

Executive Summary

The impact of problem gambling on the financial, psychological, familial, recreational, legal and employment domains of problem gamblers' lives, is under increasing scrutiny from both the social health research and public policy points of view.

Critical attention needs to be given to determining effective treatments and interventions for problem gamblers, as well as determining if earlier interventions can prevent an 'ordinary' or 'recreational' gambler becoming a problem gambler.

While a number of research projects have already been undertaken that provide demographic information on gambling activity and service use, no research appears to have been conducted that incorporates systematic, *qualitative* research into the study design and uses the same cohort over time to understand clients' views of the effectiveness of problem gambling and related services.

This initial report is the first in a series to be provided as part of the GRP-commissioned Study of Clients of Problem Gambling Services. The report, which draws on qualitative research data gathered from late April to mid-June 2002, provides a preliminary snapshot of gambling and service activity as seen through the eyes of problem gamblers, their families, and problem gambling and related crisis intervention service providers.

A total of 50 people were involved in this initial round of research. They included:

- 18 service providers (from both regional and metropolitan areas);
- 24 problem gamblers;
- eight family members.

Empirical data was gathered from non-structured interviews in focus/discussion groups, and semi-structured telephone interviews conducted across Victoria.

This preliminary research informs the larger, longitudinal client tracking study that will follow a sample of self-identified gamblers, their families and service providers over a 12 month period. In particular, the longitudinal study will:

- monitor successes in terms of 'what works' for problem gamblers;
- pinpoint triggers for problem gambling;
- evaluate the effectiveness of a range of interventions reported by service users, non-users and service providers;
- compare differences over time as they relate to regional, gender, cultural and other factors;
- give people affected by problem gambling an opportunity to relate their stories and experiences.

In concentrating on issues from the perspective of problem gamblers, this research is a useful resource for policy makers, the gambling industry, problem gambler service providers, and the community.