take on this industry should be very proud.

I must also note the significant achievements and contributions of our outgoing Chair, Cr Geoff Lake. Geoff took on the role of Chair of the Alliance when it first began in 2015. For five years, Geoff has led the Board team, which has guided the Alliance through a period of fantastic growth as we have moved from strength to strength. Geoff's contribution will long be remembered, and we wish him well.

We started 2020 with our Board comprised of more than 50 per cent of members being people with lived experience of gambling harm. We are truly an organisation committed to elevating the voices of people impacted by the insidious and predatory gambling industry and driving the reform this country so desperately needs.



THE NEW YEAR PROVIDES THE ALLIANCE WITH NEW

CAMPAIGNS THAT REQUIRE CONTINUED ADVOCACY FROM

OUR GROWING NUMBER OF LEADERSHIP COUNCILS.

ON THE HORIZON IN 2020

2020 provides the Alliance with new campaigns that require continued advocacy from our growing number of Leadership Councils, as well as increased advocacy nationally from councils.

We will also continue our scrutiny of purported community benefits, venue code of conduct changes, and applications to the regulator for Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) increases, in partnership with our Leadership Councils.

VICTORIAN COUNCILS AND GAMBLING HARM AWARENESS WEEK 2019

A round of applause goes to all Victorian councils who took the opportunity to bring attention to gambling harm in the second week of October.

The week is designed to encourage community discussions about why gambling harm matters, and it was great to see innovative approaches to getting dialogues happening.

These activities included performances by Three Sides of the Coin, which is a theatre group telling stories of gambling harm from first-hand experience, and community forums and stalls at community festivals.

Special thanks to Darebin, Hobsons Bay, Kingston, Moreland, Knox, Yarra, Banyule, Maroondah, Wyndham and Brimbank Councils for participating during the week.

We had four councils join the Alliance as partners at our Gambling Harm Awareness Week event on the steps of Parliament House. Eight councillors attended the event and we interviewed them about their support for gambling reform.

It's also pleasing to report that in NSW, councils are beginning to undertake activities during the NSW-equivalent week. See pages 12 and 13 for more.



THE POKIES

PLAY YOU

CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE

Throughout 2019 the Alliance's work was enriched by working alongside lived experienced advocates through the Champions for Change program.

In Victoria, South Australia and NSW, 40 people who know first-hand how gambling harm impacts people and families are now working with us to advance our shared goal of gambling reforms that will prevent further harm. That number is double how many Champions for Change we had in 2018.

Some of these amazing advocates have extensive campaigning experience that they are sharing with numerous newcomers, like Shonica Guy.

Shonica celebrated 10 years of pokies-free life this year.

Others in more recent recovery have dipped their toes into advocacy for the first time, supported by the Alliance and peers as they step up their involvement.

Some of that work is public, and other work is behind the scenes. This work ranges from meetings with MPs, speaking to the media, engaging with members of the public at community stalls, speaking at council meetings

and making submissions to support local poker machine fights.

This sharing of insights and experiences by advocates is also an important part of informing policies regarding solutions that will work in relation to both pokies and sportsgambling campaigns.

All of our Champions for Change made a huge difference in 2019 and are a vital part of the Alliance's success and strength.



ALL OF OUR CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE IN 2019 AND ARE A VITAL PART OF THE ALLIANCE'S SUCCESS AND STRENGTH.



ENGAGING STATE AND FEDERAL POLITICIANS

Over the course of 2019, meetings with Members of Parliament took place in Victoria, NSW and South Australia. Some of these meetings were initiated by advocates, others were organised by Alliance campaigners with advocates attending and adding the element of lived experience of gambling harm.

Anna Bardsley joined the Alliance for Gambling Reform as the Victorian Coordinator for the Champions for Change program in the second half of 2019.

Here she explains the importance of engaging state and federal politicians as we seek gambling reform.

"When we are able to express what it means to be harmed by gambling, the effect not only on ourselves but the people we love, what the aftermath looks like, what recovery involves, how long it takes, there is a more complete picture of what gambling actually costs, personally and in our society. The conversation is different. As lived experience advocates, we tell our stories, not just to rehash sadness, but to inform and educate about the real face of gambling harm.

We are encouraged and supported by each other and working together we add another layer to our recovery. We are more than just casualties of gambling harm; we are now part of a team of powerful advocates for change." Anna Bardsley

OUT IN THE COMMUNITY

Having information stalls in public places allows the Alliance and our Champions for Change to share information about the reality of gambling harm, and the possibility of reform.

In South Australia, Shonica Guy and her phenomenally committed group of advocates regularly set up stalls in shopping centres.

In Victoria in 2019 we were part of the My Community Life Fair held by Kingston Council in Victoria. This was a first for Kingston Council, one of our Leadership Councils. It was a successful and fun day, we chatted to locals, gave away lots of free stuff and encouraged people to sign up to the Alliance.

NSW Champions also had several stalls in shopping centres, at community and professional events.

Additionally, advocates regularly go along to community events organised by Alliance member councils, as part of a more formal program, tell their stories and talk with locals after. Others write letters of support when the fight to stop more pokies sadly comes up in their local area.



AND THE WINNER IS... ANNA BARDSLEY!

In October it was off to Victoria's Government House for long-time Alliance advocate, and now staff member, Anna Bardsley.

Anna was named the 2019 winner of the Healthy and Active Living Award as part of the Victorian Seniors Awards. Alliance Chief Advocate, Rev Tim Costello, watched on proudly as Anna received her award from the Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AC.

On receiving her award, Anna said: "Gambling harm is real. I lived with the shame for so long but now I'm facing the shame. I've been able to raise my voice for the many people who don't feel able to speak; I speak for more than just myself."

GAMBLING HARM IS REAL.

I'VE BEEN ABLE TO RAISE

MY VOICE FOR THE MANY

PEOPLE WHO DON'T FEEL

ABLE TO SPEAK.

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

GAMBLING HARM AWARENESS WEEKS 2019



Around Australia, Gambling Harm Awareness Week is an important touch point for the advocacy for gambling reform we undertake as the Alliance.

The week brings the much-needed attention of governments and other politicians, and is an opportunity to engage with the community about gambling harm and what we are doing to help minimise it.

In Victoria, South Australia and NSW, 40 people who know first-hand how gambling harm impacts people and families are now working with us to advance our shared goal of gambling reforms that will prevent further harm. That number is double how many Champions for Change we had in 2018.

Some of these amazing advocates have extensive campaigning experience that they are sharing with numerous newcomers, like Shonica Guy. Shonica celebrated 10 years pokies-free this year.



TAKING THE FIGHT TO THE STEPS OF PARLIAMENT IN VICTORIA

During Gambling Harm Awareness Week 2019, the Alliance gathered with event partners on the steps of the Victorian Parliament to bring voices of lived experience of gambling harm and mental ill-health direct to decision-makers.

Together, advocates and supporters called on the Victorian Parliament to recognise the evidential link between gambling harm and mental ill-health, and include gambling harm minimisation and prevention measures in its public health and wellbeing strategies.

Gambling harm is not mentioned in the Government's Mental Health Strategy, nor its Suicide Prevention Framework, nor its Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. This is despite recent submissions to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System from the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation concluding that 22% of the total costs to Victoria's Mental Health System are related to gambling harm.¹

Speakers at the event included Sheena Watt, a Yorta Yorta woman with extensive experience in Aboriginal health and employment and lived experience of gambling harm via family, Ethan Taylor, a young Warumungu man with lived experience of gambling harm, and Carolyn Crawford, a woman with lived experience of gambling harm who spent 18 months in prison for taking money to gamble on poker machines. Alliance Chief Advocate, Rev Tim Costello, also delivered a rousing address to attendees.

The event was well supported with more than 60 individuals in attendance, including mayors, councillors, and officers from Alliance Leadership Councils, representatives of Alliance member organisations, and elected Members of Parliament.

After the event, Ethan Taylor had this to say:

"I woke up this morning so anxious about the event, having never spoken about gambling harm before. But being there and around such incredible people, I honestly felt so safe to tell my story. You all created an environment where I felt secure and comfortable to speak and I cannot thank you all enough for that."

1. Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. June 2019. Retrieved via <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/publications/submission-to-the-royal-commission-into-victorias-mental-health-system-650/>.

RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING AWARENESS WEEK IN NSW

Presently, the name for this week of advocacy is Responsible Gambling Awareness Week, but we're working on that, and with some success!

In October the NSW Upper House supported a motion to call on the government to rename Responsible Gambling Awareness Week to Gambling Harm Awareness Week. The Minister for Gambling has yet to react, but we'll keep lobbying him.

In the same month, the Government, ALP and Greens all came together to strengthen legislation on bans for inducements for new sports gambling account holders. It's an unexpected sign that there might be more opportunities for reform in the most pokie-captured state in Australia.

The Alliance supported events run by other organisations through the week, particularly in Fairfield and Cabramatta. There we helped coordinate a successful coffee cart and gambling help stall. With multilingual volunteers from several organisations, we gave out 120 free coffees, provided gambling counselling and help information to around 70 people.

During the week we even helped one Assyrian man make an appointment with the Multicultural Problem Gambling Service, because seeing us helped him realise he needed a hand.

It was particularly satisfying to arrange to have Three Sides of the Coin perform for the first time in NSW, in Fairfield. The audience, as always, found it a powerful experience.

Rev Tim Costello rounded out the week by delivering the keynote speech to Sydney Recovery's Gambling Awareness walk.

**WE GAVE OUT 120 FREE
COFFEES, PROVIDED
GAMBLING COUNSELLING
AND HELP INFORMATION
TO AROUND 70 PEOPLE.**

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

DIVESTING GAMBLING INTERESTS

We had major wins in 2019 as Coles, Woolworths and AFL clubs decided that profiting from poker machines was too damaging to their reputations, and that they needed to get out of the industry.



Shonica Guy, who spent 14 years battling a pokies addiction and ended up taking Federal Court action against Aristocrat and Crown Resorts in 2017, made the following comment at the time:

After years of campaigning by us, Coles announced it would be dumping its poker machines holdings in March. This move by Coles put further pressure on Woolworths -- not just a supermarket chain, but Australia's biggest poker machine business, with more than 12,000 poker machines across 286 hotels.

The pressure of whistleblowers coming forward, boards being grilled at AGMs, executives meeting family members of gamblers, thousands of letters from our supporters and the direct lobbying of the Woolies executive team culminated in July when Woolworths announced that it too would divest its substantial poker machine interests.

This was a monumental decision. Woolworths poker machines were raking in more than \$1.5 billion a year.

The Woolworths board's decision to give up \$1.5 billion reflects just how toxic the poker machine industry has become to brands.

Rev Tim Costello made the following comments at the time of the Woolworths decision:

"This is a globally significant moment for the gambling divestment movement, not unlike Rio Tinto getting out of coal. And if Coles and Woolworths no longer wish to be associated with such a toxic industry, then it's time for other family-friendly sports such as football to get out of gambling too."

It was also a massive year for AFL poker machine divestment, with Collingwood, the Western Bulldogs, and Geelong finalising their exits from the industry. We congratulate these clubs who decided to put community first, along with North Melbourne for never getting into the poker machine business in the first place, and Melbourne for selling off one of its venues and committing to not renewing its gaming entitlements at another venue when they expire in 2022.

The AFL prides itself on being a family friendly organisation; its reliance on the poker machine business that causes so much misery just doesn't add up.

A special thanks goes out to those footy fans and community members who have put themselves out there in advocating to their club -- your advocacy is crucial.

"THIS IS A HUGE WIN FOR THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN TORN APART BY WOOLWORTHS/ALH POKIE DENS. THE PUBLIC KNOW HOW TOXIC THIS INDUSTRY IS, NOW WOOLWORTHS KNOWS TOO. NOW IT'S TIME FOR STATE GOVERNMENTS TO TAKE SERIOUS ACTION TO REIGN IN THIS COWBOY INDUSTRY."

WHY IS GAMBLING DIVESTMENT IMPORTANT?

We sometimes hear that divestment does not have an impact on gambling harm as often the poker machine licences end up in other hands and continue to operate. This is true in the short-term, but divestment is very much a long-term proposition.

Every time a company decides that being invested in gambling is toxic to their brand is a huge win for the community.

Every time ethical investors make it clear that gambling is not an industry in which they will invest is a shift to undermining this abhorrent, exploitative way of making a profit.

Every time our governments have it reinforced that the gambling industry is viewed negatively it makes it easier for them to legislate change. Just like smoking, gambling is harmful to health. Politicians would never dream of being associated with big tobacco in 2020. Getting gambling to be perceived in a similar vein will make it untenable for politicians and political parties to take donations from the industry, reducing its political influence and paving the way for gambling reform.

Australia's poker machine industry is powerful, normalised, and causes tremendous harm to people and communities. Serious reform requires serious changes to government policy and law, but politicians only act when there is deep community support, and weak industry opposition.

When large companies and AFL clubs divest out of poker machines, they are giving up 'easy' money because they have been forced to recognise the damage done by the machines, and the damage that in turn does to their reputation.

Every time a club or pub divests, our movement for reform gets stronger, and the influence of the industry still fleecing the community weakens.

This is why the Alliance will continue to pressure AFL clubs to divest their poker machine interests until they are all out of the business. This is why we will watch Woolworths closely as the deal for their divestment goes through. Divestments help build momentum towards an Australia that sees gambling harm for what it is -- a devastating blight on our country.

MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD AT AGMS

In 2019 we supported people with lived experience of gambling harm to speak truth to power at various industry Annual General Meetings (AGMs), including Tabcorp, Macquarie Bank, Woolworths and Aristocrat.

It was incredibly powerful to witness the chairperson of the Woolworths Board be confronted by the mother of a son who has struggled with gambling addiction, and for him to be held to account for the company's complicity in her family's pain.

The Chair was forced to acknowledge that being in the gambling business made it difficult for ethical individual and institutional investors to buy Woolworths shares.

The success of this work demonstrates why it is so important to ensure that people with lived experience of gambling harm have their voices heard.

WOOLWORTHS AGM



GETTING INTO THE FIGHT AGAINST SPORTS GAMBLING

Unfortunately it is almost impossible to avoid exposure to sports gambling and its ubiquitous advertising and marketing around Australia, and that is of particular concern when it comes to children.

In 2019, the Alliance kicked off our long-awaited sports gambling campaign, on the eve of the Federal Election by calling for a ban on gambling advertising. We asked the community about the impact this unavoidable advertising was having and we received hundreds of powerful responses. These continue to inform our advocacy work.

"I resent having to constantly re-inforce to my young children why gambling is bad, as it is destroying the lives of many in the community. Sport is such an intrinsic way of life that to allow this destructive gambling industry any foothold is too much."

In December 2019, a government study confirmed what many already knew -- despite modest restrictions, the volume of gambling advertising increased by a whopping 50 percent since 2018.¹ In real terms, this means that on average every night, 1.2 million children are still exposed to gambling messages plastered across their television screens and spruiked by sporting legends.

We know all too well the detrimental impact this is having on the way children view sport and we will continue to advocate for a total advertising ban.

We had cause for celebration in March 2019 when the Geelong Football Club became the first in the country to ban gambling advertising at its home stadium.

In June, we wrote to the AFL and Presidents of every club in the league following the shocking revelation that AFL footballers themselves are being seriously harmed by sports gambling.

This year we'll continue to pressure Australia's leading sports codes to end their exorbitant sponsorship deals with corporate bookmakers who exploit family-friendly brands to normalise gambling to fans.



ON AVERAGE EVERY NIGHT, 1.2 MILLION CHILDREN ARE STILL EXPOSED TO GAMBLING MESSAGES ACROSS THEIR TELEVISION SCREENS.



1 IN EVERY 5 ADULTS

WHO GAMBLE DANGEROUSLY STARTED BEFORE THEY WERE 18

REDUCING HARM FROM SPORTS GAMBLING

We will remember 2019 as the year significant harm reduction measures were adopted to better protect Australians from online gambling harm.

Following a landmark agreement between state and federal governments, we saw a series of major reforms implemented under the National Consumer Protection Framework, including gambling companies now being prohibited from using inducements such as “bonus bets” to lure in new customers to gamble. NSW Campaigner Dr Kate da Costa worked across the aisle to successfully ensure this measure was particularly robust in Australia’s most harmed gambling state.

In December 2019 we saw the introduction of the long-awaited National Self Exclusion Register -- a single-click platform that will better support people experiencing from online gambling harm. The Alliance was actively consulted on the Bills supporting this measure, and continues to amplify the voices of those with lived experience to inform the development and rollout of this important harm minimisation tool.

The Alliance also actively consulted our Champions for Change as we advocated for tighter restrictions to age verification requirements for online gambling accounts to ensure new customers are being verified before they can place a bet to better safeguard children from gambling harm.

Campaigns Director Margaret Quixley took the voices of lived experience advocates directly to Canberra where she met with bureaucrats and formally presented to the House Committee overseeing this review.



ALLIANCE FOR GAMBLING REFORM

2019

AT A GLANCE

OUR GOALS

Nationally, the Alliance's long-term goals are:

- 1. Harm prevention:** Elimination of machine design features that increase the likelihood of addiction such as losses disguised as wins and near misses.
- 2. Harm minimisation:** Lowering the maximum bet to \$1 and the hourly loss rate to \$120 an hour reduces the harm done.
- 3. Empowering communities:** Changes to the regulation of the poker machine industry to empower communities to have a real say over applications for more machines, and reducing the number of machines and venues.

HOW WE ARE GETTING THERE

1.

Changing the debate and language from placing the responsibility on the individual -- "responsible gambling" -- to highlighting exploitation by the gambling industry.

"If I have to hear the words 'responsible gambling' one more time, I think I'll vomit. This is an industry that makes the absolute majority of its money from people who are experiencing gambling harm, and they create their products and marketing accordingly to drain people of their money. How dare they try and place the blame for gambling harm with the people they are intentionally addicting and exploiting!"

Anna Bardsley, Winner of the 2019 Victorian Active and Healthy Living Award for Seniors

2.

Build a national supporter base of individuals, 'Champions of Change' who have experienced gambling harm, Leadership Councils and community organisations that share our commitment to preventing gambling harm.

"The gambling industry stole 14 years of my life, so it's an honour to be able to fight back as part of the Alliance's 'Champions of Change' program. Whether it be speaking at Council meetings or to the community at a stall in a shopping centre, every time we engage with people and organisations about the harm gambling causes, and what we can do to change that, is a step towards reducing the influence of the gambling industry and preventing harm."

Shonica Guy, South Australian Gambling Reform Advocate

3.

Reduce the credibility and influence of the gambling industry and contrast it with positive examples of gambling-free or pro-reform clubs.

"It's no coincidence that Western Australia has the lowest levels of gambling harm in Australia and is also the only state to have not given in to having poker machines in pubs and clubs. The Beach Hotel in Byron Bay is a fantastic example of a business thriving without poker machines, having removed them in 2018. The venue sold recently for a record price, with the new owners expressing their commitment to not bringing pokies back. It can be done, and done well."

Rev Tim Costello, Chief Advocate, Alliance for Gambling Reform

4.

Advocate to politicians with our alliance of supporters to secure systemic policy reform.

"Despite being nervous the first time I went to a meeting with a politician I found telling my story to them empowering. It's so important for us to meet with people in power to ensure they understand the very real impacts of gambling harm. We are the people behind the harm and they need to listen to us."

Carolyn Crawford, Victorian Gambling Reform Advocate



Other philanthropic orgs logos

The Reichstein Foundation

The Ross Trust

The Collier Charitable Fund

The William Buckland Foundation

The John T Reid Charitable Trusts

The Rio Industrial Group

A photograph of an elderly man with white hair, wearing a green quilted jacket, holding a yellow sign. He is standing in a crowd of people outdoors. In the background, there are other people, including a man with glasses and a man with a shaved head. A blue sign is visible in the background. The sign he is holding has black text and a white box with red handwritten text. The logo for the Alliance for Gambling Reform is at the bottom of the sign.

**I support
gambling
reform
because**

I DON'T WANT
TO GAMBLE WITH
OUR HEALTH.

 ALLIANCE FOR
GAMBLING REFORM

If you or someone you know needs support please contact:
Gambler's Help on 1800 858 858, gamblinghelponline.org.au
Lifeline on 13 11 14, lifeline.org.au