

# Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Future Gaming Markets From Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania

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Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania is proud to be an active member of the Community Voice on Pokies Reform. Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and our member Houses call on the Tasmanian Government to:

1. Remove poker machines from hotels and clubs.
2. Not increase the number of poker machines in the casinos and to impose on the machines in the casinos a maximum \$1 bet limit and a system that requires people to set an enforceable limit on their losses. Further, for it to be mandatory for staff to intervene where customers may be experiencing harm from poker machines.
3. Continue counselling and other support services for those harmed by gambling.
4. Support hotels and clubs that currently have poker machines to transition their business model.

Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania is the peak body that supports and represents the 35 Neighbourhood Houses, most of which are located in areas that experience high levels of disadvantage, and yet also have poker machines located in their communities. In 2015-16 our network had 445,336 occasions of service with community members. Many of these contacts relate to support for the health and wellbeing of individuals and families, developing confidence and resilience after life challenges. Our member staff and volunteers have a comprehensive understanding of the issues affecting local communities as they are working with and supporting the individuals and families affected by problem gambling.

Further information about our network can be found at:

<http://nht.org.au/home/neighbourhood-houses-in-tasmania/>

During October NHT conducted a survey of our members to seek their views on the impacts (positive and negative) of poker machines in their communities. We received 42 responses from house members from across the state, a response similar to other surveys. We learnt the following information:

- 🏠 66% believe that gambling on poker machines is a problem in their local community, (28% weren't sure, and less than 5% don't believe it is a problem)
- 🏠 Over 95% believe that pokers machines are addictive and harmful,

Our 35 Houses are clear in their desire to see an end to the pain and damage inflicted on local communities by poker machines in pubs and clubs around the State.

While a few people who responded to our survey felt that many people are able to enjoy poker machines with no risk or harm, the recognition of the harm done is considered too great and doesn't justify the presence of poker machines in local communities.

NHT also wishes to make the following points, in support of our submission:

- 🏠 The maps and associated information provided by the Social Action Research Centre and Anglicare clearly demonstrate that:
  - poker machines unfairly target the most disadvantaged areas of the state.
  - Over \$200 million was lost to poker machines in the Tasmanian community, around half of which is in local pubs and clubs<sup>i</sup>
- 🏠 We applaud the Treasurer's statement that policy will be guided by community views rather than revenue considerations, and call on the whole Government to listen to the views of the whole community.
- 🏠 It is our understanding that polls taken since 2003 show clearly that an overwhelming majority of Tasmanians do not believe the Tasmanian community have benefited from the location of poker machines in local pubs and clubs, but rather that they want them reduced or removed from these locations.
- 🏠 Surveys of Tasmanians views on poker machines have shown there is no difference between regional and urban Tasmanians in strongly believing that poker machines are of no benefit to their local community. Further, regional Tasmanians like their city counterparts have been clear that they value social, family-oriented and community-building entertainment options, a view that is strongly reflected in the experience of Neighbourhood Houses. Regional Tasmanians also strongly value and prefer the diverse national parks, tourism ventures, food and wine experiences, and other cafes and pubs that do not have poker machines, the evidence shows there are plenty of alternatives.
- 🏠 With a level of promotion of these alternatives, awareness and access to them could be increased. Efforts to "normalise" healthy activities over risky ones like poker machine use, will pay off in healthier, and better-resourced individuals and communities.

- 🏠 The money currently lost to pokies can still be spent by local people in their broader local communities, which could make other forms of entertainment and activities and their associated businesses more viable. Neighbourhood Houses themselves also offer a variety of cheap or free activities and events to suit local communities.
- 🏠 In addition to the social harm poker machines cause, Neighbourhood Houses believe poker machines are a detriment to local economies.
- 🏠 The Tasmanian Government is working hard to address other community and social issues such as family violence, child safety and suicide through the following plans and strategies:
  - Safe Homes Safe Families – The Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan
  - The Strong Families Safe Children Implementation Plan
  - The Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Community Network

An article in *The Conversation* cites research from Victoria to show correlations between the number of poker machines and the levels of domestic violence.

*“In terms of relative risk, the police recorded 20% fewer family violence incidents and 30% fewer domestic violence assaults when postcodes with no poker machines were compared with postcodes with at least 75 pokies per 10,000 people.”<sup>ii</sup>*

Previous research in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania has shown that more than half the people receiving problem gambling treatment have recent experience of domestic violence, either as survivors or perpetrators.<sup>iii</sup>

A 2005 Tasmanian study by Margie Law, confirmed what has been found through other national studies that problem gambling can lead to relationship breakdown and stress. While poker machines is only one form of gambling, when know that there are around 2500 people with problem gambling who use poker machine<sup>iv</sup>

According to research conducted by the Social Action Research Centre, around 2500 Tasmanians have problems with poker machine addiction and harm, while being responsible for around a third of losses to poker machines.<sup>v</sup>

Failing to restrict pokies to the two casinos and remove them from local communities, will mean the Government is failing to do all it can to minimise harm to local families, and failing to respond to community concerns. The current commitment to the wellbeing of children being made in this State, means nothing if other policies that directly and negatively impact on many childrens’ wellbeing are ignored. It unfortunately means the government is enabling that harm to occur.

Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott, presented at the Tasmanian Government’s Child Wellbeing Symposium in Hobart on 15 November 2016, and made the following points:

🏠 Cummins, Scott & Scales (2012) report “protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry Report showed a strong correlation between

- Local government areas with high levels of social disadvantage (SEIFA Measures), and
- High levels of child protection reports, and
- Number of children identified as vulnerable in one or more domains of AEDI

🏠 “Service reform requires supportive policy settings”

Dr Maria Harries AM also presenting at the Child Wellbeing symposium made the following points:

🏠 *Child Safety and Wellbeing is everyone’s business. This requires:*

- *A population focus that aims to improve the overall health of the community*
- *Focus on prevention, promotion and early intervention*
- *Working in partnership (the whole community including government needs to work together to address issues affecting child safety and wellbeing)*
- *Reduction of inequalities means reducing the impact of relative or absolute disadvantage and*
- *Effective and sustainable action*

Removing poker machines located in disadvantaged communities can be an important contribution to addressing inequalities, helping to improve the wellbeing of the overall community, and preventing further harms. This would be an effective and sustainable action.

### **Pokies take from the poor and give to the rich.**

It’s time to call a spade a spade. The evidence shows that poker machines are overwhelmingly located in disadvantaged areas. The millions of dollars spent in poker machines could otherwise be spent in other local businesses in local communities, including to provide the necessities of life for children and families. The industry claims about potential loss of jobs appear to be overinflated when the importance of venues to regional communities is considered, and if adequate time is given for transition before licenses experience. Jobs lost from pubs as a result of transitioning away from pokies as part of the business model will be replaced in other local businesses where the money stays in local communities rather than be funnelled to the select few who own the machines. Pubs that have removed poker machines in other states have shown that this can enhance the appeal of their venues. Even the locally licensed venues only take a small percentage of the profits from poker machines.

Comments from NHT members about Pokies in local pubs and clubs:

*“They destroy culture too. Pubs and clubs used to be social, have bands, quiz nights etc. Now they just have desperate zombies staring at flashing screens. The sounds of banter, laughter and music have been replaced by shrill pokie jingles that feign happiness and success but actually represent addiction and misery. I (really) hate them.”*

*“Poker machines take \$3.2 million out of the ‘EAST’ Devonport community (4500 resident/1200 homes). 2 venues with 30 machines each. Losses for Devonport are \$12 million” (per year)*

Neighbourhood Houses believe that part of improving safety and wellbeing outcomes for Tasmania’s children, means addressing issues of disadvantage experienced by parents.

Neighbourhood Houses recognises that it will be a bold move to remove poker machines from local pubs and clubs, but it is one that will benefit the wider community, and reduce harms impacting on the safety and wellbeing of children and families.



Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania is an active and proud member of the Community Voice on Pokies Reform. We wholeheartedly support the submission of Community Voice on Pokies Reform.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://sarc.good.do/getthepokiesoutoftasmaniaspubsandclubs/pages/why-the-pokies-need-to-go/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://theconversation.com/areas-with-more-poker-machines-have-higher-rates-of-domestic-violence-66982>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://ajgiph.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/2195-3007-3-13>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/sites/anglicare-tas.org.au/files/House\\_of\\_cards\\_-\\_problem\\_gambling\\_and\\_low\\_income\\_earners\\_in\\_Tasmania.pdf](https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/sites/anglicare-tas.org.au/files/House_of_cards_-_problem_gambling_and_low_income_earners_in_Tasmania.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.pokermachinescauseharm.org.au/in\\_your\\_area/about/](http://www.pokermachinescauseharm.org.au/in_your_area/about/)