



The Royal  
Australian &  
New Zealand  
College of  
Psychiatrists

21 July 2017

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

By email to: [ec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Committee Secretary

**Re: Inquiry into the participation of Australians in online poker**

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications Inquiry into the participation of Australians in online poker.

The RANZCP is a membership organisation that prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises government on mental healthcare. The RANZCP has more than 6000 members including over 4000 qualified psychiatrists and over 1500 trainees.

As one of the peak bodies representing mental health expertise in Australia, the RANZCP has particular insight into the harms associated with problem gambling and its detrimental impacts on the mental health and well-being of vulnerable individuals, their families and the broader community.

We commend the Commonwealth Government for its work in ensuring gambling legislation keeps pace with the rapidly changing gambling industry. Overall, the RANZCP supported the proposals to amend the *Interactive Gambling Act 2001* to strengthen enforcement mechanisms related to offshore gambling.

Problem gambling is recognised in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th edition) as a mental disorder similar in brain origin, comorbidity and treatment to substance use disorders. A related condition of internet gaming disorder has also been considered for inclusion. Online gambling and poker could be considered as a manifestation of one or both conditions.

The rise of interactive and online gambling is having devastating consequences. New gamblers are more easily recruited online, especially young people who are highly involved in web-based activities, while the difficulties experienced by existing problem gamblers are exacerbated by engagement with online gambling. In addition, online gambling sites are accessible 24 hours per day and do not require the person to leave their home.

Despite promising research, there is a dearth of evidence-based treatments for problem gambling, which makes other harm minimisation measures, such as legislation, all the more important. Increased research into evidence-based screening, assessment, treatment, prevention and early



The Royal  
Australian &  
New Zealand  
College of  
Psychiatrists

intervention is required, particularly evidence-based models for the regulation of interactive and online gambling incorporating consumer-protection and harm-minimisation features. The RANZCP also recommends banning and/or limitations on advertisements for online betting and gambling, and encourages all jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand to work together collaboratively to develop comprehensive guidelines and legislation that respond to the growing online market.

For more information on our recommendations for minimising the harmful effects of gambling, we invite you to refer to RANZCP Position Statement 45: ['Pathological/problem gambling'](#) (which of note, is currently being reviewed and updated).

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this letter, please contact Rosie Forster, Executive Manager, Practice, Policy and Partnerships via \_\_\_\_\_ or by phone on \_\_\_\_\_

Yours sincerely

Dr Kym Jenkins  
**President**

Ref: 0797o