

June 4, 2011

Ms. Lyn Beverley
Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform
S1.107 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms. Beverley,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the committee with information that may be pertinent to their deliberations concerning potential gambling reforms.

During the past two decades my research, prevention and clinical work has focused on youth gambling and problem gambling issues. I have attached a brief resume and an abbreviated list of publications is included below to illustrate the scope and breadth of my work.

My research primarily has focused upon exploring the risk and protective factors associated with youth gambling and problem gambling. This research, both basic and applied, has been translated into a number of award-winning prevention initiatives currently being used in multiple jurisdictions around the world. I have testified before numerous commissions and legislative hearings in the U.S, Canada, Europe, South Africa and New Zealand. My consulting work has been used as a foundation for the development of programmatic research agendas, educational frameworks, and has been used to help develop responsible gambling social policies.

With respect to the specific questions the committee is addressing we have conducted research examining the impact of advertising on youth gambling in Canada, have worked on the area of Internet gaming, and I have headed the most recent National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) study in the US where we looked at college athlete's (approximately 20,000) gambling behaviours. Many relevant references are available on our website at www.youthgambling.com. I have also worked with a number of Australian researchers studying gambling, in particular those that have worked in the field of youth gambling.

Having recently been in Victoria I remain deeply concerned about the blurring of advertising and sports wagering, especially on football, and its potential impact upon youth. Wagering among bookmakers or via international Internet providers (there are currently between 2,500-3,000 sites) is particularly problematic for youth as these sites are easily accessible, highly attractive and one can wager on traditional gambling activities, place propositional bets, and gamble on alternative activities (e.g., spelling contests, political races, celebrity adoptions, etc.). In addition, there is a growing body of research revealing that many youth are playing gambling games on the .net sites which may lead them to the actual money sites. A number of Internet gambling providers are using social media as a way of attracting young people without strict adherence to age restrictions. Sports teams in Australia carry logos of gaming corporations and benefit directly from pokie revenues of clubs. While the teams appear to be concerned about the integrity of the game, with multiple scandals having received media attention, I remain deeply concerned about the impact of gambling upon adolescents and young adults.

I was an international advisor to the recent ACER national study in Australia which has data on the national prevalence rates of youth problem gambling. I am more than happy to supply copies of the presentations I recently made at the Responsible Gambling Awareness week in

Victoria and at the Ministry of Justice in Victoria. The Ministry of Justice in Victoria also has a video of my presentation at the symposium and at a meeting at the Ministry offices that might provide pertinent information for the committee.

The Australian Productivity Commission reports have done much to articulate some of the problems and the ACER report attests to the vulnerabilities of youth with respect to problem gambling. While some research has been ongoing examining youth vulnerabilities in Australia (Drs. Delfabbro and King in Adelaide, Dr. Gainsbury in Sydney, and Dr. Jackson in Melbourne), more empirical work is needed in this area. Nevertheless, there is an international body of literature suggesting that underage youth and those amongst the youngest of adults are indeed vulnerable to excessive gambling. Our research suggests that gambling advertisements are indeed stimulating youth to gamble and that a growing number of youth are engaged in both Internet gambling for fun and those sites accepting money. It is particularly important for the committee to understand that the reasons engaged in gambling focus on the excitement, entertainment value and the ability to make money. Young males view themselves as smarter than everyone and while they recognize both the risks and benefits of gambling they minimize the risks. They perceive themselves to be invulnerable to the effects of excessive gambling. What initially begins as a fun activity can escalate rather quickly. The high rates of youth gambling on both regulated and unregulated activities, coupled with our research that shows parents of youth typically do not view gambling as an issue for their adolescents, represents a serious concern. In a national Canadian study we found that among 13 potentially risky adolescent behaviours gambling was viewed as the least problematic behaviour, far behind excessive video game playing. The body of International research suggests that approximately 4% of youth experience gambling problems and another 8-10% remain at risk for developing a problem as they exhibit a number of problems but do not reach the clinical criterion level for pathological gambling.

I would support tighter regulatory procedures concerning advertising. As well, the development of appropriate social policies needs to be established.

The parliamentary committee can do much to help ensure strict advertising standards are established, prevention initiatives need to be developed, and greater public awareness about the problems associated with teen gambling need to be established.

Sincerely,

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