

Wanna Bet?

The Problem of Online Gambling

Problem gambling ripples like a wave across the Australian community because it impacts not just the individual gambler but also their families and the broader communities and economy. But what about online gambling? As more employees become familiar with this phenomenon, there are several measures organisations can take to mitigate the risk.

When it comes to gambling, Australians are recognised across the world as the biggest losers.

It's recently been reported that we lose around \$25 billion each year from legal gambling, including pokies and sports betting.

Like most big numbers, this is hard to grasp. In more granular terms, this means that each year, each one of us loses around \$1500.

The state that leads the way with the highest losses is NSW with \$1508 spent on gambling per capita each year. It's not just people who have gotten addicted to gambling either. As a result, Australia's state and territory governments have raised around \$7 billion per year from gambling.

As with many industries, the recent pandemic impacted the gambling industry. Wagering softened so that Australians bet around \$175 billion in the financial year 2019–20 — whereas before the pandemic, that figure was well over \$200 billion a year. But again, like many industries, there was a pivot online.

Our love of a bet has been an enduring one. But the more social traditional ways of gambling in person – like having a flutter at the races – have been displaced by online wagering.

Australians are estimated to have punted nearly \$8 billion through internet-based gambling last year. The number of Australians participating in online gambling has increased 20% from 2020 to 2022.

WHY EVEN GET OFF THE SOFA?

A big driver of this growth is the tsunami of gambling advertising we're subjected to. As a consequence of this, we now live in one of the world's most "normalised" gambling environments, with advertisements for gambling in pubs, clubs, homes, cars and sporting venues. Exposure to online gambling is impossible to avoid.

The move towards online gambling has supercharged what was already an established risk for many Australians. There are several reasons for this:

- Online gambling is commonly done alone without any interruption, and access to it is 24/7 in real time.
- New smart phone apps are created with very deep consumer psychology principles in place. They're deliberately designed to influence user behaviour through targeted push notifications with limited-time promotional offers. These utilise powerful nudge messages (eg, "Bet with mates").
- There are addictive features that encourage people to gamble more and more online, such as offers to level-up, or unlock achievements with bigger offers and prizes.



FIND OUT MORE

WHAT'S THE HARM?

There's a growing body of evidence in Australia that gambling is doing real harm. It is important to remember that it impacts not only the individual gambler but also their families, friends, local community and the broader economy.

Aside from the financial costs, problem gambling can:

- Impact our health and wellbeing, and contribute to serious illnesses including sleep disorders, hypertension and cardiovascular disease
- Negatively affect our productivity and career prospects
- Impact our interpersonal relationships, leading to relationship breakdown and conflict at home
- Contribute to poor mental health outcomes, leading to higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicide.

MANAGING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH RISKS OF ONLINE GAMBLING IN THE WORKPLACE

While many of us will have the occasional bet, a recent report from the Productivity Commission suggests that around 170,000 Australians are problem gamblers – and that number is growing. It is estimated that around 7,000,000 Australians gamble regularly. Of those, the AIHW estimates that 7%-8% will gamble this year at levels that are potentially harmful – that's about 500,000 Australian employees.

The emerging threat of online gambling is attracting a whole new generation of younger employees. This increase in availability and accessibility has the potential to lead to gambling in the workplace, during work hours – making both the employee and employer vulnerable to greater financial strain and workplace conflict.

In the context of online gambling, employers can help reduce the impact of gambling at work by:

- Adopting protective policies against online gambling, including what is and isn't considered toxic gambling behaviour in the workplace, Eg: Some workplaces consider team footy tipping acceptable.
- Taking a preventative approach to online gambling with information materials and open communication, such as talks and webinars.
- Providing helpline and support services to employees, including EAP support.

When it comes to population health promotion and harm reduction, employers and workplaces in Australia have played an important role in informing, educating and supporting people to change their attitudes and stay healthy, happy and safe.

Here at Converge we provide free, confidential support for employees experiencing difficulty with specific helplines for those impacted by the financial, legal, psychological and social impacts of online gambling. You can contact your EAP or call **1300 687 327**.

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