

## Report shows mental health, gambling link

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New research found the problem gambling rate among mental health patients was four times higher than in the general community. *Photo: Paul Miller*

ALMOST one in five people presenting to a public mental health service had a gambling problem and half of those were at risk of suicide, new state government funded research has revealed.



Poker machines were the overwhelming number one gambling activity of those detected with a gambling problem. The report, *Problem gambling in people presenting to a public mental health service*, by the Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre, was released by the state government yesterday. The researchers examined 290 patients assessed by the crisis assessment treatment team of the department of psychiatry at The Alfred hospital last year and found 50 had a gambling problem - 24 of those at risk of suicide.

The report's chief investigator, Anthony de Castella, said while it was not his field of expertise, he believed a mandatory pre-commitment system for poker machines "could be beneficial". The problem gambling rate identified among mental health patients in the report was four times higher than in the general community.

The report called for all people presenting with mental health issues to be assessed for a gambling problem. "Based upon the high prevalence of gambling found in this study, the inclusion of routine screening for gambling problems for both new and existing clients of mental health services is clearly warranted," the report said.

Many of those identified in the report with a gambling problem later participated in gambling help programs and self-excluded from gambling venues.

Mr de Castella, research manager at the Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre, said the key message of the report was for mental health services to be aware and respond to the issue of problem gambling.

He said while more research was needed to determine whether problem gambling led to a mental illness or mental illness led to problem gambling, the main issue was detecting and treating people affected by a gambling problem.

Gaming Minister Michael O'Brien said "the report adds to a body of research that suggests the overall prevalence of problem gambling may be much higher among mental health patients than the rest of the population".

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/report-shows-mental-health-gambling-link-20111028-1mo8t.html#ixzz1cVTRb2zS>