

Minimising Harm from Poker Machines: Darebin Electronic Gaming Machines Policy 2023-2027

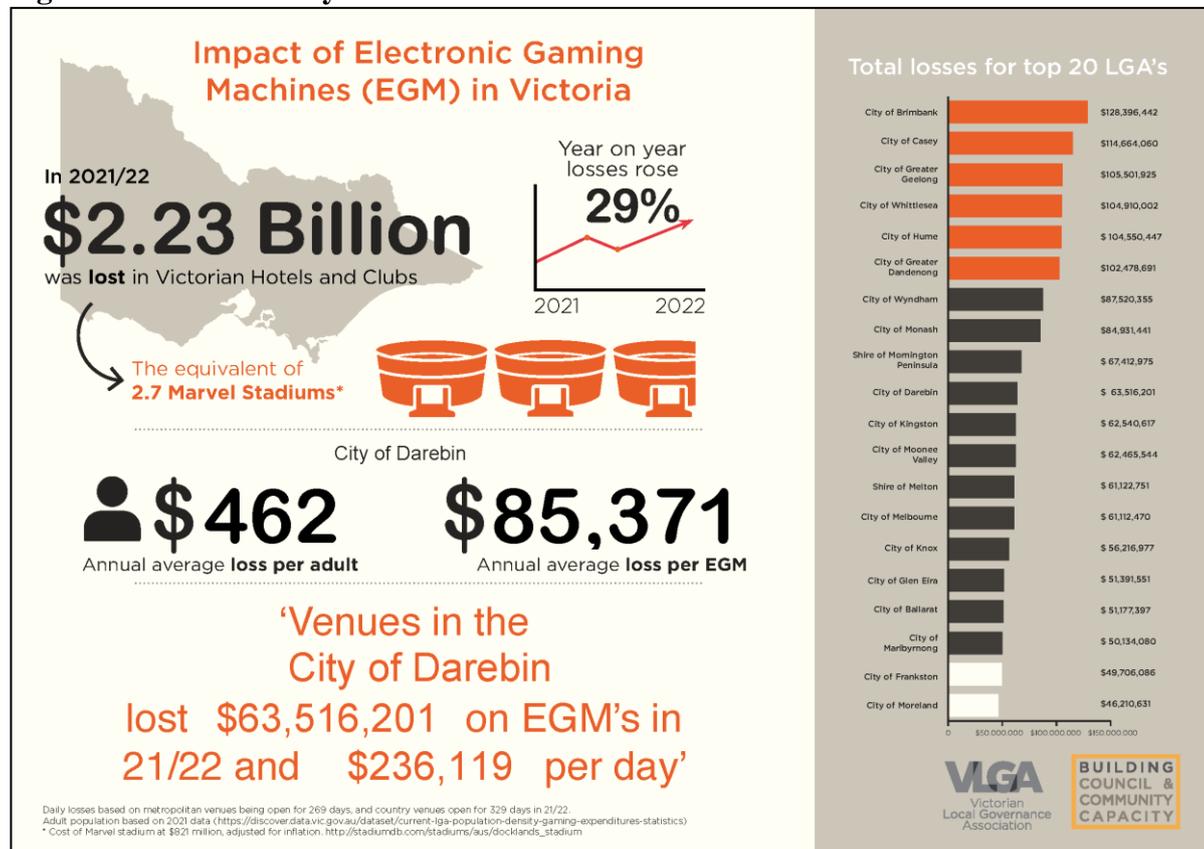
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| <p>Purpose</p> | <p>This Policy aims to make the City of Darebin free of the harm associated with Electronic Gaming Machines (EGM). The Policy outlines Council’s commitment to minimising harm from EGMs in the City of Darebin. The policy guides Council in its actions and decision making on gambling harm prevention.</p> |
| <p>Scope</p> | <p>The Policy has a specific focus on minimising gambling harms as a result of EGMs. Council recognises that there are other legal gambling opportunities available to the community including lotteries, wagering (racing or sports betting) and online gambling. Harm from these gambling activities need attention too. However, the Policy focuses on EGM gambling as current research indicates EGM cause the greatest harm in our community. The Policy also recognises the limited role Council plays in the regulation of EGM and acknowledges the powers of the State and Federal governments to create the most effective policy frameworks to regulate the gambling industry.</p> <p>Council acknowledges that there are some community cohorts or individuals who may be more vulnerable to the harms associated with gambling. Community-based agencies and welfare groups are best placed to provide individual case work and prevention programs that are targeted, relevant and culturally appropriate. Under this Policy, Council will support these agencies and groups to continue their work.</p> |
| <p>Context</p> | <p>BUILDING ON OUR ACHIEVEMENT</p> <p>Over the past four years, Council has worked with a range of stakeholders—local businesses, sporting clubs, seniors’ clubs and local community groups—to implement the 2018-2022 Darebin Electronic Gaming Machine Policy. Together, we have undertaken significant reform in response to the Policy. We are committed to building on this achievement in order to minimise harm from EGM machines in our community.</p> <p>During this period, Council provided support to Council-affiliated clubs to divest themselves of EGM. Council worked with sporting clubs to develop a transition plan in order to continue to access Council facilities and resources and provide a community benefit to their members.</p> <p>All sporting clubs, community groups, organisations and associations had until 30 June 2022 to complete a transition plan to divest themselves of EGM generated cash or in-kind support in order to be eligible for Council’s community grants, financial assistance or in-kind support from Council.</p> <p>Council also updated its internal policies and ensured all new lease agreements, MOUs, partnership agreements and funding agreements aligned with the Policy. These actions have supported Council’s effort in minimising harm from EGM machines in the community.</p> |

WHY A FOCUS ON EGM?

In Darebin, gambling through Electronic Gaming Machines (EGM) continues to be directly associated with the greatest harms to individuals, their families and the general community.

Between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, the Darebin community lost \$85,837,107 to EGMs. This is an increase from previous financial year 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022 which was \$63,516,201.

Figure 1: Loss of money to EGM



Source: Victorian Local Government Association

According to the Australian Gambling Research Centre,¹ EGM are aimed to maximise spending and “time on device” per user; their design employs psychological principles to maximise users’ bet sizes and machine usage. These characteristics increase the addictive potential of EGM.

Poker machine operators in Darebin

In September 2017 the Victorian Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor imposed a regional cap of 769 EGM in the municipality. On 30 June 2023, there were 744 poker machines operators in 12

¹ Australian Gambling Research Centre. 2017. How electronic gambling machines work EGM structural characteristics. Accessed 7 December 2022. Available https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/1706_argc_dp8_how_electronic_gambling_machines_work_0.pdf

venues in the City of Darebin, which is 97% of the legal limit.² Figure 2 shows spatial distribution of EGM venues in Darebin.

Figure 2: Spatial distribution of EGM poker machine operators in Darebin



² The City of Darebin has a regional cap of 769 poker machine entitlements.

Compared with all local government areas in Victoria, Darebin ranked the 10th highest community experiencing loss of money to poker machines.³ Table 1 below shows the loss of money by venue.

Table 1: Loss of money to poker machine operators by venue

| Venue Name | #EGM | Loss of money (\$) | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| | | 2018/2019 | 2019/2020 | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 |
| Albion Charles Hotel | 50 | 5,619,528 | 3,868,270 | 3,478,011 | 4,142,633 | 5,318,588 |
| Cramers Hotel | 79 | 10,009,547 | 7,230,246 | 5,853,625 | 7,734,281 | 11,370,077 |
| Croxton Park Hotel | 54 | 5,173,157 | 3,842,207 | 3,395,922 | 3,919,381 | 5,162,326 |
| Darebin RSL | 65 | 4,705,966 | 3,546,285 | 2,275,731 | 3,207,857 | 4,767,216 |
| Edwardes Lake Hotel | 100 | 13,251,226 | 9,050,771 | 7,135,590 | 11,202,586 | 15,215,438 |
| Furlan Club | 30 | 682,342 | 403,627 | 141,474 | 338,165 | 443,213 |
| Junction Hotel | 46 | 6,158,223 | 4,337,937 | 3,049,884 | 3,510,937 | 4,253,111 |
| Olympic Hotel | 80 | 1,0435,326 | 7,375,183 | 5,040,447 | 7,356,596 | 10,397,992 |
| Preston Hotel | 40 | 4,456,562 | 2,835,839 | 2,584,599 | 3,739,158 | 4,398,668 |
| Reservoir RSL | 68 | 465,582 | 2962675 | 2,260,209 | 2,996,676 | 4,360,788 |
| Rose Shamrock & Thistle Hotel | 44 | 5,192,480 | 3,492,567 | 2,687,538 | 3,311,663 | 4,497,852 |
| Summerhill Hotel | 88 | 11,426,171 | 7,996,689 | 8,897,905 | 12,056,268 | 15,651,839 |

Source: Victoria Gambling and Casino Control Commission.⁴

PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH IN PREVENTION OF GAMBLING HARM

Council regards a public health approach as the most promising means to minimising gambling related harm. This is because of the recognition that many factors contributing to gambling harm exist beyond the individual's control. Levels of influence on gambling behaviour include:

- **Intrapersonal:** Knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, skills and personality traits.
- **Interpersonal:** Social networks and support systems; family and peers that provide social identity, support and role definition.
- **Institutional:** Social institutions with formal/informal rules, regulations, policies that constrain or promote behaviour.
- **Community:** Relationships, standards and networks that exist among individuals, groups and institutions.
- **Public Policy:** Local, state, federal policies and laws that regulate, support or constrain healthy actions and practices.

Therefore, a focus on self-responsibility or changing the behaviours of poker machine users is inadequate in addressing the many factors that

³ Victoria Responsible Gambling Foundation. 2021. Pokies across Victoria. Accessed 6 November 2023. Available <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/gambling-victoria/pokies-across-victoria/darebin/>

⁴ Victoria Gambling and Casino Control Commission. 2022. Gambling expenditure by local area. Accessed 6 November 2023. Available <https://www.vgcc.vic.gov.au/resources/information-and-data/expenditure-data>

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| | <p>contribute to gambling harm. According to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (2015)⁵ a public health approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enables consideration of the broad range of factors that influence individual gambling behaviour, including the social, cultural, political, institutional and environmental factors • considers the possible consequences of gambling harm for the individual, their families and the wider community • has the potential to address prevention of gambling at multiple levels <p>As such, the public health framework allows for a whole-of-Council approach to minimising harm from EGM in the community.</p> |
| <p>Details</p> | <p>PRIORITY AREAS The Policy will be enacted through the following five priority areas:</p> <p>Organisational Leadership Take a whole of organisation approach to minimise harm from EGM. This includes ensuring that Councillors and Council officers lead by example and that any of our actions aim to minimise harm from EGM.</p> <p>Legislation Regulation Exercise the full extent of regulatory and legislative mandate to minimise harm from EGM.</p> <p>Advocacy and Partnership Maintain strategic partnerships and undertake advocacy to minimise gambling harm.</p> <p>Awareness and Education Educate the community about the imbalance between EGM harms and benefits. This is critical to ensure that community members have an informed perception of EGM.</p> <p>Funding and Resourcing Dedicate resources and source funding to minimise harm from EGM in the community.</p> <p>POLICY STATEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council will continue to be a statewide leader and innovator in reducing gambling harm. • Council will maintain independence from the gambling industry. Council will not accept financial contributions from poker machine operators and will not promote community grants or initiatives offered by local poker machine venues. • Council will not provide sporting grounds, Council venues or use of Council property to any sporting clubs, community groups, organisations or associations who directly operate or own EGM in Darebin or elsewhere. |

⁵ Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. 2015. Background Paper: Using a public health approach in the prevention of gambling-related harm. Accessed 6 December 2022. Available <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/documents/21/using-a-public-health-approach-in-the-prevention-of-gambling-related-harm.pdf>

- Council will not support (in-kind or cash) any community groups, clubs, organisations, associations or businesses who hold functions and activities in an EGM venue.
- Council will support any local business or clubs that wishes to divest themselves of EGM through the provision of advice.
- Council will acknowledge and honour any existing arrangements between sporting clubs, community groups, community organisations, associations, business or Council programs and poker machine operators, owners and venues until a mutually suitable and tailored transition plan has been finalised.
- Any sporting club, community group, organisation, association or business that operate or own EGM will be ineligible for community grants, financial assistance or in-kind support from Council.
- Council staff will not run Council and community events, activities, programs and social outings in venues that have EGM.
- Councillors and Council staff will not accept any gifts (in-kind or otherwise) from organisations, associations or businesses that receive funds from EGM gambling.
- Councillors and Council staff will not attend EGM venues when representing Council in an official capacity subject to policy exceptions identified.
- Council will block and filter gambling activities and advertisement across its internet and intranet.
- Council will actively monitor and manage all EGM venue signage to ensure compliance with the Planning and Environment Act and the Gambling Regulations Act.
- Council will ensure all new lease agreements, MOUs, partnership agreements, funding agreements and internal policies align with this Policy.
- Council will support clubs to identify venues with no EGM to hold their outings and activities.
- Council policy, action and advocacy will be informed by evidence-based public health and wellbeing research and policy.
- Council supports measures to prevent and/or respond to gambling harm that are evidence-based and likely to have a positive impact.
- In assessing any future proposals for the operation of EGM in the municipality, Council will treat applications from clubs in the same way as applications from pubs and other poker machine operators.
- Council will oppose any planning and licensing application for additional EGM and the transfer of EGM in the municipality where there is evidence that the application will have negative social and economic impacts and minimal community benefit.
- Council will not allow EGM on Council-owned or managed land. All planning decisions and advice relevant to gambling matters will be made with reference to this Policy and the relevant provisions of the Darebin Planning Scheme.
- Through its Leasing and Licensing Policy, Council will not permit gambling promotion or advertising in Council-owned facilities. This pertains to sports betting, online gambling and EGM.

- Council will not permit gambling activity or the promotion or advertising of any gambling activity or venue on Council-owned or managed land or in Council facilities.
- Council will publicly support and recommend reforms on policies, legislation and structures to minimise harm from EGM.
- Council will lobby the state and federal government for the necessary legislative and regulatory reforms to reduce harm from EGM and provide greater protection for poker machine users.
- Council will oppose any increase to the maximum municipal limit of EGM or the inappropriate relocation of existing machines to areas of high socioeconomic disadvantage as indicated in the Socioeconomic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index of disadvantage.
- Council will provide public notice to the community when there is an application for new EGM licences in Darebin. Council will consult with our stakeholders (where applicable) and publish it on the website.
- Council will raise awareness of the gambling harm occurring in the community by communicating gambling losses and related harm.
- Council will participate in the annual gambling harm awareness week campaign and promote Gambler's Help support service in the community.
- Any sporting club, community group, organisation, association or business that operate or own EGM, or receives sponsorship or grants (in-kind or cash) from poker machine revenue will be ineligible for community grants, financial assistance or in-kind support from Council.
- Council will not support (funding or in-kind) any club, community group, association, organisation or business that meet in venues that have EGM.
- Council will not provide community grants, funding, sponsorship, Council facilities, publicity or promotion for community groups/organisations that promote gambling.
- Council will continue to invest in community infrastructure, community programs and community networks to provide alternatives to gambling.
- Community groups, clubs, organisations, associations and businesses that are in a Council-owned facility or building (in a capacity of a license or lease agreement) or plan to hire a council facility or building are prohibited from receiving sponsorship or grants (in-kind or cash) from poker machine operators.

POLICY EXCEPTIONS

Music groups and musicians who perform in EGM venues

Live music groups and musicians, and associated performers that perform in EGM venues and are not in direct receipt of Council funding but may be contracted by Council to perform at an event or associated Council sponsored program, are considered outside the scope of the Policy and will not be affected.

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| | <p>ANZAC Day and similar military services held at Returned & Services League (RSL) venues</p> <p>The RSLs will be exempt from the EGM Policy <i>only</i> for ANZAC day and similar military service events. For these occasions the Council resources such as access to the community bus will continue for eligible residents wishing to attend these commemorative events.</p> |
| <p>Definitions and Abbreviations</p> | <p>LANGUAGE USE</p> <p>Council rejects the public rhetoric of ‘responsible gambling’ and ‘problem gambler’, which seeks to shift the responsibility to the individual rather than the gambling industry, which takes money from the most vulnerable community members. This language deliberately hides the systemic and structural problems in the gambling environment, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The addictive design of EGM used in Australia • The opportunistic conduct of the gambling industry • A conflicted reliance on the significant taxation revenue generated by the State Government from EGM losses. <p>Therefore, ‘problem gambler’ and ‘gambling addicts’ is to be replaced with ‘people harmed by gambling’ in all Council communications. ‘Pokie players’ is to be replaced with ‘poker machine users.’ ‘Pokie venues’ is to be replaced with ‘poker machine operators/EGM venue/poker venue’ or ‘gambling industry’, and ‘gambling expenditure’ is to be replaced with ‘gambling losses’ or ‘money taken’.</p> |
| <p>Responsibilities</p> | <p>How are individuals responsible for the success of the policy?</p> <p>All employees are expected to be aware of this policy and to work within their teams to support and enable it as directed.</p> <p>How are managers responsible for the success of the policy?</p> <p>All managers, coordinators and team leaders are expected to understand and demonstrate a positive commitment to this policy and, where applicable, align it to the activities of their respective business units.</p> <p>Wellbeing Policy Lead</p> <p>The Wellbeing Policy Lead is responsible for coordinating implementation, monitoring and review of the policy in conjunction with relevant business units across Council.</p> <p>EGM Reference Group</p> <p>The Reference Group made up of council officers across relevant business units will provide oversight of the EGM Action Plan to ensure successful implementation of the Policy.</p> <p>The Group will be chaired by Manager, Equity and Wellbeing (or the proxy). The Wellbeing Policy Lead will provide secretariat support to the Group.</p> |
| <p>Implementation</p> | <p>Implementation of the Policy will be overseen by the Wellbeing Policy Lead.</p> |

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| <p>Organisational Values</p> | <p>Council’s organisational values enable and support the effective design and application of this policy by guiding staff in the course of their work.</p> <p>We Make a Difference: We are driven by our desire to make a difference for the people we serve. Our work is purposeful and creates a positive impact for the community. We are proud to work here. Our work matters.</p> <p>We are Accountable: We are empowered to own and take responsibility for our actions. We follow through on our commitments and deliver on our promises. We make it happen.</p> <p>We are Collaborative: We are united by a common purpose to serve the community. We work together, connecting within our teams and across the organisation. We are inclusive and collaborative. We are one.</p> <p>We have Integrity: We act with integrity and transparency in conversations and decision-making. Through open and clear communication, we build trust. We’re honest. We walk the talk.</p> <p>We show Respect: We are diverse, inclusive, respectful and caring. We encourage everyone to have a voice and we listen to each other. We recognise one another’s contributions and treat people fairly. We look after each other.</p> <p>We are Creative: We are bold, courageous and innovative. We try new things, experiment and continuously improve. We are open-minded, creative and forward-thinking. We are leaders.</p> |
| <p>Breach of Policy</p> | <p>The previous EGM policy 2018-2022 outlined a four-year developmental approach to supporting groups to become compliant with the Policy. With the review, the Policy proposes a move from a graduated policy to one that seeks compliance.</p> <p>If there has been a breach, the Policy proposes that officers will consider the reason behind the breach and implement with the club or group a diversion plan to support and encourage compliance in a capacity building way.</p> <p>Where a club or group continues to intentionally breach the Policy, despite the best efforts of officers to support and encourage compliance in a capacity building way through a diversion plan, this may ultimately result in Council resolving to withdraw funds or hiring of venues, however this will ultimately be a decision for Council.</p> |

GOVERNANCE

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| <p>Parent Strategy/ Plan</p> | <p>Minimising Harm from Poker Machines: Darebin Electronic Gaming Machine Policy 2023-2027</p> |
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| Related Documents | <p>This Policy should be read in conjunction with Council's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature Review: Electronic Gaming Machine Policy 2023-2027 • Community Engagement Findings: Electronic Gaming Machine Policy 2023-2027 |
| Supporting Procedures and Guidelines | <p>Minimising Harm from Poker Machines: Darebin Electronic Gaming Machines (EGM) Policy and Action Plan 2023-2027</p> |
| Legislation/Regulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Government Act 2020 • The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 • The Planning and Environment Act 1987 • Gambling Regulation Act 2003 • The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 |

! All Darebin policies and procedures must be developed through the lens of key Darebin strategies, plans and related considerations. See the **Darebin Policy Review Lens** to inform and guide policy development and review.