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Preventing and Minimising Gambling Harm Submissions
Ministry of Health
PO Box 5013
WELLINGTON 6145.

Sent to: gamblingharm@health.govt.nz

To whom it may concern,

Ōpōtiki District Council's Submission on the Draft Strategy to prevent and minimise gambling harm (2022/23 to 2024/25)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Ministry of Health's Draft Strategy to prevent and minimise Gambling Harm consultation document.

We have provided some background information about the Ōpōtiki district before replying to some of the questions set out in the consultation document.

The district of Ōpōtiki is located in the Bay of Plenty region on the north-east of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. The population of the Ōpōtiki district is mostly rural, with just 46% of the population living in urban areas, the lowest of any district in the region and compares against a regional wide average of 84% of the population living in urban areas. The nearest major town to Ōpōtiki is Whakatāne, which is around a forty-minute drive west.

According to the 2018 census approximately 64% of people in Ōpōtiki identify as Māori. The district has among the highest levels of deprivation in New Zealand and features at the wrong end of many statistics: unemployment; median household income; benefit numbers; rate of home ownership and health.

Currently there are 4 venues in the Ōpōtiki District who operate a total of 57 class 4 electronic gambling machines (pokies), all of which are in high deprivation areas. This number has remained static since 2016. The Council has a 'sinking lid' policy in relation to gambling venues. The Council strongly feels the current Class 4 provisions in the Gambling Act 2003 need to be strengthened alongside increased services and support for those who impacted by gambling harm.

Feedback:

Please note if no specific comment is provided, we agree in principle with the question asked.

Does the draft strategic plan adequately reflect changes in the gambling environment?

The cost of Gambling harm far outweighs funding that goes back into a community. For the 2020 year \$2,457,000 was lost on class 4 pokies for Ōpōtiki district across 57 machines (an average of \$43,105 per machine across four sites). The amount of funding returned directly to Ōpōtiki community via community grants in 2020 was approximately \$155,000 (www.pfg.co.nz). It appears currently there is no provision of accessible gambling harm support within the Ōpōtiki District.

A letter written from Ōpōtiki District Council Mayor, John Forbes, in late 2018 to then Minister of Internal Affairs, Tracey Martin, highlighted the challenges local authorities have in addressing gambling issues for the community. Further, the letter requested additional assistance to address gambling harm in the community. The response from Minister Martin noted the 2019-2022 strategy to prevent and minimise gambling harm proposed piloting new types of services for Māori and geographical groups that had little coverage. It is disappointing nearly three years later these pilots are not yet in place. As a community, the services and support available to those who are seeking help from gambling harm are not locally accessible.

The draft strategy does not indicate how public health and clinical interventions will be allocated to areas of need rather than being funded by service providers. This has been highlighted as a need in the last two strategies but to date we have seen no positive change for our community.

Do you have any comments to make on the priority populations, including how we will address inequities?

We support the identification of Māori, and young people as being identified as priority populations as this aligns to our own community's priority groups. How will the Ministry of Health adequately address the inequities these group face in terms of accessing timely and appropriate support to address and minimise gambling harm? This is a challenge for the Ōpōtiki community which has an additional barrier of geography. Individuals are required to travel to Tauranga (approx. 1.5 – 2 hrs away) to access face to face gambling harm support services. The Ōpōtiki Community would welcome the opportunity to participate in pilot/ innovation projects to ensure the delivery of equitable and localised support.

Does the draft service plan adequately cover what it needs to cover, for example, does it include the right types of services and activities?

We support the increase of funding for clinical intervention and support services but again reiterate the need for delivery of such services within communities of need and aligned to support individuals may already be accessing from local providers (such as Iwi hauora providers).

There is also a need to highlight the true cost and return from Class 4 pokies within communities. There appears to be belief communities significantly benefit from having the machines, whereas data shows this not to be the case.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the draft strategy or preventing and minimising gambling harm more generally?

We believe there is a need to consider how there can be better regulatory management of online offshore gambling sites. A recent PFG report notes approx. 8-10% of New Zealanders have reported gambling online and problem gambling rates among those who gamble on the internet are 10 times

higher than that of the public (www.pgf.co.nz). A lack of regulatory oversight means we are not able to adequately identify the level of harm and put in place measures to address and minimise this harm.

Yours faithfully