



HELP SHEET

UNDERSTANDING PROBLEM GAMBLING

Problem gambling is a term which has become commonly used to describe the gambling behaviour of people for whom gambling has become problematic in some or many areas of their lives. A common feature of a gambling problem is the desire to spend more time and money than was initially planned and for many the development of a cyclical form of behaviour involving gambling, losing, chasing losses and losing again (refer Cycle of Problem Gambling article this manual). The resultant damage in financial, personal and relationship areas of one's life can become a progressive decline into lack of control and potential health and life threatening activities.

Drug and alcohol problems in the community have been well documented and public health campaigns have focussed upon minimising risks and creating awareness of these and where to gain support. However there has been little available in the general community about problem gambling. Consequently people often suffer in silence and find the shame of acknowledging their problem a major barrier to getting help.

The 1999 Productivity Commission Inquiry into gambling in Australia found that over 300,000 people have moderate to severe gambling problems and for every one of them there are 5-10 other people negatively impacted. This includes family members, friends and employers.

Problem gambling is a health issue of our times. The increased availability of gambling through the expansion of poker machines into the community has seen a significant increase in those experiencing gambling problems. Of those people seeking help through

counselling for problem gambling 85% of them have difficulties with poker machines.

The average person who gambles in Australia loses \$625 per year where for someone affected by problem gambling this is \$12,000 per year and for many it is much more.

People experiencing difficulties with gambling often describe feelings of loss of control. They may be responsible members of their community, workplace or family, but find themselves suddenly



covering up, lying and possibly "borrowing" money, which rarely gets returned. For many,

problem gambling has all the symptoms of an addiction and that is why some of the older terms have referred to it as a "compulsive" behaviour with features like an addiction. You may have also heard the term "pathological gambling" which also means someone who has features similar to an addiction.

However, not everyone who has a problem with gambling has a full-blown addiction. So problem gambling is progressive but at anytime with treatment and support a person can reverse the cycle and learn new ways of dealing with this health problem in their lives.