

DISCUSSION PAPER

# Gambling and young people: impacts, challenges and responses

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# FOREWORD

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The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation began its work in 2012 and has a commitment to fostering responsible gambling and minimising harm from gambling. As part of this approach, the Foundation concerns itself with actively scanning the gambling environment, looking at the latest research, consulting with the community and working with governments, statutory organisations and the community sector, to pursue our mission of reducing harm from gambling.

This is the first of a series of discussion papers that the Foundation will produce on issues related to the risks, dangers and harms that can arise from gambling.

These discussion papers have a threefold purpose: they are working documents to assist the Foundation in its directions and activities, they are analytic and informative documents making a contribution to public knowledge and debate, and finally, they are an invitation to responses from the community, to help us further refine our thinking and to expand our knowledge of peoples' thoughts about, and experiences of, the contemporary effects of gambling.

This paper arose from an identification, through research and expressions of community concern, of underage gambling as an issue that needed to be addressed.

We found some good research on the behaviours and attitudes of young people that deserved a wider audience, though it can be seen more research is needed. We also noted a relative lack of awareness about the high number of young people participating in gambling and the risks and dangers that could pose.

Our paper notes that the gambling environment has changed markedly in the last five years. We are led to conclude there is a need to raise levels of community awareness about the numbers of teenagers gambling. Further, what should and can be done about young people gambling needs to be discussed with some urgency.

This paper, canvassing what we know about young people's gambling and the risks associated with it, provides a platform for that discussion.



**Serge Sardo**  
CEO, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Gambling and young people: impacts, challenges and responses

In the last five years there have been major changes in the opportunities for gambling and its promotion. This has been driven in large part by the direct and indirect effects of changes in digital technology and access to the internet.

These changes have had major impacts on the way young people are exposed to gambling. They have affected the way young people both experience and interact with gambling, as a concept and as a product.

This paper explores these changes and is part of the Foundation's response to the challenges of this new gambling environment. The focus of this paper is adolescents but contains information relevant to younger children.

This discussion paper serves a number of purposes. It is a working document to underpin the directions the Foundation is taking, it distils and analyses contemporary information and research to provide information for the community, and it is an invitation to the community to respond with its own ideas and insights into the issues the paper raises.

The paper is based on a survey of recent academic literature, particularly that concerned with young people and gambling. It inquires into what is known of the attitudes and behaviour of young people with regards to gambling and also the effects from changes in the gambling environment.

The paper raises questions for the community, particularly those with close links to young people, about what should and can be done in relation to children's exposure to gambling. The paper concludes by offering directions for action and a summary of actions the Foundation is taking to fulfil its responsibilities to foster responsible gambling and prevent gambling-related harm.

The primary observation is, that while it is illegal for young people to gamble, the great proportion of Australians growing up today are likely to have direct experience of gambling before they are 18.

Of itself this might denote just another level of experimentation that is not untypical of adolescents.

However, this observation becomes more pointed when it is also noted that young people are considered up to five times as susceptible to problems with gambling than adults. Studies of adults' gambling problems also indicate that many of them began gambling while underage.

Gambling problems can lead to a multitude of harms including deep depression, missing school or dropping out, undermined friendships, family disruption and criminal behaviour.

Gambling issues for young people are also often associated with other problems. These include drug and alcohol use, unsafe sex, eating disorders and violent behaviour.

Identifying that a young person has been gambling could also flag that there may be other serious problems in their life.

The main message is that a young person's engagement with gambling should not be treated with complacency.

The changes in the gambling environment have greatly increased young people's exposure to gambling promotion and opportunities for gambling.

Victoria (and Australia) has changed from a place where there was relatively little advertising and other promotion of gambling.

Before 2008 gambling advertising was mostly regulated by states and territories and was usually limited in scope. In Victoria, promotion was largely restricted to wagers on horse and dog racing and entering various types of lotteries.

Victories by sports betting agencies in the High Court have overturned much of that control.

Any Victorian who has followed sport in the last five years will be aware of a blitz of gambling promotion in the mass media, at the grounds and using players.

In addition to these changes, there has been the greater penetration of faster and wireless internet connections into all aspects of life. This has been accompanied by a convergence of new mobile devices that are internet capable (smart phones, tablets, TVs, iPods, notebooks).

All of this has presented new opportunities for the gambling industry to promote and deliver its products.

However inadvertently or deliberately, today's young people are surrounded by this new environment. As technology becomes cheaper and more accessible the breadth and intensity of their engagement can grow. It should be noted that developing alongside increased internet accessibility there have been increasing new interfaces that reference or promote gambling. This has occurred on social media sites, mobile apps and in the number of children's video games that either involve, or are, simulated gambling.

Today's young person is exposed to a gambling environment that presents a different set of temptations, challenges and dangers than was experienced by their parents.

Many previous attitudes and messages about responsible gambling that children were taught still apply. However, it must be acknowledged that the world of gambling has changed. It is more intense and more available and this means past protective strategies and tactics may no longer be adequate.

The adult world, of parents, extended family, community leaders, policy-makers and educators has not yet developed full responses to these challenges. It is important for those who want to look after young people to be aware of the dangers and temptations that might be on offer. Not just in a generalised form but in a way that meets the specific challenges of this new environment. This discussion paper is a contribution and encouragement to that task.

## Major findings

- The majority of young Australians gamble at some point before they come of age. In any year between 60 and 80 per cent of teenagers will have gambled in some way
- Young people usually do not gamble frequently but a significant percentage, between 5 and 10 per cent likely do
- Most gambling by young people is on more benign (though still illegal) types of gambling, such as scratchies, lotto or friendly card games. However, around one in five are participating in gambling such as sports betting, racing or even pokies
- Parents and peer networks are important factors in whether young people play, what they play, how they play and how often they play
- Young people are more likely to gamble in a harmful manner, surveys indicate between 2.4 and 5 per cent have a problem. This is a much higher rate than adults
- Gambling by young people appears to have strong links to other risk-taking and harmful behaviours and attitudes
- Because gambling is illegal young people may have even more trouble seeking help
- There has been a radical change in the gambling environment that has impacted on messages and experiences of gambling being placed before young people.
- The new environment can invite dangerous behaviour now and in the future, in terms of both opportunities for harm and in misconceptions about how gambling works
- Parents, educators and regulators need help to come to grips with the new environment.

## Identified directions for action

- Improving parents' awareness of the risks to their children from gambling
- Giving parents, and others with stewardship of young people, tools to help prevent or intervene in problems with gambling
- Community organisations that engage or cater to young people, particularly sporting associations, improving the messages and mentoring given to the young
- Informing and building young people's knowledge and capacity to negotiate the gambling environment they are exposed to, including knowledge of how gambling works, how to avoid the harm it can cause and the confidence to seek help
- Improving the knowledge of the general community and enlisting its support in creating a better and safer environment for young people
- Informing and assisting educators to deliver responsible gambling messages to young people
- Providing better awareness of the signs of gambling problems in young people and better pathways to help when they are identified
- Providing better pathways to help not just for young people who have problems with gambling but for those who are being affected by the problem gambling of others
- Providing support to governments, regulators and policy-makers who have responsibilities and concerns connected to this issue.

## Responses to this paper

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# INTRODUCTION

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The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (the Foundation) is a statutory body set up by the Victorian Government in 2012. The Foundation has twin priorities of fostering responsible gambling and minimising the harms that gambling can cause. It takes a strong preventative focus in its work, informed by public health principles and strategies. This approach makes it imperative to regularly scan and analyse the gambling environment and how people are experiencing and behaving in it.

In the last five years, big changes have occurred in the forms and availability of gambling. The types of gambling on offer and how they're being offered and promoted have all changed rapidly and radically. Meanwhile, this process of change is continuing, being driven by developments in digital and internet technology and the evolution in people's use of them.

The Foundation has identified a need to examine what these recent changes in gambling availability and promotion mean for young people. Firstly, in terms of dangers and risks that might exist and secondly, in identifying the help that young people and those who care for them may need in safely negotiating this new environment.

## This discussion paper explores both issues, the risks of the changing gambling environment and what might be done about them.

This paper serves a number of purposes. It is a working document to underpin the directions the Foundation is taking. It also distils and analyses contemporary research to provide an information resource for the community. Finally it is an invitation to the wider community to respond with their own ideas and insights into the issues the paper raises.

While some of the issues canvassed in this paper, particularly the impact of sports betting advertising, are clearly of concern even with regard to primary school children, the main focus is on teenagers through to young adults coming up to 21 years of age.

This age group is the focus of this paper and the Foundation's broader youth strategy because changes in the gambling environment have particularly:

- a) increased awareness of gambling and gambling opportunities for all teenagers
- b) led to a barrage of advertising specifically targeting young (male) adults.

The paper is mainly occupied with the experiences and potential risks for those under 18, with research showing that the majority of teenagers do participate in gambling at some point, of further concern is that gambling as a teenager can contribute to patterns of risky and even harmful gambling behaviour as an adult (Delfabbro 2013).

## The potential link between underage gambling with later harm for young adults is therefore a concern.

Young adults, and particularly young men, are over-represented in the ranks of problem and at-risk gamblers. Their underage experiences are important to understanding their later behaviour and possibly identifying ways to prevent problems and harm from occurring in the first place.

This paper is specifically concerned with gambling as it directly affects young people and their exposure to it. It does not however delve deeply into the issue of growing up in a family situation with someone with gambling problems. Others have covered this issue in depth and this paper does not seek to explore that territory (Dowling 2010). The paper does note the effects of parents' gambling behaviour generally however; this is a large and important area in itself and has been left to the side in this project.

The paper is presented in three sections:

1. The first section presents a picture of young people and their gambling behaviour,
2. The second examines the new gambling environment and the impacts this has on young people; with a focus on the risks and harms from gambling and gambling promotion that young people are or may be experiencing,
3. The final section summarises the issues, explores possible future directions and outlines actions the Foundation is taking to begin addressing the issues that have been raised.

# SECTION 1: YOUNG PEOPLE, THEIR GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR AND HARM

## Young people and gambling: what the evidence tells us

### Underage young people do gamble.

Even though participating in gambling is illegal for people aged under 18, research has consistently shown that a majority of young people gamble at some point. For example, a recent Australian study, *Gambling and Young People in Australia*, found that over three quarters (77 per cent) of people aged 10 to 24 had gambled at least once in the past year (Purdie 2011 p55). This included 75 per cent of young people aged 10 to 14, although as discussed in Box 1, this figure may have been inflated by difficulties in the research design. Even allowing for this the figure is consistent with numerous other studies which show 60% to 80% of underage children have experience of gambling (Delfabbro 2013 p.2).

Underage gambling therefore appears to be a relatively common experience in Australia. The evidence from Australia also accords with evidence from similar countries such as Canada, the United States, Great Britain and New Zealand (Volberg 2010).

One implication of this is that underage youth are not just experiencing gambling at a distance, seeing it portrayed in the media around them and by adult behaviours, they are also having direct experience.

Research suggests the nature of these experiences will be important in both the context of their current behaviour and possibly their future behaviour.

### Box 1: The limits of research on young people and gambling

Most research on young people and gambling relies on surveys of young people about attitudes, behaviours and the symptoms of problem gambling. However, there are some significant limitations to this approach. In any survey there is a risk that participants may not respond accurately, for example because they have forgotten relevant information or because they want to provide responses which reflect well on them (called social desirability bias). However, there are particular risks in surveying young people about gambling. At least one recent study (Purdie 2011) has found that young people may interpret questions differently to adults, for example including classroom learning (eg games of bingo as part of maths class) as gambling. This confusion among respondents as to what constitutes a gambling experience may have created some artificial increase in the prevalence of gambling in the study, particularly with regard to younger age groups.

Given that most studies of young people and gambling also examine the prevalence of problem gambling, it is important to consider some of the limitations of measuring problem gambling among young people as well. For example, some researchers have suggested that rates of problem gambling are not directly comparable between adolescents and adults, as different measures of problem gambling are used and behaviours that are not considered problematic in an adult may be considered problem gambling in a young person. Haroon and Derevensky (2002) suggest that problem gambling among young people may be conceptually different to problem gambling in adults, so that prevalence surveys in adults and young people may not be measuring exactly the same thing.

Social science research always struggles to be as exact as the physical sciences, since humans and their minds do not sit in fixed positions or yield themselves to microscopes. Humans learn about each other through talking and watching but in both cases the observations they make are relying on interpretation. In the case of surveys, both the questions and answers have to be interpreted by surveyers and those surveyed.

This paper has used the most reliable information available, from respected and careful academics, and analysed it with an awareness that allows for the problems particular to this area of research.

## Boys and older adolescents are more likely to gamble, but gambling is common in all groups of young people.

Some young people are more likely to gamble than others. For example, boys are more likely to gamble than girls (Volberg, 2010), and younger adolescents are less likely to gamble than young adults (Delfabbro, 2009). However, high rates of participation in gambling are found in most groups of young people. For example, the Purdie study, showed that three quarters of both girls and boys had gambled in the past year (Purdie 2011). Other Australian studies from the 2000s report that between 60 and 99 per cent of those aged 12 to 20 have gambled at some point (Splevins 2010 p.190). This indicates that an encounter with gambling by Australians while growing up is almost universal.

## Young people gamble in many ways.

Young people participate in a variety of gambling activities. The table below shows results from three recent Australian studies of young people and gambling. In all three studies, playing scratch tickets and playing card games for money were common gambling activities for young people. Notably there was also gambling in what would traditionally be thought of as clearly adult and more risky pursuits including betting on races and sports. Despite the apparently strict barriers around such forms of gambling, around one in five young people reported gambling in this manner.

**Table 1 Participation in selected gambling activities by young people**

Gambling activity	Purdie et al (2011 p56) (10-24 year olds)	Delfabbro (2009 p 529) (13-17)	Dowling (2010 p137) (12-18)
Card games for money at home	33.2	29.1 <sup>1</sup>	36.5
Racing	27.1	21.7	24.9 <sup>3</sup>
Sports betting	18.1	18.1	26.1
Lotteries	35.9	11.8	34.8
Scratch tickets	43.7	42	33.7
Bingo	15.8	16.7	7.7
Internet gambling	12.2	6.9	8.9
Card games at the casino	13.8		29.6
Other casino games	15.8		

<sup>1</sup> Includes card games at the casino.

<sup>2</sup> Includes only betting at the casino. 26.5 per cent of young people played gaming machines at clubs and hotels.

<sup>3</sup> Includes only betting at TAB outlets

It should be noted that there are significant differences in the findings from the studies (Purdie (2011) and Dowling (2010) find much higher rates of poker machine gambling among young people than Delfabbro (2009). In part this is explainable because of the different age groups and different locations where the studies took place. Purdie (2011) and Dowling (2010) are national studies, while Delfabbro's (2009) was based in South Australia.

The variations can be attributed to the different spread of ages across the studies as well as the location of the studies. Some states have higher levels of accessibility to gambling and differences in each state's gambling culture (both values and behaviour).

## NSW, for example, has vastly more poker machines per capita than any other state. They are a feature of life in that state in a way that is not comparable to Victoria or Western Australia<sup>1</sup>.

Forms of gambling engaged in by young people have also been shown to vary according to whether they live in the city or country (Allen 2008 p.17).

Not surprisingly, young adults are more likely to participate in forms of gambling that are not legally available to people under 18 (Volberg 2010). For people aged 18 to 24, popular gambling activities include playing poker machines (26.95% in the past year), raffles and sweeps (25.62%), lotteries (17.99%) and scratch tickets (17.38%) (Department of Justice 2009 p39). People aged 18 to 24 also have higher rates of participating in sports betting, private betting, playing poker machines and table games than other adults. This is consistent with Delfabbro's (2013) finding, that participation in the gambling activities of playing poker machines, wagering on racing and betting on table games increase as adolescents transition into adulthood.

## Young people usually gamble only infrequently.

While the experience of gambling is widespread among young people it is important to note that although many young people gamble, few do so on a regular basis. Delfabbro (2009 p529) found that only 6.3 per cent of young people gambled at least once a week. Similarly, Purdie (2011 p56) found that less than five per cent of young people gambled once a week or more on each of the gambling activities they measured, with the exception of footy tips and sweeps.

This finding suggests there are two different but related issues about youth gambling for the community to consider:

<sup>1</sup> Victoria has had poker machines only since the early 1990s and has around 30,000 compared to the almost 100,000 of NSW. Nor are Victoria's machines primarily in clubs. Western Australia has no poker machines outside of its casino.

- a) How do we feel about a large percentage of our young people gambling while underage?
- b) How do we feel about a small group of our teenagers being regular gamblers?

At the core of the first issue is how comfortable is our community with this level of participation in gambling by underage young people? What of gambling increasingly being a normal part of life? And if this normalisation is not acceptable, what are the causes and what can be done about it?

Breaking the issue down by gambling type may be a useful way to address the subject because different types of gambling have been shown to have different levels of risk (Productivity Commission 2010). Some types of gambling are more commercialised and advertised than others, and some are newer than others.

Parents' and society's tolerance is also likely to vary between different forms of gambling and that may need to be reflected in laws and policing.

The Foundation has a key role in helping parents make informed judgements about how their children experience gambling.

In terms of the second issue, the existence of a small group of teenagers who gamble regularly, there are strong reasons to be concerned about this behaviour, notably its relationship with other forms of risky or harmful behaviour and the risk it poses for problem gambling now and in the future lives of these young people.

## Young people gamble for many different reasons, and are likely to gamble with their family and friends.

Like adults, young people gamble for a variety of reasons. The most common reason for young people to gamble is because they enjoy it. The next most common reason is 'to win money'.

Gambling for excitement, or to be with or make new friends were also listed as reasons to gamble (Purdie 2011 p71).

Young people who are experiencing problems with gambling however tend to have other motivations for gambling. They may do it to relax, from boredom, because they are unhappy, to escape from problems, or to fulfil a competitive desire to 'beat the machine' (Purdie 2011 p.71).

Gambling is often a social activity for young people. About six out of ten young people who gamble say that they gamble with at least one other person, most commonly a friend (Purdie 2011 p72). The social nature of gambling for young people means that the attitudes and behaviours of peers are important influences of young people's gambling.

Delfabbro (2003) found that young people who had friends who approved of gambling or believed that friends were frequent gamblers were themselves more frequent gamblers.

## The attitudes and behaviours of parents and other family members influence young people's gambling.

The attitudes and behaviour of family members may have a strong influence on whether young people start to gamble (Valentine 2008). Research has shown that having family who approve of gambling, or who gamble frequently, is associated with increased frequency of gambling among young people (Delfabbro 2003).

There is evidence that in a family where there is an adult with gambling problems (especially if it is the male parent) this can transmit problems to children. However, it is not clear that this is always due to the example being set, also known as modelling. Problems with gambling may arise in children in response to the pressures of living in a house with an adult with a gambling problem (Dowling 2010).

Parents' attitudes to gambling vary. For example, one Australian study of poker playing among young people found that only one in ten of the young players had parents who disapproved of their gambling and two in ten had received parental approval.

This study also showed almost two thirds of the players effectively received no substantial adult feedback on their behaviour. This was because their parents either did not know they were playing or, if they were aware, offered no response to it (Kalé 2011 pp.25-6).

Some parents assist young people to gamble, for example by buying lottery tickets or scratch cards for children (eg. Valentine 2008). The evidence suggests having parents who gamble frequently, or display positive attitudes to gambling, is associated with more frequent gambling among young people (King 2010 pp.182-3 Delfabbro 2003).

## This is a concern because more frequent gambling does increase the risk of developing problems and some types of gambling can be more dangerous than others in terms of both immediate harm and of developing risky or even addictive behaviours.

Young people will not always discriminate between types of gambling and perceived parental approval for one type of gambling may be taken as permission for another.

In Kalé's study of poker, around 20 per cent of those surveyed reported they started engaging in other forms of gambling after starting to gamble on poker and almost 35 per cent said they had started gambling on poker having already engaged in other forms of gambling (Kalé 2011 p.27).

Thus, not only do we know young people try many ways of gambling, this study indicates that having tried one form of gambling it may not be unusual for young people to be open about trying others.

## Many young people lack knowledge about gambling, or have misperceptions about winning at gambling.

Young people may suffer from an inability to estimate probabilities when gambling. Delfabbro (2009a) found that a significant proportion of young people were not able to accurately estimate the likelihood of winning on lotteries or other common activities.

In particular, they commonly have misconceptions about probability and randomness. A good illustration of this lack of knowledge is evident in Delfabbro's study. A number of respondents claimed there was some skill involved in gambling activities such as lotteries or playing pokies. These respondents presumed that skilled players would have a greater chance of winning where in reality; these games are designed to ensure the gambling providers always win their cut.

## Mistakenly thinking a game of chance is actually one of skills is often found in problem gamblers.

Although some young people may have misconceptions about gambling, the positive news is that most young people still have realistic attitudes to the chances of winning at gambling. Purdie (2011) found that young people had predominantly negative attitudes to gambling, with over eighty per cent of young people agreeing that gambling is a risky activity and agreeing that you could lose all your money gambling. Only a small proportion (10 per cent) thought that gambling was a good way to get rich quickly.

However, these negative attitudes need to be balanced against the very high rates of participation in gambling among young people. This would indicate that negative attitudes to gambling do not always translate into behaviours. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to assume that, among the small group of youth who gamble frequently, negative attitudes to gambling are not the norm.

## Young people and harmful gambling

### Young people are more likely than adults to gamble in an out of control manner that can cause them harm.

Young people who participate in gambling may be at risk of harm as a result of their gambling activities. Australian research has found that between 2.4 per cent (Delfabbro 2009) and 5 per cent (Purdie 2011) of young people are problem gamblers, with a further 6.4 per cent (Delfabbro 2009) to 16 per cent (Purdie 2011) at risk of problem gambling.

Boys were more likely to have problems than girls but the figures for young females were still substantial. With a 5.7 per cent rate of problem gambling for males and a 3.2 per cent rate for females both were much higher than figures for adults (Purdie 2011). The most recent Victorian prevalence study of 2009 gave adult figures of around 1 per cent for men and half a per cent for women (Department of Justice 2009 p.10).

Rates of problem gambling are not directly comparable between adolescents and adults, as different measures of problem gambling are used and behaviours that are not considered problematic in an adult may be considered problem gambling in a young person, as discussed in Box 1 (Hardoon and Derevensky 2002). However, rates of problem gambling could be as much as five times higher among young people than in adults (Purdie 2011; Department of Justice 2009).

This is not surprising considering that young people's minds and capacity to make and control judgements are still developing. Other factors that contribute to gamblers developing problems are also more likely to be found in youth. For example, lack of impulse control or incorrect assumptions about the likelihood of winning.

In games that include skill or knowledge (such as poker or wagering) then a streak of competitiveness, or an underestimation of one's abilities, or a weak grasp of how the probabilities are structured, can all lead young people into trouble. Retreats into fantasy, disassociation or denial are all occurrences that are associated with problem gambling and these behaviours are often seen as typically adolescent coping mechanisms.

Problem gambling may be associated with significant negative consequences for young people and those around them. Some of the potential negative consequences that have been linked to problem gambling for young people are shown in Box 2.

### Box 2: Possible negative consequences linked to problem gambling in young people

- Delinquency and criminal behaviour
- Poor academic performance
- Absenteeism from school and early school drop out
- Disrupted family and peer relationships
- Financial difficulties and bankruptcy
- Housing crisis and homelessness
- Substance abuse involving alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Suicidal ideation and suicide
- Mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression

Source: Allen et al 2008

Problem gambling is also linked to negative consequences for the family and friends of problem gamblers. For each problem gambler, it is estimated that five to 17 others may be affected by their gambling. This may include financial difficulties, emotional impacts such as guilt and arguments and other disruptions to family life (Valentine 2008). For teenagers, trying to finish school and grow into adulthood, experimentation that leads to problem gambling can have negative effects not unlike the impact of alcohol or drug use.

To fulfil its responsibilities to foster responsible gambling and minimising harm related to problem gambling, the Foundation believes it is important for the community to have a realistic understanding of the risks associated with underage gambling and the harm it can cause.

Knowing that many young people will take risks the community, through its governments, takes special care with regard to teenagers and what are termed hazardous products and behaviours.

Examples of this include regulations and prohibitions around products such as alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, and junk food. There are also a raft of interventions and educative tools around hazardous behaviours such as unsafe sex, eating disorders and violence.

Questions are raised by this paper about how the hazards posed by gambling should be approached.

- Is the community's awareness and knowledge about young people and gambling adequate in the face of the evidence about it?
- Where does gambling sit in relation to these other hazardous products and behaviours?
- Are the correct measures in place and available to parents, educators, health professionals and policy makers?
- What would such measures look like?

Problem gambling in young people often occurs alongside other problems.

The relationship between problem gambling and a variety of life debilitating conditions, including mental health problems, suicidal thoughts and substance abuse, is complex. A young person with a gambling problem is more likely to have depression or think about suicide, and more likely to have lower self esteem (Hardoon and Derevensky 2002). Young people with gambling problems are also more likely to engage in a variety of risky or antisocial behaviours, such as alcohol or drug use or engaging in criminal acts such as theft or graffiti (Purdie 2011). People with gambling problems are also likely to have disrupted relationships with family and peers (Valentine 2008).

However, it is not always clear whether problem gambling is the cause of these co-occurring problems, or whether these were present before the development of problem gambling.

It seems likely that 'problem gambling is one element in a general pattern of high risk or anti-social behaviour' (Valentine 2008). It therefore seems likely that problems such as mental illness or substance use may be risk factors for problem gambling, as well as being worsened by problem gambling behaviour.

Regardless of whether problem gambling is a cause or effect for any individual, the research does indicate that it can be a sign that other problems exist. A young person with gambling problems is likely to have other problems that make them more at risk of negative or harmful consequences from their actions.

This is an important because it suggests teenagers who are at risk may be displaying or experiencing a variety of harmful behaviours, one of which is gambling. From a parental or community viewpoint, responding to an identified risk may require responses or preventive measures being taken in relation to other hazardous areas.

The evidence about young people and gambling suggests that looking out for other problems when gambling is identified makes good precautionary sense.

Some young people are at greater risk

We don't know why some young people develop gambling problems while others do not. However, there are some factors which are known to be associated with increased risk for problem gambling. Boys are at greater risk of problem gambling than girls. Young people who are impulsive (Valentine 2008) or have low self esteem (Purdie 2011) are also at higher risk.

Young people's risk of problem gambling is also linked to their knowledge and beliefs about gambling. Young people who have a positive attitude to gambling (Purdie 2011) and a poor understanding of chance and randomness (Turner 2008) may be at increased risk of problem gambling, highlighting the importance of education about gambling for young people.

Problem gambling is also influenced by gambling among peers and family members. Having a parent who gambles or peers who are involved in gambling may increase the risk of problem gambling among young people (Purdie 2011). This effect may be stronger where a parent has a gambling problem. Young people with a parent who is a problem gambler are more than twice as likely to be problem gamblers themselves (Dowling 2010).

Young people who begin gambling earlier are at increased risk of problem gambling.

Research has shown that people who begin gambling at a younger age are at greater risk of developing problem gambling either as an adolescent (Rahman 2012) or as an adult (Burge 2004).

Evidence from adults with gambling problems indicates that many of them began gambling underage (Department of Justice 2009 p235).

The Productivity Commission reported a strong link between underage gambling and playing the pokies, with 87 per cent of those playing pokies at 18 having gambled while underage (Productivity Commission 2010 Box 9.3).

Existing research indicates young people's gambling behaviour varies over time and problems with gambling during adolescence may not lead to continued problems in adulthood.

A longitudinal study conducted in South Australia that followed young gamblers over time found that those who gambled at age 15 or 16 were not more likely to gamble at age 21 (Delfabbro 2013 and 2009b). This study also found that young people with signs of problem gambling at 15 or 16 were not more likely than others in the study to have signs of problem gambling at 21.

These contrasting patterns of involvement in gambling suggest that for some young people, involvement in gambling may be part of the risk taking behaviour often associated with adolescents, similar to drinking alcohol and taking drugs. However, for other young people, early involvement in gambling may lead to a lifetime of problems with gambling.

It should be noted that all research took place in the early to mid 2000s before the full effects of the changing gambling environment discussed later in this paper eventuated.

The consequences of a gambling problem for adults can be devastating, for individual gamblers as well as for families and friends. Some of the impacts of problem gambling for adults are shown in Box 3.

Overall, the research reflects a common pattern among adolescents of experimentation with hazardous behaviour. While many adolescents may experiment and do little or no harm, some will do harm to themselves as teenagers and some may be setting themselves on a pathway for greater harm down the track.

The warning inherent in these findings is that parents and the community should not be complacent about the potential harm from underage gambling.

### Box 3: Negative consequences of problem gambling

(extract from the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Gambling, 2010, pp4.4-4.5)

- theft, domestic violence or other illegal behaviours
- inability to meet the costs of essentials such as food or rent
- lower performance at work, possibly leading to job loss

- relationship problems
- health or personal impacts, such as feelings of guilt, anxiety, depression and helplessness
- problems controlling money or time spent when gambling.

### Young people often do not seek help for gambling problems.

Many people who experience gambling problems do not seek help, and this includes many young people. Splevins (2010) found that most adolescent problem gamblers in his study did not recognise that they had a gambling problem, which means they would not seek appropriate help.

Even when people are aware of problems, stigma can be a barrier to young people seeking help with a major study of help-seeking for problem gambling, Hing (2011) finding that:

“there was more resistance amongst the younger cohort to seeking professional and non-professional help for gambling issues and this was reflected in commonly endorsed barriers to help-seeking of shame, pride and wanting to solve the problem on their own.”<sup>3</sup>

For those underage, the fact their gambling is illegal will add to any conventional shame they feel from having problems with gambling. This could be an additional barrier to seeking help.

Young people may also be less likely to know where they can seek help (Purdie 2011 p.95). If they have seen ads for Gambler's Help counselling services, they may not realise the service covers all ages and is not just for adults.

A more detailed consideration of this issue from a social marketing perspective is likely to be needed along with specialised and targeted services. As an initial response the Foundation has established the Gambler's Help Youthline as a way to highlight the availability of services to young people.

Overall, the low rate of seeking help for problem gambling must be of particular concern given the apparent high rate of problem gambling among young people.

The evidence indicates:

- A high rate of illegal and perhaps clandestine gambling is occurring among young people
- The rate of problem gambling among young people is higher than among adults
- Young people with gambling problems are often unaware of them
- People with problems are reluctant to seek help or do not know where to get help
- All of the above points to a need for a more targeted and concerted response in terms of problem gambling prevention and intervention for young people.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Hing's study did not cover young people who were under age.

# SECTION 2: CHANGES IN THE GAMBLING ENVIRONMENT – IMPACTS AND RISKS

## The changing gambling environment

The gambling environment has changed radically since 2007.

There were major changes in Victoria in the 1990s in what is known as land based gambling. Poker machines were introduced to local venues in 1992 and the Melbourne casino followed in 1994. Corporate bookmakers, who have become the sporting bet companies so familiar today, started up shortly thereafter.

The arrival of the first real web browser Netscape Navigator in 1995 followed by Internet Explorer soon after however marked the biggest change to the gambling landscape.

For anyone born in 1995 and turning 18 in 2013, the reality of living in a world that exists in both a physical and digital sense is natural. It is this group of young people who are often referred to as digital natives.

While the arrival of the internet introduced us all to a brand new digital world, its impact on the gambling world didn't make itself known until around 2007.

It was then that the liberalised gambling market introduced in the 1990s began to take advantage of: (a) the internet as a medium for commercial transactions; and (b) the opportunities springing from the convergence of technologies that could access the internet.

This was also the time when the digital natives born in 1995 were just starting high school.

This pace of change has continued and accelerated with desk bound computers being replaced by portable notebooks and then by smart mobile phones and tablets. Broadband access, and then wireless access, was rapidly spreading across cities and into regional towns.

At the same time, internet access was moving from being a high end luxury to a regular consumer service in much the same way cars and television did in the 20th century.

Along the way, Australians have become comfortable with internet commerce, with young people leading the way. In 2011 close to 90 per cent of 18-34 year olds said they were buying online (Irvine 2011).

The gambling industry responded to these changes by offering its own products online. One result was that physical and local legal restrictions on access to gambling, chief ways in which it had previously been regulated, disappeared.

In 2013, the online world is almost ever present and this is especially so for young people. A study in the ACT this year found that 99 per cent of young people between 12 and 18 (and in all demographics) could access the internet at home while 95 per cent had a mobile phone. Of these 69 per cent had a smart phone and over half of these used it to browse the internet (Macpherson 2013 ch.4).

## Box 4: The Great Convergence: Milestones to the new gambling environment of the digital natives

Changes in internet technology, and their impact on commerce and law, radically changed awareness, access and capacity for gambling in Australia

- 1995: Netscape Navigator 'creates' the World Wide Web (www) for mass consumption
- 1996: Sports betting companies begin setting up in Australia
- 1999: Sports betting companies now established all across Australia
- 2003: First 3G services launched (Hutchison), making data downloads more practical
- 2007: Apple iPhone (smartphone) launched
- July 2007: Zynga play poker game launched on Facebook
- 2008: Apple app store launched, apps for iPhone and iPod touch
- 2008: Betfair wins High Court case freeing gambling companies from much state imposed regulation
- 2008: first Android smartphone
- 2009: Sports betting advertising begins growing, just over half of interactive gamblers first gambled this way during or after 2009 (Gainsbury 2013)
- April 2010: first iPad tablet arrives in Aust (launched in USA in Feb)
- Dec 2010: 10.4 million active internet subscribers in Australia, 93% using broadband
- 2011: Android tablets begin to be serious competition for iPad
- 2011: Extent of sports betting advertising becomes a serious political issue (JSCG 2011)
- 2011: Gambling apps made available in the Apple app store
- Sept 2011: Facebook allows gambling advertising
- 2012 Facebook for the first time hosts a gambling game with cash jackpots
- Proportion of over 13 year olds accessing a social network site at least once a day exceeds 60% (ACMA 2013 p.38)
- June 2013 Telstra's 4G network has 66% of Australian population covered, including all capital cities. It is projected to have 85% coverage by Christmas 2013 (Bender 2013)
- 3 April 2013 Zynga launch real money online gambling games. Partner with Bwin who offer a virtual poker party room and sports betting and are based in Gibraltar

## Effects of the great convergence and the change in the gambling environment

Embedded marketing and advertising by sports betting companies has significantly increased the visibility of gambling in the community's life.

The acceleration in internet availability, capacity and access have affected the gambling environment in two important ways. Firstly, the new medium meant there could be more opportunities to gamble and the industry quickly developed new ways to gamble. This included both new types of bets and new ways to deliver and advertise them.

Australia's bookmakers have traditionally been focused on horse racing. However, the new corporate bookmakers, some of which only exist online with no physical presence at the race track, take bets on many sports and other events including election results and even the birth date, gender and name of a new royal baby.

The corporate bookmakers have also developed a large array of types of bets that could be made on sports including so-called microbets where gamblers can place bets on sporting action as it takes place like who will kick the first goal or score the first try.

More recently, corporate bookmakers have turned to developing apps and social media strategies to attract and retain customers.

### The delivery of gambling over the internet also brought Australia's constitution into play.

In a 2008 landmark case, the High Court of Australia effectively overturned the rights of states in many areas of betting regulation (Ball 2008).

For corporate bookmakers such as Betfair, Sportingbet and Centrebet, this meant they could conduct business across state borders via the internet. Being registered in only one place (mostly Tasmania and the Northern Territory) meant they could claim immunity from restrictions imposed by the states they were selling into.

This is significant because, while co-operation between states and the federal government on gambling regulation had been growing since 1999, states and territory governments continue to be the primary source of gambling regulation. After 2008, much of that carefully crafted legislation was now void or at least in question.

The most effective legislation on sports betting was now the Commonwealth Interactive Gambling Act 2001 (IGA). Its most important provisions regulated what sort of betting could be offered by companies in Australia to Australians while they were in Australia. It is this act that allows sports betting companies to operate and forbids the industry from offering gambling such as virtual pokies, poker, roulette or other casino type games.

But in relation to advertising the IGA only has provisions specifically related to the types of gambling it bans. It is silent on advertising of legal forms of gambling.

In Victoria there are laws that ban, regulate or restrict gambling advertising. They clearly apply to Victorian registered companies or companies operating from Victorian shopfronts. However, the extent to which these laws and regulations can be applied to companies registered elsewhere in Australia and operating over the internet continues to be disputed in the courts.

Under these new rules, or absence of them, sports betting advertising has become more of a feature of the mainstream media, of the internet, and of sporting events to the point where it is threatening to overwhelm the events themselves (Thomas 2012c, Lindsay 2013, IBISWorld 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

### The gambling environment has changed so fast that much of past knowledge and rules around gambling may be insufficient or even inappropriate to the task of protecting today's young people.

The great convergence has:

- changed the amount of gambling that is available,
- changed the ways it is available
- changed the types of gambling that are available
- subjected the community to a large scale and continual media campaign to be aware of and engage in gambling
- changed the community's awareness of gambling and arguably its attitudes towards it
- increased the participation of betting on sports other than racing<sup>5</sup>

The result of this convergence has been a new world of gambling; a world where the community's awareness of the issues and capacity to protect the vulnerable may now be steps behind what is needed.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas and Lindsay calculate minutes of exposure to gambling advertising for television viewers of AFL and NRL matches. Total minutes of exposure, counted cumulatively, are longer than the actual time of play. For more on the extent and growth of sports betting see the VRGF's submission to the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform (VRGF 2013 p.5ff)

<sup>5</sup> In the 2008 Victoria wide survey of gambling just under 4% of the population were betting on sports. A recent national survey has the figure at over 13%. (DoJ Department of Justice 2009 p.10) (Gainsbury 2013 table 1)

It's a world where young people's experience of gambling is markedly different to their parents' experiences at the same age. A world where existing community attitudes and laws may be less than sufficient for helping today's adolescents to stay safe.

The questions that arise for the broader community in relation to this radically changed environment include:

- I. what impacts might it be having on young people's attitudes and behaviours?
- II. what countervailing messages can or should be sent in relation to it, and how should both young people and their parents navigate it safely?

Giving parents a better understanding of the environment, and also what avenues are open to them to influence, change and allow for it, is an important first step to meeting the challenges being presented.

## The new gambling environment – the regulation

At present, gambling advertising on mainstream television (Broadcast and cable) is primarily self-regulated through codes of conduct enforced by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). These codes prohibit gambling advertisements during children's television hours but there are exemptions for sports and news broadcasts.

Concerns raised this year in Federal parliament, primarily around the effect of television gambling advertising on children, have led to recent amendments in the codes.<sup>6</sup> They now ban live odds advertising during live sporting events and restrict gambling advertising to breaks in the event such as half time. There are also restrictions on the way gambling could be portrayed in advertising during live sporting events, including restrictions around them being directed to children or portraying gambling as a family activity.

These changes were made in response to criticisms that (a) primary school-age children would struggle to distinguish gambling ads merged with commentary as advertising and (b) that widespread reports of young people referring to events through a lens of odds meant that gambling was being normalised.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this concern with sporting outcomes seen through gambling odds was characterised as undermining the traditional ways Australians have valued and enjoyed sports such as football and cricket (VRGF 2013 Sec.4).

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview see Sports betting advertising: a guide to the recent debate, on the Foundation's Gambling Information Resource Office website.

<sup>7</sup> Of course in one sense gambling in Australia is normal. Many people do it. However, the normalisation debate reflected an anxiety about gambling now being seen as a normal part of life in areas where previously it had not been.

It does remain the case that gambling advertising can appear on the internet, in print and on radio and in other television shows, with little restriction.

## The new gambling environment – impacts on young people

Advertising for gambling remains a pervasive part of lived experience, especially if young people follow a sport. If they attend games there are banners and promotions of gambling companies at sporting events, logos on team uniforms and even betting vans outside of grounds. If they listen to the radio or use smart phone apps to follow play or get statistics gambling ads will also be appearing. Following sport through the media means further exposure to gambling advertising, including the association of gambling companies with sports stars and the integration of gambling advertising with program material in both television (when not during a live telecast) and radio (at any time).

### Young people may not be the targets but they are still in the firing line.

The gambling industry, and the advertising agencies, broadcasters and sporting organisations who accept their money, will note that their advertising is not aimed at children or at any underage youth. However they are, in particular targeting young men. Advertisements that appeal to these young adults are also likely to appeal or resonate with male adolescents behind them in age but anticipating and constructing for themselves ideas of adult behaviour. Further, it is the case that adolescent youth are more susceptible to projecting wishes on to what they are shown and making emotional attachments to products they are presented with (Monaghan 2008 p.254ff). In the case of gambling and sports sponsorship there is a clear intention to link emotions connected to a sporting team to the gambling brand or product being advertised (Thomas 2012c p.146).

## Impacts of advertising

Apart from advertising for sports gambling there is little other gambling advertising occurring in Victoria. Land based forms of gambling face heavy advertising restrictions under Victorian law, Crown casino for instance can only show gambling incidentally in ads for the casino complex. Pokies are restricted to being advertised by signs outside venues and the signs themselves must fit within specifications.

However, advertising for sports gambling has been prolific and growing over the past few years. It is most visible in the mass media but it is also being pursued on internet delivered channels and in social media.

Strong evidence on the impact of all this advertising on children and adolescents is only in the early stages of being collected because the phenomenon itself is so new. The best understandings will come from studies across time. Most of the studies that do exist date back three to five years, which is before the main acceleration that has occurred.

## Young people know the brands and are absorbing messages of gambling as harmless fun and being promoted to try it.

Impacts that have been identified include strong recall of gambling brands by young adolescents (JSCG 2013 pp.8-9, Allen 2008 p.28, Delfabbro 2005 ACT, Derevensky Sklar 2010) and the development of an attitude towards gambling that see it as 'entertaining, harmless and convivial' (McMullan 2012 p.843).

Overseas studies of adolescents frequently exposed to gambling advertising have found that a high percentage report that the ads make them want to try gambling. The gambling advertising works in a similar manner to the way alcohol advertising has been shown to prompt a desire to drink. Moreover, a majority of young people find the ads encourage them to imagine or dream of that they would do with their winnings (Monaghan 2008 pp.254-5).

Australian researcher Sally Gainsbury has noted that adolescents are more vulnerable than adults to persuasion by the emotional content of commercials. Further, that gambling advertising can play into their concerns around appearance, self-identity and belonging (Gainsbury 2012 p.91).

Some Australian sporting organisations and some sporting celebrities have accepted payments to allow themselves to be used to sell and promote gambling. The intent of the advertising is to transfer the appeal and emotional connection of followers from the sport or star to the gambling product. It has been noted this may be even more successful when it takes place directly within the context of the sporting event rather than in clearly identifiable commercials (Lindsay 2013; Thomas 2012c p.146ff).

Unfortunately, those underage are equally or even more susceptible to such forms of persuasion. Support your team by supporting its sponsor is a traditional advertising message but one that can have dark overtones in relation to young people and gambling.

In terms of the attitudes and perceptions gambling advertising is conveying to teenagers, a major Canadian report noted that youth found messages in the advertising that gambling was some or all of; fun and exciting, easy to win at, a form of dramatic escape from everyday life, and could change your life for the better (Korn 2005 p.20).

In short, the fears being expressed by adults in Australian public discourse over the past few years, that pervasive sports betting advertising is normalising gambling in a way that is different and dangerous compared to how Australians have traditionally regarded it<sup>8</sup>, has support in research.

There is also research to suggest that, for those young people who for other reasons may be vulnerable to gambling problems, the effect of a normalising gambling environment may increase their risk of harmful gambling (Focal Research 2008).

## Impacts of the new levels of access to gambling

### More young people claim to be gambling online than the authorities or gambling industry recognise.

Gainsbury notes that, given the experience of adolescents and their familiarity with computers, it should not be surprising that some of them are engaging in forms of internet gambling (Gainsbury 2012 p.88). As with land based gambling, age based restrictions are applied at reputable online gambling sites, including all those based in Australia. Despite this, it does appear that some young people are managing to gamble. Unlike a physical encounter at a land based venue, being able to provide a credit card is the chief requirement to establish bona fides online (Gainsbury 2012 p.89).

Samples recruited from school populations in Canada reported that eight per cent of students had gambled for money online. A study of Australian students with a mean age of 14 found four per cent had gambled online in the last year (cited in Gainsbury 2012 p.87). How this is happening is not clear, though it may well be the case that for many this gambling takes place with assistance or permission from adults (King 2010 p.183).

Balanced against this evidence, a recent large international survey of gambling showed a much lower rate of underage gambling than the surveys above, and industry providers have progressively been making it more difficult for age verification to be defrauded. (Gainsbury 2012 pp.88-90)

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<sup>8</sup> For example, The Queensland Household Gambling Survey 2012 found 51 per cent wanted a ban on gambling advertising at sports grounds, a Newspoll national survey in 2011 found 63 per cent of people thought sports betting advertising was increasing problem gambling. See also Thomas SL 2012 conceptualisations Ch.5

## Online gambling has particular risks and gamblers at risk are more likely than other gamblers to play online.

Two important issues need to be kept in mind with regard to internet gambling. The first concerns the technology and the second the characteristics associated with online gamblers.

In relation to technology, gambling online offers particular risks that are not generally a factor with land-based gambling:

- Access is usually unlimited by time or place. For gamblers who are motivated by either impulse or a need to escape (motivations associated with problem gambling) gambling is now always conveniently available
- Gambling can be more anonymous, problem gamblers often have strong feelings of shame that can inhibit their gambling behaviour.
- Losses can happen at a faster rate. Land based gambling is bound by local laws over technology and laws of physics regarding games, eg poker hands can only be dealt so fast, roulette wheels need time to spin. Where online betting is produced and governed by software, and these rules need not apply
- Credit cards can be used. In land based gambling in Victoria betting using a credit facility is not legally permitted
- Provision of social or responsible gambling codes and tools vary in their quality on online gambling sites

(all based on King 2010 p.183)

With regard to gambling, studies indicate that frequent gamblers and gamblers at risk or with problems are more likely to play online than other gamblers (Gainsbury 2013 p.7). This does not mean that gambling online actually increases your risk of problems (though it does carry the risk factors listed above) but rather that someone who is gambling online has a greater chance of being someone with problems. This applies to those underage gamblers as well as adults.

## Pretend gambling can distort young people's perceptions of gambling and encourage them to gamble.

Researchers have also expressed concerns about young people playing gambling games where no money can be won (though in some games it does cost to play or keep playing) (King 2012; King 2010; Monaghan 2009).

Imitation (or simulated) gambling games can be legally offered by existing gambling sites such as online casinos or sports betting sites. Specific gambling games such as poker or play versions of pokies or roulette are also popular on other websites, through social media sites and also via apps that can be played on smart phones, tablets or even iPod touches. The app store offers over 1,000 simulated gambling games, many promoted as practice for the real thing.

In addition to these dedicated games there are also occurrences of simulated gambling that takes place within other video or internet games as part of the larger game. Since 2000 simulated gambling content has featured prominently within over 100 video games sold in Australia (King 2012 p.422).

Three concerns tend to be associated with these:

- That they constitute a form of grooming in that young people are being accustomed to gambling as a normal and harmless behaviour. Moreover, on some sites there are short steps to move to real gambling and advertisements during the play game to do so
- That they can create false perceptions around the dangers of losing and the likelihood of winning, simulated gambling games may reward players with a rate of return (winnings) far higher than that offered by real games
- That when embedded in games of skill it can be difficult for young players not to confuse a gambling game that might be entirely based on probability with a larger game where skills play a role. The danger being that players develop misconceptions about the role of skill in winning and losing.

In summary there are real concerns about the impact of simulated gambling games on young people's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours towards gambling.

Simulation games need not always be negative, it has been noted that they may be able to work as a precautionary tool, particularly in an educative setting (Allen 2008 pp.142-3).

However, commercial providers of simulation games are not aiming to teach responsible gambling but rather to engage players in the game.

## Conclusion – the risks of new environment

Young people are growing up with much more awareness and knowledge of gambling than the generation before them. They also have many more opportunities to experience gambling.

The arrival of myriad forms of marketing around sports betting is being coupled with multiple channels for delivering it. There are commercials and embedded commentary in mass media, pop-ups and click throughs on the internet and in apps, ads on social media and the formation of gambling interest groups on social media. Logos and advertisements are often prominent features of sporting teams young people follow or at sports grounds they attend.

The messages coming from all of this marketing encourages young people to frame many of their experiences of sport, and life generally, with language and concepts related to gambling. It encourages them to think of gambling as normal because they are and have been surrounded by references and encouragements to gamble.

There is not yet robust evidence that this is leading to a significantly greater risk of harm but the change and innovation is creating ripples that can be expected to impact on young people. This applies to both what they might do now and also how they might behave in the future.

Any evidence of increased rates of harm or risk will take time to evaluate. However, there is enough evidence to make it clear that society does face real challenges in helping and protecting its young negotiate the changed world of gambling. The concerns are clearly outlined in box 5.

Young people are being confronted with wider array of opportunities to gamble and an avalanche of messages about what gambling is and how they should treat it. It is important that their perceptions are not left to be informed by gambling advertising and the pervasive presence of gambling. In light of this, providing alternative sources of education is a major task.

### **Box 5: Suggested effects of new gambling environment based on what we know about risk factors that promote adolescent gambling**

- (a) make gambling more accessible and attractive to young people,
- (b) may promote factually incorrect information about gambling,
- (c) provide an easy 'escape' from real world problems such as depression and social isolation,
- (d) create a gambling environment that easily facilitates peer pressures to gamble,
- (e) ease parental transmission of gambling attitudes and beliefs, and
- (f) make gambling more ubiquitous and socially acceptable.

Adapted from: Daniel King Paul Delfabbro Mark Griffiths, The Convergence of Gambling and Digital Media: Implications for Gambling in Young People Journal of Gambling Studies (2010) 26:175–187

# SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS AND ACTIONS

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## Preventing gambling-related harm in young people

### The issues

This paper makes a number of crucial points around gambling and young people. Perhaps the most important is that despite it being illegal, they do gamble and are far more likely to have problems with it than adults. Add to this consistent studies showing many older people with gambling problems say they started gambling when they were underage. Gambling underage carries potential risks in both cases.

This paper has established the ways the gambling environment for young people growing up today has changed radically, especially over the last five years. Rapid change is continuing and new opportunities to gamble, new types of gambling and new ways of marketing gambling are still growing.

The use of interest in sports as a conduit to gambling has been prominent but there is also interest from the local gambling industry in expanding into other forms of gambling, not least because there is a wider variety of gambling offered on the world market and it is only the click of a button away.

All this change has caught adults, parents, educators, and those who work with young people to some degree unaware and perhaps under-prepared and ill-equipped to respond effectively. The Foundation has an important role to play in remedying this situation.

For policy-makers the speed of change has also been a challenge, complicated by the fact that the explosion of advertising for gambling, and the vast expansion in access to gambling, have been a result of the internet making state borders porous.

This has raised legal questions about the right of traditional gambling regulators, the state and territory governments, to create and enforce their own regulatory protections. The Foundation will continue to conduct and publish research that can be of use to governments at all levels.

The Foundation will continue to provide accessible information that is of use to members of the public wishing to participate in inquiries or debates about gambling regulation.

### Directions

Based on the evidence that has informed this paper, and also from continual consultations by the Foundation with help services, counsellors, community educators, teachers, academics, local government and the broader community, the Foundation has resolved that a number of steps need to be taken in terms of:

- Improving parents' awareness of the risks to their children from gambling
- Giving parents, and others with stewardship of young people, tools to help prevent or intervene in problems with gambling
- Working with community organisations that engage or cater to young people, particularly sporting associations, to improve the messages and mentoring they send around gambling
- Informing and building young people's knowledge and capacity to negotiate the gambling environment they are exposed to, including knowledge of how gambling works, how to avoid the harm it can cause and the confidence to seek help
- Improving the knowledge of the general community and enlisting its support in creating a better and safer environment for young people in relation to gambling
- Informing and assisting educators to deliver responsible gambling messages to young people
- Providing better awareness of the signs of gambling problems in young people and better pathways to help when they are identified
- Providing better pathways to help not just for young people who have problems with gambling but for those who are being affected by the problem gambling of others
- Providing support to governments, regulators and policy-makers who have responsibilities and concerns connected to this issue

## Actions

This discussion paper is a part of this process and responses to the questions, issues and observations in this paper are welcomed. The Foundation is also interested in hearing from anyone who wishes to raise further issues or suggestions of possible actions. Substantial and useful responses will be incorporated into the Foundation's planning and thinking. Where appropriate they will be used in a future updated version of this paper.

Starting immediately the Foundation has embarked on a number of initiatives, including a youth engagement strategy, to respond to the issues identified in this paper.

These are:

- An education program for students, teachers and parents
- A campaign to raise awareness about young people people's exposure to gambling and the need to protect them
- The release of guides and materials for parents
- A responsible gambling program for sporting clubs
- Provision of dedicated Gambler's help "youthline" and the development of other youth services
- Continue to monitor and support research into youth, gambling and the new environment

The Foundation is also planning to work on initiatives with sporting associations and local government to create safer and more supportive surrounds for young people that steer them away from harm and build their resilience in relation to gambling.

## Responses to this paper

Responses to this paper are welcome and can be sent to [communication@responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au](mailto:communication@responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au)

For more information go to:

[www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au](http://www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au)  
[www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/giro](http://www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/giro)  
[www.gamblingisnotagame.com.au](http://www.gamblingisnotagame.com.au)

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