



**Australian Government**

## **Media Releases**

### **Ministerial Council on Gambling Melbourne 25 July 2008**

**28/07/2008**

The Ministerial Council on Gambling (MCG) met in Melbourne today forging a new national commitment to tackle problem gambling.

Today's meeting was the first meeting of the MCG in nearly two years and was an important first step in developing a national approach to tackling problem gambling in Australia.

Ministers highlighted the successful work underway in States and Territories to address problem gambling in recent years, and how other jurisdictions can benefit from shared experiences. Ministers discussed the benefits of a national approach, and the Commonwealth agreed to take an active role in supporting States and Territories in their efforts.

Over the past five years, States and Territories have spent more than \$200 million on responsible gambling and harm minimisation. This includes telephone and face-to-face counselling services, public awareness and education, campaigning, research, intervention strategies, partnerships with community groups and support for individuals and families.

#### **Online assistance**

Ministers agreed to create a single national website for the online treatment of problem gamblers.

The service will provide online 24-hour, seven day a week counselling for problem gamblers.

This service will reach a wide range of individuals, particularly the increasing number of people who gamble online, and ensure people in remote areas have access to quality support services.

This online service will appeal to those people who would not otherwise be reached through traditional face-to-face counselling. This may include younger people, or those who are isolated or reluctant to seek help for their addiction.

All governments have committed funding for three years, totalling \$1.5 million.

#### **1800 Helpline**

Ministers have agreed to a single national 1800 gambling helpline which will allow people to seek immediate help through a counsellor in their State or Territory by ringing one number wherever they

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are in Australia.

The new national number is **1800 858 858**.

### **National work program to tackle problem gambling**

Ministers agreed on priority areas for new work to reduce harm from gambling:

- Helping individuals set their limits, including access to cash and pre-commitment technologies.
- Responsible gambling environments, through staff training and problem gambler identification.
- Gaming machine standards, developing mechanisms for better consumer protection.

This work will happen alongside the new Productivity Commission inquiry into gambling announced by the Council of Australian Governments earlier this month. Ministers discussed proposed terms of reference for the inquiry and agreed to co-operate with the Productivity Commission's important work.

The Productivity Commission will update the 1999 study and together with the MCG work program, provide a solid evidence base for future national action on responsible gambling.

Ministers agreed to the continuation of a national gambling research program for a further five years.

Ministers also agreed to discuss the development of a national framework for educational resources with their Education counterparts.