

Listen to communities

Community leaders have urged the Premier not to lock local neighbourhoods into decades of future harm by poker machines.

An open letter calling for the removal of poker machines from hotels and clubs – signed by thousands of Tasmanians – was revealed at an event at the Risdon Vale Neighbourhood Centre today.

Speakers at the event said poker machines had already cost too many Tasmanians their health, relationships, job or home.

“The 35 Houses in our network are primarily located in areas where poker machines proliferate – low socio-economic and regional communities,” said John Hooper, executive officer of Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania.

“Grassroot Tasmanians are saying they don’t want pokies doing this level of damage to the communities they live, work, parent and play in”.

“We support people to find housing, furniture, school shoes – to pick up the pieces after their family finances are destroyed by poker machine addiction,” he said. “The few jobs returned to the community don’t compensate for the destruction to lives and families”. Mr Hooper called on the Premier to respond to community concerns. “This is the wrong policy and we are begging you to change it,” he said. “Think of the thousands of lives that will be harmed if these machines remain in our communities”.

Deputy Chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Tasmania and Claremont-based general practitioner Dr Jennie Robinson said an addiction to gambling was an illness that required medical treatment.

“Poker machine addiction is not a choice. It’s a medical issue and I’ve seen firsthand the toll it can take on families,” Dr Robinson said.

“GPs are on the frontline of Tasmania’s health system. We are the ones who see the families forced into poverty, and the families unable to afford



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medication for their children because they are suffering from a poker machine addiction.

“What we care about above all else is the health of our patients – we’re here to support and treat our patients, which is particularly challenging due to the stigma and shame that comes with a gambling addiction.”

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners represents more than 700 GPs across the state, about 93 per cent of all GPs in Tasmania.

In its Tasmania Pre-Election Submission, the College identified gambling harm as a priority issue for the state.

Education and training consultant and former Assistant Principal Rosny College, Mike Frost said he’d seen firsthand the harm to families caused by poker machines. “I’ve spoken with teenagers forced to develop strategies to access money for groceries before the rest of their parents’ pay disappeared into the pokies,” he said. “That level of stress has an impact on young people in the education system”.

Anglicare said the harm caused by poker machines cost the State millions of dollars each year.

“Removing poker machines from hotels and clubs would support a range of important policy initiatives,” said Meg Webb, Manager of Anglicare’s Social Action and Research Centre. “This one decision would make a significant, measurable difference in key areas such as health and wellbeing, reducing family violence, and suicide prevention”.

Ms Webb said restricting poker machines to casinos would see communities flourish and the local economy benefit.

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