

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE FOR EFFECTIVE HARM REDUCTION: WHERE IS GAMBLING?

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Issue: Alcohol, smoking and gambling are all legally available in Australia but can result in considerable harm to individuals and those around them. Policy development in these sectors requires governments to balance their duty of care with preservation of individual freedom of choice.

The introduction of effective gambling harm reduction measures can enhance self-responsibility through strengthening capacity for informed choice and reduce risk by moderating hazardous features of the gambling environment. Building evidence of effective harm reduction measures is an important building block to policy development. The absence of evidence risks the introduction of measures with limited effectiveness.

Approach: This paper will consider harm reduction in the gambling sector, using exemplars including the removal of ATMs from gambling venues to understand how research can inform the usefulness of wider implementation.

Key Findings: A lack of evaluation in the gambling sector has resulted in harm reduction measures being introduced that have subsequently been found to have limited effectiveness. A mixed-method evaluation of the removal of ATMs from Victorian gambling venues involving pre-post surveys and post-implementation interviews demonstrated this measure was effective. It resulted in reduced spending and increased control for gamblers with limited impact on other venue services.

Conclusions and policy implications: There is an urgent need for governments to fund rigorous evaluations of gambling harm reduction measures to better inform policy and regulation. Evidence from allied areas (e.g. alcohol, smoking) should also be examined to identify effective harm reduction measures and drivers that translate into the gambling sector.

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