

% Our Community House
Wurundjeri Country
552 Victoria St,
North Melbourne, VIC 3051
(03) 9999 7372
info@agr.org.au
www.pokiesplayyou.org.au



Dear Premier Andrews, Minister Horne and Minister Foley,

While our beautiful state continues to face the challenges presented by the coronavirus, I wish to congratulate you all on keeping so many of us safe and healthy under incredibly trying circumstances.

I write this open letter to you because much as occurred last year, having poker machines off in recent months has been one of the few silver linings through this continuing crisis. We know people have managed to get control of their poker machine addictions while machines have been unavailable; we know that people are spending the money they have saved in much more productive ways in our communities; we know this because that is what people have told us.

We also know that the measures and restrictions that you put in place in November last year as we eased out of lockdown helped reduce gambling harm in Victoria. The data shows that poker machine losses reduced on a daily average in November 2020 when compared to the same period in 2019. Behind that data are human stories: a mother who was no longer worrying about her son dying by suicide due to his pokies addiction; a grandmother able to afford Christmas presents for her grandchildren for the first time in years.

Sadly, when these excellent measures eased in Victoria, gambling losses spiked. Brimbank recorded a 23 per cent increase in losses in December 2020 compared to the same month in 2019. Communities like Brimbank cannot tolerate these kinds of losses. These are stressed communities being exploited by the gambling industry, at a time when local families and businesses are trying to recover from yet more months of lockdown. They are also Labor heartland communities.

The Victorian Government has so closely listened to the best public health advice around the pandemic, it only makes sense to now consider informed advice on reducing gambling harm, which is another significant public health issue that Victorians grapple with.

The evidence on decreasing gambling harm is there from November 2020. Reducing opening hours for poker machine venues works. It is imperative that the Victorian Government bring in the same scaled measures it did last year when things return to "normal".

Victoria currently has the longest opening hours for poker machine rooms of anywhere in Australia at 20 hours per day permitted. Coupled with this, is the complication that there is a loophole regarding opening hours in Victoria that means many areas effectively have poker machines on 24/7. We will be pursuing the closing of this loophole as a matter of urgency.

% Our Community House
Wurundjeri Country
552 Victoria St,
North Melbourne, VIC 3051
(03) 9999 7372
info@agr.org.au
www.pokiesplayyou.org.au



Let's take this extraordinary opportunity to rebuild Victoria with a stronger and healthier pubs and clubs sector, free from harm and machines of addiction. The coming generations will have to bear the burden of the debt we have necessarily taken on to get through this crisis. Let's at least give them the opportunity to use their local pubs and clubs without exposure to gambling, just as they no longer have to be exposed to smoking. The community needs a positive coming out of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Costello". The signature is written in a cursive style with some overlapping strokes.

Rev Tim Costello, Chief Advocate, Alliance for Gambling Reform