

Wyndham Gambling Harm Prevention Policy Statement 2023-2025

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Definitions

Council	Council means Wyndham City Council, being a body constituted as a municipal Council under the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
EGMs	Electronic Gaming Machines
Gaming	Gaming usually refers to a gambling activity that takes place on an EGM.
Gaming machine municipal limits and regional caps	<p>Gaming machine caps are a legal limit on how many gaming machine entitlements are available for gaming within specific geographic areas of Victoria.</p> <p>A Ministerial Order dated 20 September 2017 provides the latest specification of regional caps and municipal limits on gaming machine entitlements.¹</p>
Gambling	For the purposes of this Policy, 'gambling' is defined as the placement of a wager or bet on the outcome of a future uncertain event, including EGMs, casino games, race betting, and sports betting activities. Gambling/betting requires a player to risk losing something of value (usually money) for the chance of winning more.
Gambling harm	<p>Any initial or exacerbated adverse consequence due to an engagement with gambling that leads to a decrement to the health or wellbeing of an individual, family unit, community, or population.</p> <p>Gambling related harm can be divided into seven key areas: Financial harm, relationship disruption, emotional or psychological distress, decrements to health, cultural harm, reduced work or study performance and criminal activity. These harms can further be considered as general harms (which occur at any time), crisis harms, which are associated with attempts to seek help, and legacy harms, which occur long after gambling has ceased.²</p>
Online gambling	<p>Online gambling comprises of a wide range of different forms of gambling that can be provided in an online format i.e. accessed and played via the internet.</p> <p>This can include forms of poker, casinos (blackjack, roulette etc.), sports betting, bingo, lotteries, horse racing betting.</p>
Sports betting	Wagering on sporting activities other than the established forms of horse and greyhound racing. This can be in person at an event or venue, or online. ³
VCGLR	Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation
VGCCC	Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission
VLGA	Victorian Local Governance Association
VRGF	Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Gambling has the potential to generate negative social and economic impacts for the player, their family and friends, and the wider community. The experience of these harms can differ depending on a person's gender, cultural background, age, and other intersecting factors.

Wyndham is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia, with many new residents from a wide variety of backgrounds moving to our community and calling our suburbs home. The City of Wyndham population forecast for 2023 is 322,226, and is forecast to grow to 501,634 by 2041.⁴ From 2016 to 2021, City of Wyndham's population increased by 74,892 people (34.5 percent).⁵ There are 29,466 couples with young children in City of Wyndham in 2021, comprising 31.3 percent of household.⁶ In 2021, 48 percent of people in City of Wyndham were born overseas, compared with 35.7 percent in Greater Melbourne.⁷

Wyndham's fast-paced growth also brings challenges with pressure on infrastructure delivery. There are currently limited facilities for cultural and arts activities in Wyndham. Conversely, Wyndham City is well represented by Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs). Wyndham residents lost over \$124.9 million using EGMs which equates to over \$342,201 per day in the 2022-2023 financial year. This ranks as seventh highest in losses per municipality in the State of Victoria.⁸

Whilst the decision-making criteria set out in the Wyndham Planning Scheme underpins decisions relating to EGM applications in the municipality, this *Wyndham Gambling Harm Prevention Policy Statement 2023-2025* (the Policy Statement) clearly articulates Council's intent in relation to the provision of EGMs from a public health perspective. The Policy Statement is intended to be applied alongside the Wyndham Planning Scheme and read in conjunction with related Council policies and initiatives.

It will also inform Council's submissions to the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC) in response to applications for new gaming licences or amendments to existing gaming licences.

It is recognised that sports betting and internet gambling are fast growing in the community, increasing rapidly each year. The advertising and normalisation of sports betting and online gambling and the resultant community impacts are of concern to Council. While mostly controlled at the federal level, there are points of influence that Council can use, particularly around supporting education efforts in the community.

Harm from gambling can happen much earlier than people realise and affect the health, wellbeing and financial security of even those who gamble infrequently. Most of the gambling harm in Victoria is experienced by people whose gambling behaviour is not classified as problem gambling.

There has been a link identified between social isolation and gambling. Council plays an important role in promoting and protecting the health and wellbeing of its residents, including in building social connections and community support to reduce isolation and other vulnerabilities that may contribute to gambling harm.

The City of Wyndham has a history of leadership in gambling harm prevention advocacy and initiatives. Council is represented on various gambling related policy and coordination forums including the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) Local Government Working Group on Gambling. Since 2017, Wyndham City has also been a member of the Alliance for Gambling Reform, showing further commitment in the role of harm prevention. Wyndham City also regularly engages with academics and research bodies, including members of Deakin University's Institute for Health Transformation.

1.2 Purpose of this Policy

The Policy Statement is a whole of Council approach to preventing gambling harm. It describes Council's principles and policy statements on gambling, and provides a monitoring framework.

The Policy Statement is relevant to all gambling activities that take place in the municipality. Its primary focus is on EGMs, online gaming and sports betting.

The Policy Statement replaces the *Wyndham Gambling Harm Minimisation Policy and Action Plan 2018-2022* (the Policy and Action Plan) and responds to factors such as regulatory and industry changes since that previous policy was introduced in 2018.

Through this Policy Statement, Wyndham City reaffirms and recommits to a public health approach to preventing gambling harms. This approach is consistent with Council's role to protect, improve and promote health and wellbeing under the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

The Policy Statement takes a public health approach to preventing gambling harms. It is consistent with the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2022-2025* principles to foster health and wellbeing. The focus of gambling and 'social determinants' is on developing effective harm prevention interventions. The policy focus is on the harms associated with gambling.

By adopting a 'health equity' approach in framing health as a social phenomenon, we will move closer to helping those with fewer resources in order to improve their health and living conditions. To achieve health equity, the public health model is premised on a partnership approach that works to align policy and community action.

The term 'harm' is used to describe any negative consequence that results from a person's own or another's gambling. These commonly accepted harms include financial problems, relationship conflict or breakdown, health problems, emotional or psychological distress, reduced capacity in other parts of life, cultural harms and criminal activity. Gambling harm often impacts many people, not just the person who is gambling. Family members, friends, employers and the broader community can also be harmed by someone else's gambling.

The Policy Statement also gives organisational direction to all those within Council responsible for fulfilling Council's diverse roles and responsibilities and ongoing efforts in preventing gambling harm in the Wyndham municipality. It describes Council's commitment as one of the many stakeholders responsible for public health in Wyndham, resting on a shared responsibility for public health, from individuals and community groups to businesses, corporations and governments at all levels.

1.3 How this Policy was prepared

The Policy Statement was developed through consultation with the community and research into the following:

- stakeholder engagement and consultation
- the specific social, economic and physical gambling context in the Wyndham municipality
- relevant State and Commonwealth government legislation and policies, and local government policies in other jurisdictions
- the broader policy context and gambling trends, including research findings and recommendations from academics, research bodies, and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF), a statutory authority that addresses the challenge of gambling harm in the Victorian community.

2 Context

2.1 Strategic alignment

This Policy Statement identifies a range of harm prevention strategies that Council can support in addition to the Wyndham Planning Scheme.

The Policy Statement has been prepared within the framework of the strategic directions described in the *Wyndham City Council Plan 2021-25* and the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25*. It is underpinned by the *Wyndham City Council Plan 2021-25* strategic area which seeks to enable a Healthy, Accessible and Equitable City that enhances the wellbeing of its community and provides opportunities for all.

The *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25* states that the lifestyle factors that affect Wyndham residents include EGMs and that Wyndham City is a leading member of a national advocacy organisation, the Alliance for Gambling Reform, that works to prevent harm caused from gambling.

2.2 Understanding the social costs of gambling in Wyndham

The social harms associated with gambling are well established. The effects of gambling include poverty and financial pressure, personal distress, family conflict, violence and breakup, homelessness, and others. Children are often victims of such gambling related problems.

This ripple effect of gambling needs to be understood within the context of the whole community. For example, Wyndham has a higher percentage of young people than the state or national averages. Emerging research has found parents and children identified different patterns and degrees of harm to children caused by parental gambling. Parents reported lower incidents of harm, and commonly focused on financial impacts. Children however reported higher incidents of harm, and mainly focused on the psychosocial impacts of parental gambling.⁹

Australian and international studies have uncovered several individual and some socio-cultural risk factors that increase older adults' susceptibility to gambling and provide a pathway into gambling venues. This includes but is not limited to social isolation.¹⁰

Research has found that gambling and homelessness among older people is a complex and multi-dimensional public health challenge for the Victorian community and is not adequately addressed at the present time. Research findings highlight where there is a need for action to address co-occurring gambling and homelessness among older people in Victoria.¹¹

Mental wellbeing is a concern with one in four people in Wyndham going through a period of depression and/or anxiety at any one time, and social isolation is higher than the Victorian average.¹² Mental health conditions overlap considerably with alcohol and substance misuse, and gambling. These groups of conditions share numerous risk factors, are risk factors for each other, and frequently co-occur.¹³

A public health approach is, in essence, a practice which focuses on improving the health of populations. Therefore, preventing gambling harm is likely to improve community wellbeing generally.

2.3 The seven dimensions of gambling harm

Gambling harm is not limited to financial harm, it includes harm to mental and physical health, family and relationships, work or study and cultural harm. Research has identified seven dimensions of harm experienced by people who gamble and those close to them. The dimensions are listed below with examples of gambling harms under each:¹⁴

Gambling harms	Harms include:
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduced spending on recreational activities• bankruptcy• reduced spending on essentials and beneficial items (for example, food, medication, insurance and education)• increased credit debt and selling items to fund gambling
Work or study	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduced performance because of tiredness or distraction• absenteeism due to someone else's gambling• exclusion from study, loss of job and conflict at work
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• stress, depression and reduced sleep due to worry• increased use of health-related services• suicidal thoughts, self-harm and the need for emergency treatment
Emotional or psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• regret• feelings of worthlessness• feelings of failure, extreme distress, vulnerability and worthlessness
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• conflict within relationships• neglect of responsibilities• belittlement, threat to end the relationship and actual ending of the relationship
Cultural harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• personal conflict when gambling is against cultural beliefs• reduced ability to participate in cultural practices or meet community expectations• reduced connection to the cultural community
Criminal activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• crimes of negligence such as child neglect (for example, leaving children unattended in venue car parks)• drug trafficking or prostitution to repay debts• crimes of opportunity such as theft and fraud to fund gambling

2.4 Council's roles in preventing gambling harm

Governments at all levels have responsibility for gambling policy and strategy. As the closest level of government to community, local government has an important role to play in promoting and protecting the health and wellbeing of its residents. The public health approach recognises the importance of prevention, community awareness, education, partnerships, policy, research development and targeted advocacy to achieve positive outcomes.

Council has a statutory obligation to:

1. Protect, improve and promote health and wellbeing under the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, and to apply the 'precautionary principle' to preventing and controlling public health risk.
2. Provide the best outcomes for the community regarding the long-term cumulative effects of decisions under the Victorian *Local Government Act 2020*. This includes seeking to protect communities from the risks and harms associated with gambling.
3. Assess the social and economic impacts of EGM applications through the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* and the Gaming Policy at Clause 52.28 of the Wyndham Planning Scheme.

Further, Wyndham City is bound by the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* to act compatibly with human rights. Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities includes Section 17 – Right to the protection of families and children – whose welfare can be compromised by the impacts of gambling in the community.

2.5 Gender equity assessment

Pursuant to the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, Wyndham City is required to undertake a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) when developing a new or reviewing any policy, program or service with a direct and significant impact on the public. The aim is to ensure fairer outcomes and to provide equitable access to opportunities and resources for all people.

The GIA undertaken to help inform the development of this Policy Statement identified that gambling is traditionally seen as male-dominated. However, Deakin University research has shown that women's gambling participation rates are similar to men's with an increase in the number of women experiencing gambling related harm.¹⁵ Research by others indicates a complex mix of individual, socio-cultural and commercial factors may be influencing young women's engagement in gambling.¹⁶

Research published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS) found that while gambling does not directly cause intimate partner violence, it reinforces the gendered drivers of violence to intensify the frequency and severity of intimate partner violence against women.¹⁷ There is a link between gambling harm and family violence. A gendered approach to gambling is needed.

2.6 Social connection: A protective factor in addressing gambling harm

The *Wyndham 2040 Community Vision* describes a safe, connected and inclusive community. Through the introduction of the *Living Your Best Life in Wyndham: A Lifecourse Framework To Support Our Community Through All Of Life's Stages*, Wyndham City established principles for supporting health and wellbeing, social connectivity and prioritising access to support services, programs and initiatives for all residents. Council plays an important role in building social connections and community support to reduce isolation and other vulnerabilities that may contribute to gambling harm.

For example, as part of the Prevention Partnership Projects funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF), Wyndham undertook a project aimed at encouraging seniors in Wyndham to consider alternate venues and activities for recreation. Wyndham City participated in the 'Stepping out! Building stronger social connections for older people, free from gambling harm' pilot project which sought to address the challenge of gambling venues being the 'default' location for many social inclusion activities aimed at older people.¹⁸

3 Wyndham Gambling Harm Prevention Policy Statement 2023-2025

3.1 Policy position

The Policy Statement is founded on a public health approach to gambling related harms. According to Deakin University researchers, a comprehensive public health approach to gambling recognises that gambling harm is caused by a complex interplay of individual, socio-cultural, environmental, commercial, and political determinants.¹⁹ A range of 'determinants' shape the level of risk and potential for gambling harm in local communities (see **Figure 1**). Such determinants include the nature of gambling products and promotions as well as the characteristics of gambling environments that may appeal to different age-specific cohorts²⁰. Evidence suggests there is an increased vulnerability for older adults experiencing gambling harm for example.²¹

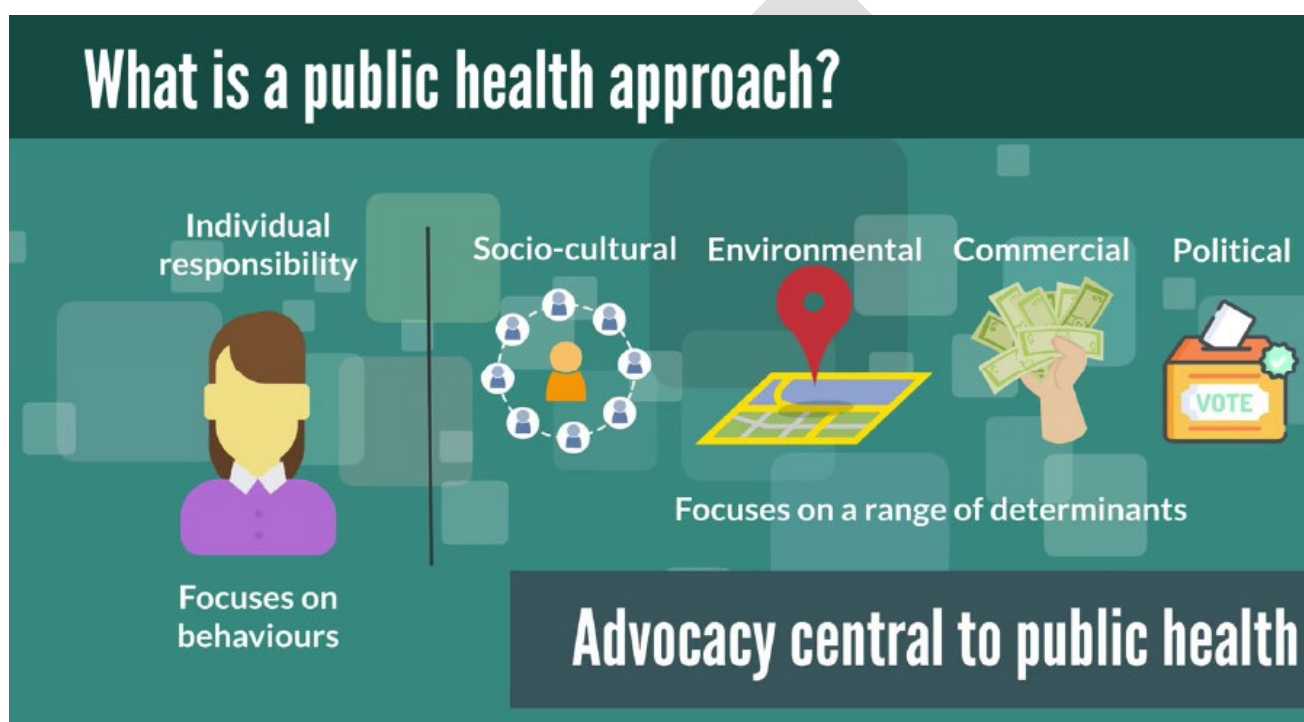


Figure 1: What is a public health approach? (Source: Institute for Health Transformation, Deakin University)

This approach acknowledges a shared responsibility for improving the health of population groups and subgroups, rather than just the health of individuals. Two key principles underpin the public health approach to gambling related harms:

1. A range of social, economic, and environmental factors affect a person's mental and physical health and wellbeing; and
2. It is important to implement an appropriate mix of actions with partners and the community to achieve improved health outcomes.

This comprehensive public health approach to gambling is being adopted by the City of Wyndham to address preventable harms in partnership with other stakeholders. This approach is consistent with Council's role to protect, improve and promote public health and wellbeing, as required under the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

The Policy Statement aims to guide Council's efforts to prevent gambling harm, addressing the complex issues related to gambling while at the same time promoting healthy communities.

3.2 Policy objectives

1. Partner

Partner with community in preventing and minimising gambling harms and promoting health and wellbeing.

2. Advocate

Advocate in collaboration with partners including community for systemic and legislative change to address gambling harm.

3. Lead

Continue to be a state-wide leader and innovator in reducing gambling harm.

4. Evidence

Demonstrate Council's commitment to protecting those most at risk of gambling related harms through its statutory roles in assessing social and economic impacts of gambling.

3.3 Policy statements

Policy statements are grouped around these four themes representing Council's policy role as – partner, advocate and lead, and in implementing evidence-based practice.

Wyndham City Council adopts the following policy statements in relation to gambling in Wyndham:

Partner

Council will:

1. Collaborate with those with a lived experience of gambling and with agencies that support them.
2. Support creative projects that explore/share stories and raise community awareness.
3. Promote services that assist those impacted by gambling harm, including family and friends affected by someone else's gambling.
4. Support and assist coordination of collaborative work within the municipality in advocating for harm prevention and improved community awareness of gambling and related harms, including increased understanding of the different ways that gambling harm may be experienced depending on gender, culture, and other intersectional attributes, and the provision of gambling harm education efforts.
5. Favour other social and recreational options for residents – such as libraries, community centres, sports grounds and fitness centres – which provide alternative recreational outlets to gambling.
6. Continue to invest in community infrastructure, community programs and community networks to provide alternatives to gambling.

Advocate

Council will collectively advocate to:

7. Continue to support the cooperative call on the Federal and State Governments to legislate changes for harm prevention, including, but not limited to:
 - reduction in the number of EGMs permitted under the caps, in municipalities of socio-economic disadvantage and relatively high EGM density
 - a regional cap on the number of EGMs across Wyndham limited to the current number
 - reduction over time in the total number of EGMs across Wyndham
 - increased investment in research on the health and wellbeing impacts of gambling including research into family violence, mental and physical health impacts
 - supporting a ban on sports betting advertising on television and live stream services in Victoria in alignment with the recommendations from the Inquiry into online gambling and its impact on those experiencing gambling harm.
8. Collaborate with other local governments and work within State-wide and national forums to advocate for reform.

Lead

Council will:

9. Oppose any new application for EGMs on Council-owned or managed land.
10. Support initiatives that reduce gambling operator's reliance on revenue from EGMs.
11. Continue to acknowledge gambling as a public health issue and, where appropriate, integrate harm prevention and reduction into future planning and programming. This includes, but is not limited to, the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Municipal Strategic Statement and the Wyndham Planning Scheme.
12. Continue to promote a variety of non-gambling events, activities and programs that encourage residents to lead active and healthy lives.
13. Take a public health approach in all gambling related communication. Ongoing Council communication will use terms such as 'gambling', 'people harmed by gambling', 'gambling losses' and 'EGM/Poker machine operators' and 'gambling industry' as opposed to 'gaming', 'gaming expenditure', 'problem gamblers' and 'pokie venues'.
14. Ensure no access to online gambling on Council staff internet access points.
15. Ensure no funding, grants or sponsorship being made available for activities that promote gambling.
16. Not run Council and community events, activities, programs and social outings in venues that have EGMs.

Evidence

Council will:

17. Monitor application of the Local Planning Policy on Gaming to regulate the location and operation of gambling venues.

18. Assess the social and economic impact of EGM license applications and represent community interests in regulatory processes.
19. Monitor research on existing and emerging forms of gambling and their impact on local communities.
20. Where possible, participate in and/or support relevant research efforts in order to inform local knowledge of the impacts and trends of gambling and of effective harm prevention strategies and practices.

3.4 Monitoring framework

The Policy Statement is a whole of Council approach to gambling harm prevention.

Public authorities increasingly seek to measure and report on the outcomes they achieve for their communities. To better understand and prevent gambling-related harm, we need an understanding of what we are seeking to achieve. The monitoring framework will measure the factors that drive preventable gambling harms in Wyndham.

The framework will be used to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the Policy Statement in reporting on progress towards outcomes.

Theme	Outcomes	Indicator	Source
LEAD	1. <i>People experiencing preventable gambling related harms have increased access to support services.</i>	People have improved health and wellbeing, including social and financial wellbeing Opportunities created for community members to engage in advocacy efforts Gambling related behaviours Use of services supporting people experiencing gambling-related harms Council resources allocated to gambling harm prevention Work with a range of project partners	Community attitudes and behaviours towards gambling Research supported with academics and research bodies Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF) Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR) Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria Council budgets
PARTNER	2. <i>Community members have increased access to alternative activities that foster protective social connections.</i>	Provision of services and facilities offering alternatives to gambling People receive relevant and accessible	Listing of services and facilities offering alternatives to gambling Free Council events

		information on alternative activities	
LEAD	3. <i>Community members have increased capacity to appreciate the overall decrements of gambling harms.</i>	<p>People have ready access to information on the harms of gambling including on Council's website</p> <p>People have greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities</p> <p>Communities are mobilised to support Council's gambling harm prevention work</p>	<p>Council website</p> <p>Links to VGCCC data sources and VRGF</p>
ADVOCATE	4. <i>Council and stakeholders have increased intelligence in responding to community needs related to gambling harm prevention.</i>	<p>Council sits on various gambling related policy and coordination forums such as the VLGA Local Government Working Group on Gambling</p> <p>Decision-makers are encouraged to introduce legislative and regulatory reforms to protect communities from gambling harm</p>	As per arrangements with various project partners
LEAD	5. <i>Council is consistent in its response to all matters related to gambling harm prevention in Wyndham.</i>	<p>Council staff are informed, engaged and supported</p> <p>Decision-makers have increased information and understanding of gambling related harms</p>	Internal data

Where additional resources are required, this will be subject to Council's annual budget processes and/or external funding opportunities.

This Policy Statement is intended to be applied alongside the Wyndham Planning Scheme. Section 12B of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* requires a planning authority to regularly review the provisions of the planning scheme. The review will assess whether the scheme provisions, such as the Gaming Policy at Clause 52.28 of the Wyndham Planning Scheme, have been effective and efficient in achieving the objectives and strategies of the planning scheme.

The Policy Statement will be reviewed within two years from the date of Council adoption to maintain relevance and currency.

Endnotes

- ¹ Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (n.d.). *Gaming machine regional caps and limits*. Retrieved from Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission: <https://www.vgccc.vic.gov.au/gambling/gaming-venue-operator/understand-your-gaming-licence/caps-and-limits/gaming-machine>
- ² Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (n.d.). *Glossary*. Retrieved from Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation: <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/glossary/>
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- ⁴ .idcommunity. *City of Wyndham Population Forecast*. Retrieved from .idcommunity: <https://forecast.id.com.au/wyndham>
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- ¹¹ Vandenberg, B., O'Brien, K., Livingstone, C., Carter, A. (2021). *Gambling and homelessness among older people: an exploratory study*. Retrieved from Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation: <https://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/resources/publications/gambling-and-homelessness-among-older-people-an-exploratory-study-971/>
- ¹² Wyndham City. (2021). *Resilient Wyndham 2021–2025*. Retrieved from Wyndham City: <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-07/Wyndham%20City%20Resilient%20Wyndham%202021-2025.pdf>
- ¹³ State of Victoria. (2019). *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019–2023*. Retrieved from Department of Health: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/victorian-public-health-and-wellbeing-plan-2019-2023>
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- ¹⁸ The *Stepping Out* project was funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation aimed at older peoples' social activities putting them at risk of gambling harm due to being at gambling venues, and a lack of awareness about gambling harm and alternate venues. Eight workshops were held in 2021 with a total of 87 participants. The project also produced a manual which is available at: <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/gamblingharm>

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