



## Wesley Mission Advisory gambling language guide

Wesley Mission, like other gambling reform and harm minimisation advocate organisations, is working to change the discourse around gambling which has been controlled and manipulated by the industry. Gambling harm should be treated as a public health issue, which requires a change in attitude, focus and terminology. Language is important. It can keep people down or it can empower them.

Like many areas of social injustice, people who have experienced the harm should be part of the conversation. With respect and care, people with lived experience should be consulted for any project. Mental health, disability and domestic violence sectors now customarily work with, and refer to Lived Experience Advocates.

If referring to a specific person with a lived experience, it would be good to capitalise as if referring to a title. The term may vary, but could include: Lived Experience Advocates, Lived Experience Experts or Experts by Experience.

It's important to use inclusive language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, judgemental, stereotyped or discriminatory views of particular people or groups, and doesn't deliberately or inadvertently exclude people from being seen as part of a group.

**AVOID:** 'problem gambler' or 'problem gambling'

**USE:** people experiencing (significant/serious) gambling harm, person (significantly/seriously) harmed by gambling, people affected by gambling issues

'Problem gambler' is an industry term and is victim-blaming. It is designed to make the person the problem, not the structure of the industry or its dangerous products.

The term relates to the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), a clinical tool used in therapy for a counsellor and client to establish how severe their issue is. It invites the use of 'problem gambling' to describe disordered or compulsive gambling but reinforces the concept policy reform is only needed for those scoring high on the index.

Harm is experienced by people who score as low or medium risk gamblers on the PGSI.

Harm is also experienced by between 6 and 10 other people impacted by someone else's gambling. By focussing only on people who gamble, we are making a greater number of people invisible.

Where appropriate, referring to a particular person, use the Lived Experience Advocate/Expert terminology they prefer.

**AVOID:** 'players' or 'playing'

**USE:** users/using or gamblers

The industry has worked hard to condition us to view the use of machines as 'playing', in order to make it sound fun and innocent, when clearly it is neither. People use or gamble on poker machines.

**AVOID:** victims of poker machines

**USE:** people targeted or preyed on by the gambling industry

Even though the word 'victim' clearly indicates there is a perpetrator, it is also disempowering. This is particularly to be avoided when talking about people who have recovered or are recovering from a gambling compulsion.



**AVOID:** poorest suburbs/most disadvantaged suburbs/communities

**USE:** most stressed suburbs/communities or suburbs/towns/communities under/experiencing stress

People will not necessarily identify with being considered poor or disadvantaged but will often identify with being under stress. This describes their situation, without alienating them.

**AVOID:** gaming

**USE:** gambling

Gaming implies fun, gambling has serious consequences and impacts.

**AVOID:** gambling expenditure or profits

**USE:** gambling losses or money taken

In NSW, data on poker machine losses is published by the Department of Liquor and Gaming on a spreadsheet which has a column heading NET PROFIT. It is only profit to the venue. Public health measures target the whole relevant population, so from that view, this money is a loss to individuals and the community.

**AVOID:** Sports betting

**USE:** Sports gambling

Betting is a word we use without thinking in ordinary speech, for example "I bet the dog has chewed up my shoes again". It tends to disguise the activity.

It's also important to link all forms of gambling together - sports gambling advertising has been shown through research to help normalise all forms of gambling, including poker machine gambling.

**AVOID:** 'anti-gambling' to describe harm prevention advocates

**USE:** gambling reform organisation or advocate

Wesley Mission, its allies and other gambling reform organisations around Australia are anti-gambling harm. We know it is not possible to ban gambling, but we can aim to minimise harm.

## Used with caution

**USE WITH CAUTION:** addiction

People generally have a negative attitude to any addiction. However, it is hard to explain the compulsion people have, or the way their body responds to triggers like the sound of a poker machine, without recognising these machines are designed to create dopamine rushes, to which a person can become addicted. The dopamine rush overcomes conscious thought.

Certainly, avoid labelling a person as an 'addict', and only use the terminology around addiction with caution bearing in mind the likely audience.

People with lived experience of gambling may describe themselves as addicts or having had an addiction. If so, with their consent, the terms may be used.



## Avoided unless absolutely necessary

### TRY TO

**AVOID:** pokies

**USE:** poker machines

Pokies is a nickname and makes the machines sound harmless.

**AVOID:** the (most) vulnerable

**USE:** people experiencing stress

There is a persistent stereotype the people most harmed by gambling are “the other” and are not “people like us”. ‘Protecting the most vulnerable’ is patronising and disempowering. Poker machines are designed to exploit vulnerabilities, but any person could be, or become vulnerable to that danger at any time.

Research does show certain demographic groups are more vulnerable – for example Indigenous people, those who are unemployed or with low education levels, people carrying trauma from assault, war or tragedy, people struggling with poverty – but does not mean all those people are vulnerable to poker machines all the time.

Gambling harm can be experienced by people from any postcode, with any level of education, employment or income, or ethnicity. That said, there is a concentration of poker machines in communities under stress, because the statistics are there are more people likely to succumb in those communities.

**AVOID:** Gamble responsibly (from May 2023 no longer allowed as a tag line on broadcast ads)

**USE:** Responsible provision or service of gambling

‘Gamble responsibly’ is the phrase the industry got from the National Rifle Association. It makes people think everyone else is behaving responsibly yet places no responsibility at all on the industry. It reinforces shame and actively prevents help-seeking.

In reality, the industry which creates and distributes dangerous products, has an ethical obligation to act responsibly.

## Use of images and sound

Recognise for those who have been harmed, the sight or sound of a poker machine can trigger a physiological response, which might make them feel compelled to gamble, or induce strongly negative emotions and responses including distress and nausea.

Aim to illustrate the situation which should exist if reform has occurred, for instance a club with a live band or trivia competition, not the gambling room.

If it is impossible to avoid using images of poker machines, desaturate the colour and do not sensationalise.

**In all communications around gambling, please include these help contacts:**

**Gambler’s helpline:**

☎ 1800 858 858

[gamblershelp.com.au](http://gamblershelp.com.au)

**Lifeline:**

☎ 13 11 14

When discussing gambling-related deaths by suicide, refer to Mindframe’s language guide [mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/language](http://mindframe.org.au/suicide/communicating-about-suicide/language)



[wesleymission.org.au/GamblingReform](http://wesleymission.org.au/GamblingReform)

