

### Introduction

Venue Operators can potentially assist with the identification of problem gambling and the referral of possible problem gamblers to appropriate sources of help and support. Thereafter, counselling assistance to treat problem gambling is the domain of suitably qualified and experienced health practitioners.

Information about the risks of problem gambling is displayed prominently in venues operating gaming machines owned by Youhtown Incorporated. We also display information on how to recognise signs of such a problem arising and where to get help. Brochures listing treatment providers and how they can be contacted are readily available in every venue.

Those who work in the hospitality environment are familiar with the rules and regulations pertaining to The Sale of Liquor Act (1989). Social drinking is a valued part of life in New Zealand and in many countries in the world. Most New Zealanders drink alcohol in moderation, but some people can have too much of a good thing, resulting in problems for themselves and others.

Gambling should be viewed in a similar way. Gaming machines are supposed to be fun – and there's nothing wrong with playing for a little enjoyment. As with so many things in life, it's overdoing it that can cause harm. You already have the skills and experience to create and manage a responsible drinking environment and gambling is no different.

New legislation in the Gambling Act 2003 requires that the operators of gaming machines establish environments that minimise the harm caused by gambling and facilitate responsible gambling.

### What is Problem Gambling?

Problem gambling can manifest in various ways – from a short-term desire to beat the odds, which is common of most gamblers and usually not problematic, through to the compulsive or pathological gambler who simply cannot control their gambling and can no longer make sensible gambling decisions.

Problem gambling can be described as occasional or regular gambling to excess to the extent that it leads to problems in other areas of life, particularly with finances and inter-personal relationships. These problems can range from minor ones involving, for example, arguments with the family over gambling expenditure, to serious issues involving a compulsive addiction to gambling. The result may be major financial and inter-personal difficulties. (extract from DIA's Report on the Social Impact of Gambling 1995).

It is common for problem gamblers to want to keep on betting until they win back what they have lost. If they keep losing, the distress and guilt that they often feel can affect many areas of their lives, including work performance and relationships with family and friends.

### What are the signs?

It can be very difficult to tell whether someone is experiencing problems with their gambling. With alcohol there are a number of overt signs that indicate a person is intoxicated. Signs that indicate a person may be having a problem with gambling are less clear.

We do not expect venue staff to become mind-readers, nor should we encroach on the rights of individuals to spend their discretionary income as they see fit. It's when a person is spending non-discretionary funds, making poor gambling decisions, and adversely affecting their family or friends that gambling has become a real problem for that person.

The essential characteristics of problem (pathological) gambling include:

- A continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling
- A progression in gambling frequency and amounts wagered
- A pre-occupation with gambling and obtaining monies with which to gamble
- Continuation of gambling despite adverse consequences

International research has identified a number of tell-tale signs that a person may have a gambling problem. They are listed below in more practical terms than the four main diagnostic criteria for the professionals provided above. In general, when you run through the potential signs in relation to gaming machine players, consider each person in terms of their overall behaviour rather than being too strongly influenced by one or two criteria alone (unless their behaviour in those areas is so strong, clear and possibly strange that you are left with little doubt that they must have a gambling problem).

Typically, a person is deemed to have a gambling problem if they display five or more of the following signs:

- Is pre-occupied with gambling (e.g. reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next venture or thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble)
- Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement;
- Has repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut down or stop gambling
- Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling
- Gambles as a way of escaping from problems or relieving feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety or depression
- After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (chasing losses)
- Lies to family members, therapists or others to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling
- Has committed illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft or embezzlement in order to fund gambling
- Has jeopardised or lost a significant relationship, job or educational or career opportunity because of gambling
- Relies on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling

*Source: "What do we know about problem gambling in New Zealand?" Report number 7 of the New Zealand Gaming Survey, Max Abbott, June 2001.*

Your guests with a possible gambling problem may give you further indications when they interact with you. This could be when giving them change, paying a jackpot or cancel credit, filling a hopper or otherwise when generally interacting with them.