Rural City of Wangaratta

Gambling Policy

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Department	Council-wide
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Responsible Officer	Manager Community Services
Authorising Officer	Director Community and Infrastructure
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1. Statement and Purpose

The purpose of the Rural City of Wangaratta Gambling Policy (the Policy) is to outline Council's future approach to protecting the Wangaratta community from gambling harm.

The Policy will guide Council in fulfilling its statutory obligations under the following legislation:

- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Gambling Regulation Act 2003*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Local Government Act 1998 (amended 2021)*

The Policy seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Protect those most vulnerable to the social and economic harms caused by gambling.
- Maximise opportunities for gambling activities to deliver social and economic benefits.
- Strengthen our partnerships with organisations that provide services to people directly and indirectly affected by gambling-related harm.

- Strengthen the community's capacity to understand the risks and impacts of gambling-related harm.

2. Scope

The Policy outlines Council's position on gambling and will guide Council's roles and responsibilities in relation to all forms of gambling within the Rural City of Wangaratta. The Policy will also guide Council in making decisions on planning permit applications for Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) and representing the community's views on applications for gaming licences.

Whilst there are many different forms of gambling, the most predominant source of financial loss and harm in Australia comes from EGMs.

The Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission is responsible for the regulation of all forms of gambling, including EGMs. Under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the Rural City of Wangaratta Planning Scheme, Council has the capacity to regulate the location and operation of EGMs and consider the social and economic impacts of EGMs. Council can also ensure active participation by the community in planning permit decisions and has the opportunity to represent the community's views on applications for gaming licences under the Gambling Regulation Act 2003.

The scope of this Policy and Action Plan covers four pillars.

PILLAR	COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT
1. Manage and support	• Council will manage gambling activities on Council owned land, build the community's capacity to engage in healthy lifestyles and support the gambling industry to reduce its reliance on revenue derived from gambling.
2. Partner and advocate	• Council will advocate on behalf of the Wangaratta community to protect it from gambling-related harm and partner with service providers and agencies to increase access to support for people affected by gambling-related harm.
3. Plan and regulate	• Council will fulfill its statutory and land-use planning obligations to regulate gambling activities in the municipality and reduce the incidence of gambling-related harm.
4. Inform and engage	• Council will support initiatives that increase the community's awareness of the risks and impacts of gambling-related harm.

3. Policy

Council acknowledges that while gambling is a legal form of entertainment that is associated with some benefits, it also causes significant harm to vulnerable members of our community.

Council is committed to protecting the Wangaratta community from gambling-related harm by actively seeking to reduce losses from gambling by meeting its requirements as a responsible authority in accordance with the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003.

In fulfilling this obligation, Council will adopt a public health approach, recognising that the level of harm created by gambling ranges from no harm through to very severe levels of harm, and that the harm may be experienced not just by the person who gambles but also by their family, friends and the wider community. It is now well established that such harm is experienced by people considered at low and moderate risk of harm, in addition to people at the greatest risk of harm. The public health approach also recognises that there are multiple social, economic and environmental determinants of harm, and that a collaborative and intersectoral approach to protecting the community from harm is required (1).

Council is also committed to reframing gambling-related harm and will use terms such as ‘gambling’ in place of ‘gaming’, ‘people harmed by gambling’ in place of ‘problem gamblers’, ‘gambling losses’ in place of ‘expenditure’ and ‘EGM operators’ in place of ‘gaming venues’. This is in line with best practise guidance from the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, which identifies that gambling behaviour is influenced by a combination of factors, including characteristics of the individual person, social and cultural norms, aspects of the gambling environment, and broader policy and legislation (1).

Council acknowledges that some forms of gambling that are considered lower risk are utilised by community organisations for the purpose of fundraising, such as raffles, bingo and similar games. Whilst Council does not actively support these activities, it is understood that these are a main source of revenue for clubs and organisations. Council commits to working with clubs to reduce their dependency on gambling revenue but will not penalise clubs for lower risk activities where the main purpose is fundraising.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

1.1 Council

It is the role of Council to adopt the Policy, and to continue to be leaders in the community in support of the improved health and wellbeing for residents and visitors of the Rural City of Wangaratta

1.2 Rural City of Wangaratta employees:

All Council employees have a responsibility to ensure adherence to the policy

The Community and Recreation unit is responsible for:

- Administrative implementation and review of this policy and all associated reporting to Council
- Ensuring all Council staff are aware of the Policy and its application

The Statutory Planning Unit is responsible for:

- Application of policy to inform decisions on planning permit applications for new gaming operators or increases in the number of EGMs in existing venues

5. Breaches

Breaches of this policy will be investigated by the Manager Community Services or other delegate, and disciplinary action in line with the Enterprise Agreement or other statutory acts or requirements may be undertaken.

6. Community Consultation

The development of this Policy began to address actions embedded in the Council Plan (2021-25). The Gambling Policy has been refined at each stage of the development.

Stage 1 – Preparation of evidence base

- Research of Council's legislative roles and responsibilities
- Review of Victorian public health data and priorities
- Review of policies by other councils
- Analysis of the Rural City of Wangaratta gambling context and vulnerability to gambling-related harm
- Review of scientific and academic research on gambling-related harms
- Preparation of Background Report

Stage 2 – Preparation of draft Gambling Policy and Action Plan

- Discussions with relevant council departments
- Facilitated Councillor Briefing Session
- Discussions with relevant health and wellbeing partners and stakeholders in community according to Council Plan commitments, including Gateway Health, Centre Against Violence, Victoria Police, Neighbourhood Houses, Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, The Centre/Sport North East, Northeast Health Wangaratta, Upper Murray Family Care, Anglicare Victoria (Loaves and Fishes), LINE Wangaratta.
- Initial draft developed and presented to Councillors

Stage 3 – Targeted Stakeholder engagement

- Targeted consultation with EGM operators and venues with other forms of gambling
- Targeted consultation with sporting and community groups supported by revenue from gambling

- Review of draft Gambling Policy and Action Plan by health and wellbeing partners and stakeholders
- Draft Policy and Action Plan presented to Council Meeting prior to public exhibition

Stage 4 – Public Exhibition and Final Review

- Public Exhibition Period
- Response to feedback
- Incorporation of feedback
- Preparation of final Gambling Policy and Action Plan
- Adoption of Gambling Policy and Action Plan by Council

7. Human Rights

This policy has considered and complies with the Human Rights and Responsibilities contained in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

8. Gender Impact Assessment

This policy has considered and applied Council's Gender Impact Assessment Template and satisfies the provisions established in the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic).

9. Monitoring and evaluation

The Community and Recreation Team will develop a four year implementation plan for the actions listed in this policy and action plan. This implementation will be presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and will be reported on annually to CMT and Councillors.

The Policy will be reviewed every four years by the Community and Recreation Team.

10. Definitions

Council	Rural City of Wangaratta

Electronic gaming machine (EGM)	An electronic gaming machine is a computerised gambling device that has a video screen displaying symbols on simulated reels. Cash is inserted into the machine and buttons are used to place bets. The machine randomly determines the position of symbols on the screen. Wins are returned as credits back into the machine. They are also referred to as EGMs, pokies and pokie machines.
Gambling	Gambling/betting requires a player to risk losing something of value (usually money) for the chance of winning more. Gambling outcomes may depend on correctly predicting an uncertain outcome (such as a particular horse coming first in a race), or luck (such as a winning combination of symbols on a pokie machine).
Gambling-related harm	Any initial or exacerbated adverse consequence due to an engagement with gambling that leads to a decrement to the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community or population. These harms include relationship breakdown, compromised mental and physical health and wellbeing, financial losses, demand for services, lost work productivity and crime. Gambling related harm can be divided into seven key areas: Financial harm, relationship disruption, emotional or psychological distress, decrements to health, cultural harm, reduced work or study performance and criminal activity. These harms can further be considered as general harms (which occur at any time), crisis harms, which are associated with attempts to seek help, and legacy harms, which occur long after gambling has ceased
Public health approach	A public health approach involves utilising scientific knowledge, evidence-based strategies, and community-based interventions to improve the health and well-being of populations by focusing on prevention, health promotion, and addressing the underlying determinants of health.

11.References and Related Policies

Related Council Documents

- Rural City of Wangaratta Council Plan (2021-25)
- Rural City of Wangaratta Community Vision 2033

Other references

- (1) Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (2015) *Background Paper: Using A Public Health Approach in The Prevention of Gambling-Related Harm.* https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/21/using-a-public-health-approach-in-the-prevention-of-gambling-related-harm.pdf

12.Review

Any change or update which materially impacts and/or alters this policy must be approved by Council. The policy will be reviewed by the Manager Community Services every four years.

Version History		
Version Number	**Date of change**	**Reasons for change**
1.0	6/10/2023	