



# MHACA

23/08/2022

## Director of Gaming Machines

Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, Northern Territory Government GPO Box 1154  
Darwin, Northern Territory, 0801

By email: [DITT.LRASComplianceDWN@nt.gov.au](mailto:DITT.LRASComplianceDWN@nt.gov.au)

To the Director of Gaming Machines,

The Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) is writing to express our **objection to the applications made by the Iris Group to increase the number of electronic gaming machines in Alice Springs.**

MHACA is a leading Northern Territory community managed organisation offering psychosocial support services, NDIS services, suicide prevention and health promotion initiatives to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of people living in Central Australia.

The proposal for 60 extra poker machines across 4 different venues (Todd Tavern, Gap View Hotel, Uncles Tavern, Mercure Resort) will bring no benefit to our community, only additional harm.

There is increasing evidence providing a strong link between gambling and poor mental health. Gambling problems and mental illness frequently occur together. Approximately three-quarters of people seeking treatment for a gambling problem also have a mental illness, most commonly a mood disorder such as depression<sup>1</sup>.

People with a gambling problem are twice as likely to be depressed than people without a gambling problem and are at significantly higher risk of experiencing psychological distress. If you have a mental health problem, you're more at risk of harmful gambling. People who struggle with problem gambling often also struggle with problem drinking.

Alice Springs does not need any more poker machines. It already has 3 times more than the national average of poker machines per adult. Alice Springs has higher rates of gambling harm than the rest of the

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<sup>1</sup> Lubman, D, Manning, V, Dowling, N, Rodda, S, Lee, S, Garde, E, Merkouris, S & Volberg, R 2017, *Problem gambling in people seeking treatment for mental illness*, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.)

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NT. Gambling-related harms are more likely to impact people and their families who are already vulnerable to social, economic, developmental and psychological stressors<sup>2</sup>.

MHACA does not support the system where clubs that host poker machines contribute financially to a Community Benefit Fund. This system provides a social license to operate and does not appropriately offset the harms of gambling. The Community Benefit Fund should not be at the profit of harmful and addictive products.

The lack of political will to introduce measures that protect not only those with a gambling problem, but the wellbeing of our wider community, is concerning. Appropriate regulation of poker machines needs to be addressed and more harm minimisation programs need to be introduced.

Along with other key local agencies and community members, MHACA does not believe the community was consulted appropriately about increasing the number of poker machines in our town.

We reiterate that there is no benefit to our community for increasing the number of poker machines, only greater social harm.

We urge the Director and those involved in these proposals to **reject all the applications** for the 60 extra poker machines across the 4 different venues in Alice Springs.

For further information about any of the points raised in this submission please contact MHACA CEO, Dira Horne at [dira.horne@mhaca.org.au](mailto:dira.horne@mhaca.org.au) or call 08 89504600.

Your sincerely,



Dira Horne  
MHACA CEO

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<sup>2</sup>Stevens, M, Gupta, H and Flack, M (2019). *Northern Territory Gambling Prevalence and Wellbeing Survey Report, 2018*. Darwin: Menzies School of Health Research and the Northern Territory Government.