

INNER EAST PCP AND OUTER EAST HEALTH & COMMUNITY
SUPPORT ALLIANCE

EMR PROBLEM GAMBLING INITIATIVE GRANTS 2011

Problem Gambling Initiative

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Problem gambling is a significant public health issue in Victoria. While only 33% of the adult population play the pokies, 1-2% of players suffer from gambling related harm. Another 5-10 family, friends or colleagues of this group are harmed by their gambling. Communities and service providers are also negatively affected with around \$167million each year draining out of the region and demands placed on services as a consequence of pokie gambling.

The Eastern Metropolitan region (EMR), which covers the local government areas of Boroondara, Knox, Whitehorse, Maroondah, Manningham, Monash and Yarra Ranges, has an increasingly high rate of problem gambling within the state, affecting numerous individuals, families and the community as a whole. A snapshot of the financial effects of problem gambling in the EMR show that within the current financial year (July 2011-October 2011), the **EMR has already lost \$155,813,467.23 which equates to nearly 17% of Victoria's net expenditure** (VCGR, 2011).

Social isolation is a key risk factor contributing to the development and maintenance of problem gambling. The Productivity Commission (1999:7.68) found the second main benefit for problem gamblers was that "gambling made them feel less lonely".

The projects that will be showcased in this newsletter have been developed through, the '**PCP Problem Gambling (PG) Initiative**', which is a state-wide project funded by the Department of Justice (DoJ) based in Primary Care Partnerships (PCP). The initiative commenced in 2008 and aims to reduce risk factors for problem gambling in their communities, as well as raising awareness of problem gambling as a public health issue.

Based on the evidence provided, the Inner East Primary Care Partnership and Outer East Health and Community Support Alliance instigated a community grants program to assist organisations and groups within the EMR to undertake health promotion activities which **address the social determinants of problem gambling, in particular social isolation**. An update on the six programs developed as a result of the community grants initiative is provided within this newsletter.



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Monashlink– Opening Doors

Monashlink is a community health service situated within the City of Monash, which successfully obtained funds from the Problem Gambling Initiative in order to address social isolation in the local community. Monashlink is committed to reducing social isolation and enhancing the health and wellbeing of all residents in and around the City of Monash.

The Opening Doors program, modelled on the successful Leadership Victoria ‘Williamson Program’, was designed to bring together a diverse range of community members to develop their leadership skills, knowledge and insights about social isolation and support them to undertake community projects. The program largely used an adult education, self-directed learning approach as this was deemed appropriate to accommodate the broad range of backgrounds and experience.

Social isolation has been identified as a priority for action across the four inner east local government areas, in addition to various community health services within the same catchment area. With this knowledge, Monashlink decided to then focus the Opening Doors program to reduce social isolation.

2011 saw Opening Doors begin its third year with 21 participants, ranging in age from 23-83 year old and hailing from a variety of cultural backgrounds becoming involved. The 6 month program saw all participants take part in a 3 day retreat, which explored aspects of leadership and the program as a whole. The group also met twice a month to take part in workshops that explored different ideas around social isolation, leadership styles and the best ways to identify the many strengths that might already exist within their own community. After gaining these various skills the participants developed their own community-based projects which addressed social isolation. Some of these include; a music group for people touched by depression, a spiritual fire-gathering for the Indigenous community, a DVD case study for problem gamblers etc. A graduation ceremony was also held recently for participants, family members and project partners (picture below).

Opening Doors projects have been mindful of resource use and have been planned with sustainability in mind. Various participants have linked with organisations who hope to carry on with the implementation of these projects. For example, creating partnerships with volunteer resource centres, migrant resource centres, and local government may assist in providing a venue to hold meetings free of charge, or provide support in applying for future grants etc.



This program relies solely on the support of its sponsors. To find out how you can support future programs, please contact: Alex Mills, project officer on (03) 9239-2512 or alex.mills@ucco.org.au.

Why not check the program out on Facebook as well; <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Opening-Doors/143923135691631>.



Monashlink– Storytelling Workshops

In 2011 Monashlink Community Health Service developed the Storytelling workshop which is part of the Betting on a Better Life Program. The Storytelling workshop aims to provide opportunities for participants to explore and develop narratives around the impact of gambling on mental and physical health and well being amongst other things by using the power of media to make sense of life's changes.

The Storytelling workshop welcomed gamblers and those at risk of gambling in the Ashburton, Ashwood, and Chadstone Neighbourhood Renewal Area to take part. The sessions used storytelling as a strategy to enhance health, promote emotional and social wellbeing and increase community participation. The workshop also used storytelling as a health promotion tool to raise awareness of issues around problem gambling and avenues for treatment, support and social inclusion.

The project constituted of five weekly (3 hour) workshops with 10-12 participants at the Batesford Hub. Participants came mainly via referrals from Monashlink counsellors, Gamblers Help Eastern (GHE) counsellor, Doncare, and from the Betting on a Better Life Focus Group. 12 people paid \$20 each for the series of 5 sessions, and 10 of those individuals were regular attendees.

The Storytelling workshops were facilitated by Arnold Zable, an acclaimed writer and storyteller. Participants were given the opportunity to put their life's experiences on paper and empowered to take control of their lives. Most of the participants felt confident to tell their story and all the participants felt confident in writing their story. One participant said "Sharing our experiences and our struggles without judgement or condemnation helped us to see the whole situation clearer." Another participant said "the storytelling workshop quickened all my senses and helped me to embark into a new adventure in my life, when everything seemed hopeless and numb with sadness. Storytelling gave me hope and I know I can make it to be free again from the bondage of what at first was just an escape but find myself sucked into a pit". At the end of the workshops, Arnold Zable, the facilitator, had this to say, "I did not expect we would get so deeply into the experience of addiction and gambling as we did."

"The storytelling workshop quickened all my senses and helped me to embark into a new adventure in my life, when everything seemed hopeless and numb with sadness"

The group would like to continue to meet with Arnold for 3 further sessions, and together go to the Pokies to be 'witnesses' and then write about their observations, and compile a booklet for health promotion and community awareness raising of problem gambling issues. By bringing the 'hidden' problem of gambling into the light it will help de-stigmatize the issue.

To ensure sustainability of the program, at the final session, the coordinator of Opening Doors Community Leadership training was invited to promote the program. Four of the workshop participants signed up to the 6 month Opening Doors Community Leadership program which aims to increase the social inclusion of people at risk of isolation in local communities.



For more information regarding this project, please contact:

Judy Avisar, Betting on a Better Life Project Worker ; JAvisar@monashlink.org.au (please note Judy currently works Wednesday & Thursday only).

The lure of Pokies

The warmth of the venue gave her a very welcoming feeling and the soothing and yet vibrant lighting tantalized and evoked a feeling of excitement. The sound of free games and jackpots and the coins dispensing into the trough of machines sent a shot of adrenaline through her whole being. She quickened her steps towards her usual favourite machine with anticipation that today is going to be a good day. The jubilation of the people around only added to her excitement.

Perhaps today I may have “better luck” she thought to herself as she slipped her fifty into the slot which, like a monster, sucked it in before she even had time to ponder over it. “Oh! Well!” she thought “maybe God will be kind and let me win back my losses”.

She eagerly pressed on the keys with great anticipation. Thud! Thud! Thud! She watched anxiously as the lines flashed again and again across her vision and nothing happened. She watched with exasperation as her credits slowly dwindled and the warning sounds of the machines hissed out a reminder for more. She visualized the machine like an alien creature calling out “More! More!” and, as if under a spell, she pulled out another fifty which was hungrily devoured by the machine.

“I really should have a grip on myself and leave before I lose it all” she spoke under her breath. Thud! Thud! This time she hit the keys a little bit vehemently. Then suddenly the sound of free games rang out and she shouted with jubilation - but it paid nothing. “What rotten luck” she cursed with an audible voice oblivious of the glances coming her way. “It should pay by now”. She hastily slipped in another fifty, her eyes fixed expectantly as the game lines scrolled musically before her. “Stop! Stop!” she cried as she hit at the machine as if it will respond to her orders. “Stupid thing!”, she groaned with venom as she jabbed viciously at the keys again and again.

She was jolted back to reality only when she had lost her lot. She furiously went through her bag to see if there was perhaps one coin left. Just one more try and you never know, that may be the lucky last. She was flat broke, not a dime to her name, and she hunched forward despondently, exhausted of all emotions, and walked out of the venue that somehow did not seem to be so inviting after all.

She sat in her car with her head cupped in her hands with such mixed feelings. She was overwhelmed with disbelief in what she had just done. “What’s wrong with me?” she asked herself. “I promised not to come but I came anyway, and I lost control - and see what happened?”. She sat there with a sense of despair, utter failure, disappointment at her lack of self control and angry at her loss.

“How on earth did I get sucked into such a pit?”. It was just for a bit of fun and a place to escape from the pain and disappointment of life. ..And now I’m spiralling down and down the dark pit, unable to break free”. “I must try to seek help”. She looked at the Gambler’s Help brochure and drove off with a sense of hope and determination to overcome her addiction.



Women's Health East – Gambling and Social Connection

In 2009 Women's Health East (WHE) conducted a stakeholder consultation which identified that social isolation is a significant issue for women in the EMR. Stakeholders reported that they did not have the skills and knowledge to address social isolation. In response to this, WHE developed the "Investing in Women" project to strengthen the region's social connectedness by building the capacity of the health and community sector and women in the community to understand the barriers to social connection and establish new and innovative ways to establish meaningful social activities.

The Investing in Women project is a two year project which is divided into three phases. The first phase was the consultation phase; the second phase included a series of social connection workshops which aimed to build the capacity of the health and community sector and women in the community to more effectively address and understand social isolation amongst women in the EMR who are isolated and/or disadvantaged. The third phase involves the Grants Program which aims to establish meaningful social groups for women who are isolated and/or disadvantaged in the EMR.

The Problem Gambling Initiative was partly integrated into phase 2 (workshops) of the Investing in Women project because WHE recognised that problem gambling was one of the barriers to social connection.

In total, five workshops were run. One full day workshop for people working in the health and community sector and four half day workshops open to women in the community. Only two social connection workshops for women in the community were originally planned but due to the high level of interest, two additional workshops were delivered.

The workshops aimed to:

- Raise participants' awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of social connection for women in their communities
- Increase participants' awareness and understanding of the barriers that exist for women to participate in the community
- Develop innovative ways to establish meaningful social opportunities for women in the EMR.

At the full day workshop for people working in the health and community sector, problem gambling was featured as a barrier to why women may become socially isolated or why social isolation may lead to problem gambling. A 45 minute break out session, facilitated by staff from Gambler's Help Eastern, was dedicated to discussing problem gambling as a barrier in detail. In the four community workshops, the facilitators highlighted the topic of problem gambling and explored reasons why women may engage in gambling as an opportunity to socially connect.

At each of the workshops, participants were given a Social Connection Resource Kit. In addition to this, Health and Community Sector participants were provided with the 'Health Promotion Resource Guide for Problem Gambling Prevention in Melbourne's East' to share with their organisation on their return.

Through attendance at these workshops, organisations and women in the community were then eligible to apply for funding through the Investing in Women Grants Program. WHE will now support 28 social connection initiatives in the EMR. The project team will also be working closely with the Inner East Primary Care Partnership to develop a Social Connection/Inclusion Framework to complement the Social Connection Resource Kit developed in this project.



For more information regarding this program, please contact Women's Health East on (03) 8873 3700.

Manningham/CHFA

Chinese Health Foundation of Australia (CHFA) partnered with Manningham City Council to provide socialising opportunities to Chinese restaurant workers in Manningham. The project arose because CHFA identified that Chinese restaurant workers often visited gambling venues between lunch and dinner shifts, placing themselves at risk of gambling related harm. CHFA proposed to provide alternative recreational activities to the restaurant workers to reduce the number who engaged in gambling.

To market the project, CHFA developed posters and sent out letters to Chinese restaurants around Manningham inviting expression of interest from restaurant workers. The project aimed to:

- Introduce a new approach to break through the cultural factors, values and beliefs, such as the perception of luck which have been found to influence problem gamblers, and
- Link participants to alternative entertainment options in their local area amongst other things.

CHFA had proposed to provide computer classes, English classes, focus groups as well as seminars, however, after consultation with the participants, CHFA identified that restaurant workers were more interested in recreational activities such as, table tennis, basketball and badminton.

To meet the participants' expectations, CHFA organised indoor sports activities at Donvale Indoor Sports Centre. The sports activities took place every Thursday between 3 and 5 pm for 12 weeks. Initially the program was targeted to attract 8-10 restaurant workers; however, the program received positive exposure resulting in an increase with an average of up to 14 participants coming to the weekly sports activities.

The participants showed great commitment and enthusiasm to the program and provided great feedback to CHFA throughout. CHFA implemented the program in partnership with Manningham Council and Gamblers Help Eastern. The program received extensive positive feedback and one of the participants said "We are glad to have such a great opportunity to play these sport activities because we could not find partners to play along."

Following the positive results of this program, CHFA hope to continue the program on a long-term basis, however, their ability to do this is dependent upon them receiving further financial support. CHFA is aware that it is important to provide continuing support for the Chinese restaurant workers' overall wellbeing. If you would like to assist Manningham City Council/CHFA in future project funding/sponsorship, please refer to the contact details to the left of this case study.

Coonara Community House

Coonara Community House is holding regular Friday Evening social events at the five neighbourhood houses in the Knox network (Upper Ferntree Gully, Ferntree Gully, The Basin, Rowville and Wantirna South).

The program will address socially isolated adults from diverse age ranges and cultures who live in the neighbourhood houses catchment area and aims to provide social events for people at a time not usually catered for by neighbourhood houses. The social events which include dancing, aim to reduce incidences of people who have experienced addictive behaviours relapsing due to seeking social contact in inappropriate venues.

Case study continued on the following page



Chinese Health Foundation of Australia

For more information regarding this project in relation to referrals or sponsorship, please contact; Tilak Abeyrama, Social Planning & Research Officer, Manningham City Council, phone (03) 9840 9426 or email:

Tilak.abeyrama@manningham.vic.gov.au

Or Mei Tim Yu, CHFA via email: meiyu.chfa@gmail.com



Coonara Community House cont.

The program provides opportunities to socialise in a safe and friendly (affordable) environment on an evening of the week when commercial, more expensive entertainment is usually the only choice available.

These activities will address the prevention of gambling related harm by:

- Providing an alternative venue for socialising on an evening of the week when being socially isolated has more impact
- By introducing participants to the opportunities for adult learning, career development, and community networking that exist in neighbourhood houses.

The program is expected to continue during the festive season as the neighbourhood houses network identified that residents are more socially isolated during this period.

Chinese Gambling Concern Inc.

To effectively address the issue of problem gambling in the inner east, the Chinese Gambling Concern Inc.(CGCI) is implementing several activities within this community. CGCI is a service which provides education and early intervention around problem gambling, assistance and counselling service to problem gamblers and their extended networks, i.e. family members and friends.

Gambling is widely accepted in Chinese culture as a harmless recreational activity, with Mah Jong being a popular traditional pastime. As gambling is officially prohibited in mainland China, many Chinese people have not been educated on the risk of gambling. These two factors put Chinese people living in the inner east suburbs at an elevated risk of problem gambling. Due to cultural reasons, health seeking behaviours particularly around issues which society stigmatize differs with culture. Therefore services which account for these differences are necessary to effectively engage with Chinese people seeking assistance with harmful gambling.

Gambling has been portrayed by interested stakeholders as an alternative choice for recreation, fun and harmless as long as those who take part in gambling remain in control. The issue of control is overly simplified. Further, the human nature of greed and the natural psychological response of chasing the loss have been completely ignored. CGCI is raising these issues as well as providing alternative recreational activities to the gamblers shifting gambling in an attempt to divert community members away from gambling.

To effectively address the issue of problem gambling in the inner east suburbs, CGCI has been implementing several activities within this community. The activities which have been implemented, or scheduled to be implemented include,

- Chinese Essay Writing competition to be held in March 2012
- Fitness club (badminton and basketball were held in September 2011, badminton is being held fortnightly throughout the remainder of the program)
- CGCI hotline is currently operating.
- CGCI multimedia, currently undergoing script and project planning, expected to be complete by late March 2012
- Chinese chess and book club commenced November 2011
- Promotion of CGCI and raising public awareness of the risks of gambling at traditional Chinese festivals, including the Mid-Autumn festival in October 2011 and the forthcoming Chinese New Year festival in January 2012

This 12 month project is due to end in April 2012

For more information regarding this project, please contact:
Leanne Fitzgerald
leanne@coonarahouse.org.au
or phone (03) 9758 7081

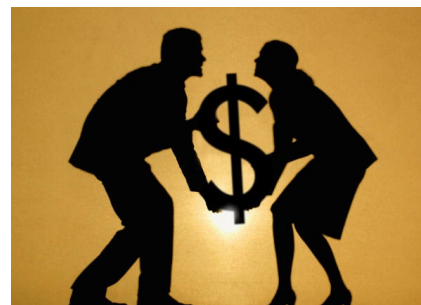


For more information regarding the Chinese Gambling Concern Inc. project please contact, Paul Tang via email on,
paultang@psmfplayers.com

Gamblers Help Eastern 1300 131 973

Is gambling leading you into debt?

EACH Social and Community Health provides a free and confidential financial counselling service for people in Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges. For people with gambling related financial problems the service extends to Boroondara, Whitehorse, Monash and Manningham. Financial counsellors fully assess people's financial position, offer information, look at debt-management options, assist in negotiations with creditors, and give information about bankruptcy, budgeting, fines, and government payments. Financial counsellors do not judge people on how they manage their money, take over their finances, offer investment advice, or do tax returns. They are not lawyers but have a good understanding of consumer law. Hours are from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday.



Phone (03) 9871 1800 and ask to speak to a financial counsellor for advice or an appointment.

A financial counsellor can help you get your life back on track but don't wait until it's too late. This service has a waiting period of up to 12 weeks so please seek help early.

We would like to extend a special thanks to all involved



Outer East Health
& Community Support Alliance



Chinese Health Foundation of Australia
Chinese Gambling Concern

