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Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs - 05/12/2022

**BENNETT, Ms Carol, Chief Executive Officer, Alliance for Gambling Reform [by video link]**

**COSTELLO, Reverend Timothy Ewen, Chief Advocate, Alliance for Gambling Reform [by video link]**

**Committee met at 10:08**

**CHAIR ( Ms Murphy ):** Good morning, everyone. Before we start, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. I am in Frankston, so they are the Bunurong people of the Kulin nation. I acknowledge the traditional owners where everyone is and pay respect to their ancestors and elders, past, present and emerging, and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural and spiritual connection to Australia's land and waters.

I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry of the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm. In accordance with the committee's resolution of 10 August 2022, this hearing will be broadcast on the parliament's website, and the proof and official transcripts of proceedings will be published on the parliament's website. I remind all members of the media who may be present or listening on the web of the need to fairly and accurately report the proceedings of the committee. I now welcome the representatives of the Alliance for Gambling Reform to give evidence today.

Rev. Costello : I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that I'm on, the Bunurong people of the Kulin nationâ I too am in Frankstonâ and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. The Alliance for Gambling Reform is the only independent national peak body that represents more than 60 organisations with shared concern about harm related to gambling and its normalisation in Australian life. We both welcome this opportunity and congratulate you on having this inquiry. This really is quite groundbreaking and, I think, very socially significant and, I would add, morally significant for the nation to have this inquiry.

Ms Bennett : I'd like to join with Tim in welcoming this inquiry, and I look forward to the findings. It's a really important inquiry, and we are really looking forward to contributing today. I'll also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land of which I'm meeting, which is Ngunnawal country, in Canberra, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I have a few more things I have to put on the record before I invite you to give your opening statement. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and therefore has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The evidence given today will be

recorded by Hansard and attracts parliamentary privilege. Now, Reverend Costello, you wished to make an opening statement? The floor is yours.

Rev. Costello : The impact of online gambling and its harms haven't been the subject of any national inquiry, but it's a critical public-health concern and, in our submission, it's a critical concern for the protection of children. You're all aware that the public is very aware of the impact of gambling on our children and our culture. We would submit that the public is ahead of our political leaders on this. A recent Resolve poll reported 61 per cent of the public wants sports gambling advertising totally removed from the AFL— way ahead of fossil fuels' sponsorship, which was only 29 per cent. The AFL's own survey material shows that sports betting is up there with the greatest hates of AFL supports. Their other equal hate is umpiring and umpiring decisions!

The public certainly are now aware that Australia leads the world in gambling losses per capita. Carol will introduce new research and findings in her opening statement— that we lead in online gambling and online gambling by children. In gambling overall, we're not only No.1; we lead the world, being 40 per cent higher than the nation that comes second. That's an area that we don't want to lead in.

Back in the year 2000, I wrote this book. It's called *Wanna Bet?*

When I started writing it, I assumed that Australians had the greatest gambling losses because culturally we just love gambling more than other cultures. That was my starting assumption. In writing this book I actually discovered what nonsense this was— that the Chinese claim to be the greatest gamblers on Earth, that the Irish claim to be the greatest gamblers on Earth, that the kiwis claim it and that the English claim it.

I realised there's a culturally constructed myth that the gambling industry has powerfully sold us, capturing community and mateship— 'gamble with your mates'— and capturing sport that we love, that we have the greatest gambling losses just because we love it far more than anyone else does. The truth is that we've had the worst policies, the least regulation of gambling. That is why we have the greatest losses. And those losses are not a cultural, innate tendency; they're a structural certainty because of the failure of proper regulation and proper policies that other nations have had.

Effectively in this space we had no national regulation of gambling. This is unlike other nations. We have a limited presence with the federal government in the areas of communication through ACMA, but it's very limited and it's really quite a toothless tiger. There are some responsibilities, and the consumer protection framework of DSS and financial wellbeing. As you have already heard from the Department of Social Services in evidence provided to this inquiry, gambling is a tiny part of what they do. And in the words of the DSS officers, there is no robust national strategy that coordinates with the states about what's happening and how it's happening.

States and territories have ministers for gaming, and, I have to say, in my 30 years of advocacy here, that focus has been much more on the gambling industry flourishing than actual regulation or harm prevention. When we move to the state areas we've seen that the regulators that have existed literally have been captured. That's what royal commissions into casinos have shown, and only now have they been beefed up with proper sanctions and independence.

We say that gambling is a harmful product, but particularly as it impacts kids, and its trajectory is similar to that of alcohol or tobacco. Yet tobacco and alcohol both have dedicated areas of the health department addressing harm. We don't have ministers at state level for tobacco or ministers for alcohol as we have ministers for gaming. We actually have health departments, state and federal, that are addressing it. There is not one health bureaucrat that we have identified in any health department, federal or state, in the country concerned about the impact of this harmful product, particularly on our children and on our community. So, our submission is that this is why we have the greatest losses and the most harm, because it is a blindspot for all governments.

We have a fear that if we don't see changes to ensure proper regulation and protection of our kids from online gambling then it's highly likely that in the next years we will see a royal commission tasked with answering the question of why we catastrophically failed to prevent the escalation of gambling harm beyond acceptable levels and literally the mainstreaming, normalising or even grooming of kids.

Gambling harm in our submission is like tobacco harm in so many ways, where the powerful industry, the gambling industry, seek to normalise and downplay the significant health, mental health, economic and social problems that go hand in hand with the culture of gambling. That is omnipresent. Just this week we saw the health minister, Mark Butler and we welcome this announcing measures to protect children from a predatory industry seeking to minimise the harms from their vaping products while marketing them to emerging customers, namely, our children. You will hear figures from my colleague Carol about the number of children gambling online. Yet we see no comparable measures to limit the marketing of gambling for our children, despite both its influence, its harm and the number who are gambling and associated with gambling products.

What has changed and made this even more turbocharged is (1) virtually having no regulation and (2) the little regulation we have not keeping up with technology. Everyone now owns a personal gambling device in the form of a mobile phone every child does. Online gambling and gambling advertising has never been more accessible. We managed to curb tobacco availability and promotion based on the fact that it was an adult product that can cause significant harm. We have utterly failed doing that with another adult product that targets our children namely, gambling. Almost all the foreign overseas betting companies use the back door provided by the Northern Territory, with significant tax advantages to them, ensuring that our losses are moved offshore, to launch their gambling advertising tsunamis.

There are now 948 ads on free-to-air TV a day in Victoria alone. Incredibly, that is a small number compared to the ads on social media and the way kids who aren't watching free-to-air TV the complaints about free-to-air TV come from the kids parents, actually. The six o'clock news all have gambling and sports betting advertisements, as well as *MasterChef* and *TheBlock*. You can't show an alcohol ad before 8.30, but there's no problem with a gambling ad at family-friendly times. But it's the parents complaining about that. Kids are inundated with social media pop-ups for gambling. As the University of Bristol recommended in a 2021 study in our submission there should be a ban on all ads of this product for kids because they have been targeted and they are being hurt.

We believe gambling has captured our sport. It dominates our advertising. Its permanent online presence is impacting all Australians and their children. We see the pervasive promotions and advertising, and we see our children being targeted already and gambling already and being groomed as the next profit-making losers for an industry that faces virtually no regulation and few restrictions. It's not the Australia that we want.

Let me finish by saying that we are able to do something about this, and the public has already made up its mind that it wants something done about this. Thank you for listening to me.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Ms Bennett, do you wish to give an opening statement?

Ms Bennett: I'll be as quick as I can.

**CHAIR:** And we did receive your additional submission this morning. I don't know how many of the other members of the committee have had a chance to read it, but we did receive your submission with the statistics in it this morning.

Ms Bennett: That's terrific. I'm quite happy to go straight to questions, given that we have limited time. I'll leave it to you, Peta, to ask questions based on what we've given you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for that. If there is something that you want to get on the record and you don't have the opportunity during the questions, please let me know, and we'll make sure you have that opportunity at the end. I'm going to use the chair's prerogative and start. Either of you could answer these questions. I'll let you work out whatever secret signal you have between you about how you're going to do that! In your submission, you talk about taking a public-health approach, and that's certainly something that other submitters have spoken about as well. I'm interested to hear what you say would be done differently under a public health approach to what is currently happening under, for example, the national framework.

Ms Bennett : There are so many parallels between alcohol, tobacco and other harmful products, particularly products that target our children, that are treated like they are harmful products. They are regulated accordingly and they are considered a public health concern. In this country, as Tim said, we have ministers for gambling or for gaming but we don't actually have the prevention, the early intervention, the treatment and supports, the research capacity, the evaluations, the evidence baseâ all of those things that go with a comprehensive public health approach towards regulating and managing a product that causes the extent of harm that gambling does. At a minimum, instead of having racing and gaming commissions at the state level managing industry issues related to gambling, we would see health departments actually looking at the harms and addressing the harms. There would be greater awareness. There would be greater regulation around things like ensuring that we have mandatory precommitment schemes that have binding and practical default limits, and that you'd have to prove your age and your income in order to be able to exceed those limits or in order to be able to increase those limits.

Public education: it would be independent of the industry. What we see is the industry often self-regulates when it comes to awareness and education. It needs to be done in a way that has the public in mindâ not the industry suggesting that we should be looking at responsible gambling and blaming the individual, but looking at it in a public health approach. Education about gambling harms.

Best practice treatment: at the moment we have a mishmash of services, often tacked on to other services, drug and alcohol and crisis services. We don't actually have a lot of specialist gambling services, and, when we do, they're funded by industry. An independent research that is not funded by the gambling industry. These are fundamentals of a public health approach. And given the extent of what we're talking aboutâ the highest losses in the world, the least regulation and [inaudible] regulationâ the fact that this is a harmful product and harmful adult product targeting our children, you would expect that we would be taking this a little more seriously and looking at this through a public health lens.

**CHAIR:** Ms Bennett, would you agree that, as the system works at the moment, most of what you're talking about is done in an uncoordinated, sort of fractured way between federal and state parliaments or governments? There is research. The Australian Institute of Family Studies, for example, does some research. We know that there are some specific gambling counselling services, for example, in New South Wales. We're yet to hear a great deal about education and early intervention, I have to say. But what is lacking is an overall strategy that pulls those together and has the states and the federal government working hand in handâ for example, like they do with domestic violence or diabetes or other health issues.

Ms Bennett : Absolutely right. And given that this is an issue that impacts in those areasâ domestic violence, suicidality, mental health, health problems themselves and comorbiditiesâ it would make sense that there would be a coordinated national approach and that there is consistency. We know at the moment, when you have state regulation you get anomalies like the states have different rules around inducements, for instance. They're all different. This is not an issue that stops at state boundaries; it crosses state boundaries; it crosses national boundaries very often, but we just not keeping up. So I absolutely agree.

Also, ensuring that advocacy groups [inaudible] do have sight of harm reduction. And making sure consumers, people with lived experience are also involved and we're not just consulting with the industry when we want to make changes or regulate.

**CHAIR:** Interestingly, industry submissions talk about the complexity of the regulatory regime as well, from a different perspective, but it is clear it's an issue.

Our inquiry is limited to online gambling, with the addition of the simulated gambling, I guess, with loot boxes, and that's for a reason, of courseâ the constitutional validity of the federal government regulating communications. Reverend Costello, you talk about how there's no national regulation of gambling and you propose a national ombudsman and a national regulator. Are you talking about more than simply online gambling? It may well be that something that people are interested in, but our remit at the moment is online gambling. Has the alliance thought about that technical legal issue about responsibilities of state and federal parliaments?

Rev. Costello : For this submission we're talking only about online gambling. You're absolutely right that there have been calls by us and others for national regulators when it comes to casinos, because the weakest state is the standard with casinos that it all sinks to. We know that when Crown was having to ban crims in their casinos, they were just welcomed at Star Sydney, Star Queensland, so we have to make calls there. But the national regulator on online gambling here is a call in concert with the national strategy and responsibility.

To your question about health, we never for a moment left health considerations and prevention of them to tobacco industries. We never let alcohol problems and prevention of that to just the alcohol industry. That's effectively what we've done with online betting. We've actually said the prevention of harm is largely left to the sports betting companies who have a number of fancy terms about their responsible gambling opportunities. We have literally left them in charge of preventing the health outcomes.

And you'll hear evidence in this inquiry from whistleblowers in the sports betting industry that they go through every bet. If someone's losing, they offer a bonus. If they don't take that bonus within an hour, they up the bonus to keep them betting. But if someone's winning, they actually slow them down and then they close them down if they're willing too much. The conflict of interest between the commercial interests and their so-called responsible gambling entrusted to prevent the health aspect is that why we're calling for a national regulator here within a health framework.

**CHAIR:** One of my colleagues might ask you questions about the 'responsible gambling' tagline, because I assume the alliance will be pleased to see that that has changed.

Rev. Costello : Indeed.

**CHAIR:** Very briefly, before I hand over to the deputy chair, I was to ask a hypothetical question. Say there was a national preventative health approach, a national strategy, what would be different about the national regulator to ACMA at the moment, which is the national regulator?

Rev. Costello : Well ACMA has a very, very limited brief and virtually no sanctions. Because the tsunami of ads come out of the Northern Territory, ACMA can only ever look at a slice of that and, as we have seen, has failed to limit the flow of those tsunamis of ads. At one level it would beâ if I had my druthers, which is not likely to happenâ best for the feds to buy out the licences in the Northern Territory and put them under a proper national regulator. It might cost a couple of hundred million to buy out those licenses, but when breaches occur, which is happening all the timeâ with inducements, with breaches of their advertisingâ there are actually real sanctions, real fines. Which is exactly what's happened with the beefed up state regulators after royal commissions into casinos.

**Mr CONAGHAN:** Thank you, Reverend and Ms Bennett. It's difficult to disagree with anything you've said so far. Just on that point, Reverend, where you said they actually shut people down when they're winning, I'm aware of a fellow who's been shut down from four apps because he was winning. It's just incredible, but that's something we can take up with those online gambling agencies.

This is probably a question for you, Ms Bennett. We've spoken about the health issue and addressing it as a health issue as you would with alcohol or drugs. You made a statement that we need the health departments looking at the harms. Can you go a bit deeper into that? What does that look like, and have you consulted with various health departments as to what they think it looks like?

Ms Bennett : I have been involved in the public health space for 30 years now, and in that area there is a recognised public health approach to harmful products, particularly harmful products that impact children. In every area you can imagineâ whether it's cancer, whether it's alcohol, tobacco, drugs, whether it's mental health, whether it's stroke or heart diseaseâ whatever causes harm at a public health level, especially the extent of harm that online gambling does to the community and to our children, there would be a commensurate response from the health department, particularly the federal health department. Also the states and territories would have some level of regard and responsibility for the health of the

community. It's an anomaly in this area that that doesn't occur. If that happened, it would enable this to be approached from a public health perspective, where you have a spectrum of responses from prevention to early intervention to treatment and management to public awareness to research and evaluation.

The problem here is that, when you have such a limited focus on just the industry and its prosperity, you don't have a response that looks at the public and its need for protection from a harmful product. The gambling industry makes money by making losers. That's the reality. While we continue to put the gambling industry at the table and give them responsibility for reducing harm, we are not going to see any reduction in harm, because it is at odds with their purpose. So a public health approach would mean that we could have health departments that do actually take this seriously and consider it a public health issue.

**Mr CONAGHAN:** You also spoke about best practice treatment. You addressed that in some degree. The consultation with the levels of government and health departmentsâ are they willing to engage?

Ms Bennett : No. I don't think I've engaged with any health department on this issue because they simply don't deal with that. I have not come across a single health bureaucrat in this country that deals with gambling. None, which is extraordinary. It's an anomaly. It's amazing.

**Mr CONAGHAN:** That is amazing. I assume that you have reached out to them and tried to engage them.

Ms Bennett : Yes. And we've certainly tried to engage with ministers for health, but it's not an area of their responsibility. We really haven't been able to have any consultations because we get referred to the minister for gambling or we get referred to, at the federal level, the DSS, which does most of the work in this area through financial counselling and through its regulation of the consumer protection framework. And then you have ACMA, which does the online advertising and that more public perspective. But they're very limited. Even where they have responsibility, they're sharing some of that responsibility with states and territories. It's very confusing and disorganised, and it lacks any kind of clear national framework.

**Mr CONAGHAN:** Has this been a slow creep over the past decade, or has it been an explosion through the proliferation of the availability of technology?

Ms Bennett : I was going to say that I think we've seen an explosion because we haven't seen the regulation that's required. As a result, the technology, as you say, has also come online, and, all of a sudden, it's way out of control. So we're kind of playing catch-up. That's why it's really critical at this point in time that we have this inquiry and that we are actually able to address some of these issues. Tim, did you want to add to that?

Rev. Costello : Yes. I would say, certainly, it's an explosion of technologyâ every phone a kid has now is a gambling device. Equally, we started from such a low base because of that cultural construction that Australians just love a punt more than others. We had a total *laissez-faire* approach. Looking at other areas, when the pokies were coin operated, they didn't do any damage or did very little damage. When they moved to being digitalâ you can load up \$10,000 in one go on the pokies in New South Walesâ they moved, in my analogy, from the ball-and-musket rifle, when the second amendment was written in America, to semi-automatic weapons, which America has protected under the same right. The technology dramatically changed, and, like the right to guns in America, the *laissez faire* lack of regulation in Australia became even more exposed by the explosion of technology.

**Mr CONAGHAN:** I have one final question, and it does relate to children. Do you have a position or professional opinion about online gaming and loot boxes? This is part of the terms of reference. Many parents have concerns about the loot boxes leading to adult gambling.

Rev. Costello : Yes. We believe there is a deliberate and conscious merging of kids gaming using loot boxes to become gamblers. We've been heartened by people's voicesâ researchers speaking out about this quite deliberate blurring. I don't think we should be surprised; there's just so much easy money here. When you're spending \$280 million on online wagering, the biggest advertising spend in Australiaâ TikTok

are now starting to actually pilot gamblingâ you just have so much easy money. The profits are so enticing. Loot boxes are part of that continuum.

**Mr CONAGHAN:** Thank you, Reverend. Thanks, Chair.

**CHAIR:** Ms Miller-Frost, over to you.

**Ms MILLER-FROST:** Thank you very much for coming in, or Zooming in. I wanted to ask: is there a costing from a public health perspective? Has somebody actually done the costing across Australia for problem gambling from a public health perspective, as opposed to just sheer losses?

Ms Bennett : That's a really good question. There has not been any comprehensive analysis of the social health and economic costs in Australia due to gambling. There is limited data. Even the New South Wales Crime Commission report that was released a few weeks ago was able to say that there are billions of dollars being laundered, with criminal activity associated with that and fraud, but it couldn't actually place a figure on it, because the data that was being collected by industry was not sufficient enough to identify the extent of the problem. We have a real problem with data, and research in general, in this space. It doesn't give us the capacity to make the kind of analysis that you can make in other areas. We certainly need a more comprehensive analysis of what this actually looks like in public health terms, and that has not been done. There have been limited studies, very qualified studies, that have shown 10 [inaudible] dollars related to the total social and health costsâ I think that's a gross underestimation. The reality is that we just don't have the data, and we really do need to know what that looks like.

Rev. Costello : I'd like to add that, in my 30 years of advocacy on this, state governments have absolutely resisted that. When we've called for health analysis linking crime, mental health and domestic violenceâ the list goes on and onâ they have totally resisted doing that research. For pokies, the reason, cynically, is that so much of the revenue comes from the pokies, so it's just too problematic to show that. Money coming into state treasuries is so grossly outweighed by the health damage that they haven't had motivation to do that.

**Ms MILLER-FROST:** It sounds like a good PhD topic for someone. We've had a lot of evidence, and you've mentioned some here, about some of the incentives and inducements that online gambling companies use to keep people gambling or to get them in. You mentioned, Reverend Costello, companies trying to speed up people who were losing and slow down those who were winning. Is there a list of those somewhere? I have to say I'm not an online gambler, so a lot of this is new information to me. We've also had evidence around people who seemed to be losing a lot getting concerned letters, emails or calls that were almost reinforcing, with 'Are you still enjoying this?' types of messages, leading them to think of gambling as enjoyment, rather than a 'Do you think you've got a problem?' approach. Do we just have to keep stumbling across these examples, or is there a business model written down somewhere that we can get?

Rev. Costello : No, there's no list because the industry controls it and they have no interest in giving us a list. We rely on whistleblowers. There is not even a level playing field in the industry, when they can slow down winners and give incentive to losers. To answer why we don't have this: they're just too powerful. They have had such power without national regulation, which is what we're calling for, that they don't disclose this. When whistleblowers blow the whistle, these companies sue them. That's the situation we're in.

**Ms MILLER-FROST:** I have one last question, which is fairly broad. Are there any countries that you think have got regulation correct that we should be looking at?

Ms Bennett : We do know that some European countriesâ Italy and the Netherlands, for instanceâ have banned sports gambling advertising. Spain and Sweden have various levels of bans on advertising and inducements. Lauren Levin from Financial Counselling Australia has recently done a Churchill Fellowship, travelling around Europe and the UK, and has found some stunning contrasts with Australia. She would be well placed to give you some real detail about that, but we do know that we are very much at odds with the rest of the world when it comes to even minimum requirements around these sorts of things.

I'd like to talk about the previous question, when we talked about the inducements and fines that we have available to us when it comes to these sorts of things. For instance: in the Northern Territory, where they have to regulate online wagering companies like Sportsbet, WinnersBet and so on, the maximum fine that they've ever been able to apply is \$27,000. They can suspend or cancel a licence. There was a fine given in late 2021, when Neds breached the code. Bookmakers were not supposed to offer credit, a voucher or reward to a person to open a betting account, but a staff member of Neds had a QR code on a business card which gave a bonus to people who opened the accountâ blatant disregard, but it was a very light-touch fine. It's totally inadequate but, obviously, states and territories vary in the degree to which they implement those fines as well.

Rev. Costello : I might just say it was the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation that gave all of us the figure of 943 ads on free-to-air TV in Victoria a day, and the contrast with the UK. The UK had 13 ads a week; we had 943 a day. So when you talk about international comparisons they, particularly Europe, are so far ahead of us.

You might also be aware that in the mid-term elections in America, California was to vote on liberalising online sports betting. They voted against it, and that was despite the industry's massive push polling to get that referendum up. When the public are asked, it doesnâ t matter which country we're talking about, they know this is dangerous and out of control. But here we lead the world, including the figures Carol has given you on the number of kids in Australia engaged in risky sports betting.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Miller-Frost we're going to move on, sorryâ but just before we do I think we've had some other witnesses join. I'll ask that if you're not speaking to please mute yourself. There's someone who I think is moving around and it's making it difficult for us to hear.

**Mr CONAGHAN:** I think it might be coming from the committee room.

**CHAIR:** Good work Deputy Chair. Ms Chaney.

**Ms CHANEY:** Thank you very much. I just want to put something to you that we heard in a different hearing and get your response. The point was made that gambling is different to smoking because every cigarette does you harm, but every bet doesn't necessarily do you harm. I'm just interested in your thoughts on similarities and differences between gambling and other public health issues like smoking or alcohol.

Rev. Costello : Carol, do you want to answer?

Ms Bennett: I was going to ask you to do that one!

Rev. Costello : Oh well, I'll have a go. Absolutely, every cigarette can do you harm and people can have a punt and not get addicted. There's no equivalent that we're making there. But I don't mind a drink, but we know that alcohol consumed excessively does you harm and yet alcohol can't be advertised in the way that sports betting ads are on free-to-air, grooming kids. We certainly know that the tactics of the gambling industry are very, very similar to tobacco and that giving them the primary responsibility for harm prevention is disastrous. So I wouldn't want to overstate the fact that every punt is like a cigarette; I have always accepted that argument.

I'm often characterised as a prohibitionist. I've never been a prohibitionist. I believe adults should absolutely be allowed to exercise adult products. But I've always maintained that, where industries do cause addictionâ that's the analogy between sports betting and tobacco; they do cause addictionâ they shouldn't be self-regulated. They do have a similar self-justifying commercial model that leads to harm.

An absolutely adult product shouldn't be in the faces of kids, grooming them. And we're seeing so many kids, with the figures we've given you today, gambling, and in risky ways. And, as our submission says, while adults are sick of the sports betting ads, the evidence with kidsâ 90 per cent know the logos, oddsâ is that it's very positive. It's very exciting. They're attracted to it. The sports-betting ads may turn off a lot of adults, but they are very, very attractive to kids. Tobacco ads certainly were making cigarettes attractive to kids. So there are parallels and there are discontinuities.



Ms Bennett: Look at the amount we spend, for instance, on managing, preventing and raising awareness of alcohol or tobacco, and regulating them. Or even seatbelts and random breath testingâ would we not do that? Running a car doesn't mean that it's not a good product and a useful product, but, where there is harm, we still intervene and set some rules and limits. This is an area where there are no rules or limits, and it's a real anomaly.

On Tim's point around the number of children, Chair, can I put in writing or in evidence at some point the numbers that we've presented to you today?

**CHAIR:** Yes, if you could forward those to the committee, that would be terrific. I've just conscious that Ms Chaney has a few more questions and we haven't got to Mr Wolahan yet, and we are supposed to finish at 11, so we'll be running a bit over time. But, absolutely, please do that after the hearing.

**Ms CHANEY:** Carol, my next question may lead you into that anyway. The data that you shared in that supplementary submission about the online gaming marketâ Australia's online gaming market being the third-largest regulated market. I'm just wondering about the definition of online gaming there and whether that is gaming or gambling. Could you maybe talk a bit more about what that actually means?

Ms Bennett: That's data that comes from the UK. It's all online gaming markets that produce some kind of gambling result, I guess, to put it in blunt terms. I haven't got the definition at hand, but I can certainly give that to you, if you'd like, after this hearing.

**Ms CHANEY:** I'm curious about whether it includes video games or if it's just gambling online.

Ms Bennett: I'm happy to provide it.

**Ms CHANEY:** That would be great. I'm happy to pass on the call. Most of my questions have been answered.

**CHAIR:** Okay. Mr Wolahan.

**Mr WOLAHAN:** Thank you, Reverend and Carol. I'm curious about how you see online gaming affecting the use of poker machines. If there's this growth in the use of online gambling by younger people, is there a corresponding drop in the use of pokies? And where do you see this in 10, 20 or 30 years; do you think those machines will still be a factor?

Rev. Costello : Pokies are already starting to move to what effectively is like online gamblingâ the digital returns. So, although it's \$14 billion of the \$24 billion we lose at the moment, it's probably flatlining. The difference is that pokiesâ and the next presenters, with lived experience, can speak to thisâ targeted a different group to young people. Online gambling, certainly sports betting, is targeted to young men and now young women and children, because they're into sport and they know the odds, and they're now watching a different game to just their team playingâ they are looking to see if their multi comes in. They have had different markets. The move with pokies will be onto digital terminals, which is much more interactive, so we'll see some changes in industry there too, Keith.

**Mr WOLAHAN:** Thank you. If you were to pick a window where sports betting on TV or other places is acceptable, which time of day does the least harm? For those who got up early to watch France and Australia in the world cup, we saw SBS have digital advertising. Now, I've since been told that that was an error; it wasn't intended to be broadcast at that time, when children were getting ready for school. But is there a time of day that does the least amount of harm, and what is it?

Rev. Costello : The achievements of getting rid of in-play sports betting during hours before 8.30, in theory, was good. The problem with the 8.30 cut-in point was that it was halfway through a game of AFL if it was an evening game, and who can get their kids to bed at 8.30 when the game's half over? Certainly, the times of day are why we had established guidelines about more adult ads when kids aren't watching at much later times. That still holds. The truth is that very few kids are watching free-to-air TV, except in certain limited times. The online presence with kidsâ with all of them having a mobile phoneâ is the deluge that is worrying us.

Ms Bennett : Even despite the current regulations, we know that they're breached all the time. During peak family viewing timesâ six to 8.30â we're still seeing sports gambling advertising, so clearly the regulation isn't working.

**Mr WOLAHAN:** We had the Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans Suicide. I was just wondering if you had made a submission to that, or if you otherwise know of the effect of online gambling on veteran mental health?

Ms Bennett : That's a really good question. We have put in a submission. We are conscious that, amongst defence personnel and veterans, there is a higher proportion of people who are gambling, and certainly online gambling is a big issue. We know that the Department of Defence have actually sent out notices to their staff saying that they're concerned about the extent of online gamblingâ and I do have some evidence to that extent that I can put to the committee. There is definitely a higher proportion of people in that population who are gambling. It's likely that will also be translating into online, which is more accessible, and we know that population are also at high risk due to the combination of mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder, health problems and all the things that go hand in hand with trauma. It is an area of concern, for certain.

**Mr WOLAHAN:** Thank you. I have no further questions, but if you could forward your submission to usâ I'm sure we could get itâ that would be very helpful, thank you.

Ms Bennett : Certainly.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, both, for making yourselves available to answer questions, and also for your submission. As you can see, we could talk to you all day, and I know that you could talk all day on this issue, but we have some very important evidence to hear from people with lived experience. You will be sent a transcript of your evidence, for review of any errors. We've asked for minimal additional information, but if you could forward your submission, for example, to the secretary. If you did wish to forward anything about other legislative regimes which you think we should look atâ and, Ms Bennett, what you said you wanted to provide usâ please do. We will follow up the Churchill Fellowship research. You are most welcome to stay on the line, if you would like, for the following evidence, but again, thank you very much for your evidence today.

Rev. Costello : Can I just add one thing? You asked us about the 'responsible gambling' tag being replaced. Yes, we are very, very encouraged that that has happened. The only worry I have is, even though the messages are far better and sharper, the number of ads we have will turn even those messages into wallpaper. That's still our concern, the tsunami of ads, which is why we called for you to consider a ban on sports betting adsâ not on sports betting, people can bet, but on the ads.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that clarification. Before we move on, I might ask the secretariat to mute yourselves again. It's not your fault, Ms Miller-Frost, but when you turn pages, we can hear it because it's near the microphone. For members of the public and others listening online, you may find the content of the next part of the public hearing distressing. If you do need to talk to someone, help is available. You can contact Lifeline, anytime, on 131 114, or Gambling Help Online on (1800)858858.

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