



Community advocates call for casino reforms to address gambling harm as Crown Sydney opens

8 August 2022

Wesley Mission, the Alliance for Gambling Reform, the Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW (FCAN), the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), Suicide Prevention Australia and the Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT have come together expressing deep concern for community wellbeing as Crown Sydney opens its gambling rooms at Barangaroo.

Ahead of casino reform legislation scheduled for Parliament this week, the groups are calling for an independent Responsible Conduct of Gambling code to be imposed on NSW casinos to ensure that staff are trained to recognise and act to help prevent gambling harm.

The Chief Advocate of the Alliance for Gambling Reform, Rev Tim Costello, said the Royal Commission into Crown Casino Melbourne exposed a pattern of predatory behaviour that caused great harm.

"Gambling harm was front and centre of the inquiry, it was clear that Crown failed to protect people and instead systematically sought to exploit them," Rev Costello said.

"With the opening of Crown Sydney, we hold deep concerns about the gambling harm its operations will cause, and we are fearful that the NSW government will not put in place strong enough measures to protect people, their families and communities across the State."

Wesley Mission General Manager, Jim Wackett, has no confidence in Crown's commitment to minimising gambling harm.

"Crown Sydney is pitched as an 'exclusive high roller' venue, but with minimum table game bets starting from as low as \$20, the casino will be accessible to many more people than they imply, increasing harm to the community.

"It is just another example of why we can't trust Crown to administer their products in a way that protects the community. To be clear, there's nothing exclusive about gambling harm – it affects high rollers to everyday punters, and we see the full impact on individuals and families through the services we provide."

NCOSS CEO, Joanna Quilty, says more needs to be done to address the scourge of gambling.

"Problem gambling destroys individuals, families and communities, and it's often the social services sector that is left to pick up the pieces.

"At the very least, an independent Responsible Conduct of Gambling code must be imposed on NSW casinos, including Crown Sydney, to mitigate some of the damage these venues will cause."

FCAN Executive Officer, Jo Parker, says, "Financial counsellors see first-hand the hardship that people and families endure when they are affected by gambling. They can't afford to buy food and essential items or pay their bills, rent or mortgage and can experience relationship and family breakdown, abuse, and isolation. To get by, they take on more debts and loans and go without meals, healthcare, necessary items and expenses.

"The stigma of gambling or the concern about the outcome of seeking advice often means people and families affected by gambling go it alone and don't seek free non-judgemental financial counselling, gambling counselling and support from community organisations."



Suicide Prevention Australia CEO, Nieves Murray, says, "We know that problem gambling is often a hidden issue and that it can heighten two key risk factors for suicide: financial hardship and relationship breakdown.

"There is currently no requirement for the gambling industry to intervene early when there are clear indicators of gambling harm. Harm minimisation and early intervention would save lives, and we must work together to reduce the impacts of gambling."

Moderator of the Uniting Church Synod NSW and ACT, Rev Simon Hansford, says, "The social problems that are created or exacerbated by gambling – relationship breakdown, children going hungry, depression and at the extreme spectrum, domestic violence and suicide – are devastating our families and communities. We are complicit if we stay silent. We must act now, for the sake of everyone caught up in this crisis."

Although forced into action by the recent inquiries, the government in NSW, as in other states, is focused narrowly on addressing money laundering and the influence of organised crime at the casino. It risks ignoring the terrible costs of gambling which should be addressed as a public health crisis.

The groups are calling for the NSW government to address gambling harm in the current round of casino reforms by:

- **Accepting all the recommendations of The Star Review report**
- **Imposing an independent Responsible Conduct of Gambling code (RCG) on the casinos, developed with the input of non-industry stakeholders and lived experience experts**
- **Ensuring cultural change by embedding in that new RCG a standing Lived Experience Accountability Panel to which the casinos must report on their efforts to minimise harm caused by gambling in their venues.**

"There is a clear conflict of interest that all casino operators have between maximising profits, the majority of which come from people experiencing harm, and training staff properly in gambling harm minimisation. There must be an independently designed, delivered and certified training for casino staff, just as there is for staff in pubs and clubs," Wackett said.

"The community is increasing the 'charge' for the social licence that permits the gambling industry to continue to operate, to insist on addressing harm caused by gambling. We're sick of scandal-plagued casinos being given chance after chance."

MEDIA CALL – 10am, Monday 8 August 2022

Watermans Cove, Barangaroo

Time: Media are invited to assemble at 10am to start at 10.15am. A COVID-safe gathering of concerned community members and representatives will be present and available for interview.

Location: Watermans Cove - Wulugul Walk, Barangaroo (Waterfront public space in front of the intersection of Watermans Quay and Barangaroo Ave, Barangaroo)

Talent present for interview:

Jim Wackett - General Manager, Wesley Mission

Jo Parker – Executive Officer, Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW

Alliance for Gambling Reform Chief Advocate, Rev Tim Costello, will be available for remote interview via phone or Zoom.



For more information, please contact: Amanda Bailey 0429 484 632 or amanda.bailey@wesleymission.org.au

Learn more about the campaign and how you can help to reduce gambling harm:
<https://www.wesleymission.org.au/get-involved/help-us-reform-gambling-in-casinos/>

Need help?

If gambling is a problem for you, free, confidential help is available by calling **1800 858 858**.

If you want to talk to someone right now, call **Lifeline on 13 11 14** or use crisis chat online
<https://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/>.

About the groups involved

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is a national advocacy organisation which works to prevent and minimise the harm from gambling. <https://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/>

The Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW Inc (FCAN) is the peak membership body that represents and supports Financial Counsellors in NSW. <https://fcan.org.au/>

The NSW Council of Social Service (ncoss) is the peak body for the social services sector in NSW. <https://www.ncoss.org.au/>

Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. <https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/>

The Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT supports more than 500 Congregations, 50,000 members, 14 Presbyteries and nine schools and Parish Missions. <https://nswact.uca.org.au/>

Wesley Mission provides practical care and support for more than 115,000 people annually across NSW. <https://www.wesleymission.org.au/>