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STEM Community Partnerships Program

Fairfield local scenario

Impact of gambling on mental health

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his or her community. The social and emotional well-being of individuals and communities is influenced by social and economic conditions i.e. physical environment, available health services, education, housing, transport, and employment. There is a strong link between gambling problem and mental health issues. Nearly three out of four people with a gambling problem are at risk of developing depression. Gambling can also be a sign that a person already has a mental health issue and may need help.

The Fairfield local government area (LGA) faces a lot of challenges relating to gambling. In 2020, Fairfield had the third highest number of poker machines in club venues in NSW. Almost 1 in 3 NSW teenagers are gambling illegally, often starting from 11 years of age and in the company of parents or other older family members. Fairfield City Council is working to minimise the harm caused to the community by gambling and runs forums to help identify this behaviour and seek help. A group of local people have petitioned to implement Libraries After Dark to provide safe recreational areas as a way to attack the problem.

Unfortunately, the community has seen a rise in gambling profits even amidst the COVID-19 disruptions in 2020. Gambling machines in club venues in the Fairfield area have the highest profits amongst all LGAs in NSW, with 2018 data suggesting that Fairfield loses \$2300 for each resident wagering on poker machines. The family environments of people with gambling problems are characterised by high levels of anger and conflict as well as low levels of clear and effective communication, less independence, less engagement in intellectual and cultural activities, a lack of commitment and support, little direct expression of feelings, and less participation in social and recreational activities.

The NSW Government is seeking to reform the laws to prevent problem gambling, which may require venues to identify and ban problem gamblers.



How your Council tackles the complexity of this issue impacts you and your community, now and in the future.

Daily Telegraph *Fairfield loses \$363m to club pokie machines, most in NSW* May 2019 <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/fairfield-advance/fairfield-city-loses-363m-to-club-pokie-machines-most-in-nsw/news-story/e0aacfc759f51f9a0189ca3fc98bdb8c>

Your task

Your task is to use the information above and resources provided below as a start to identify a local problem and design a STEM-focussed solution.

(Question, Design, Explore, Communicate)

Resources

CSIRO research

- Computer game to assist clinicians in diagnosing mental health disorders, October 2019 <https://www.csiro.au/en/News/News-releases/2019/Computer-game-mental-health>

Reports

- The impact of gambling problems on families, November 2014 <https://aifs.gov.au/agrc/publications/impact-gambling-problems-families>
- Beyond Blue, 'Problem gambling and depression' Fact Sheet <https://resources.beyondblue.org.au/prism/file?token=BL/0773>
- NSW Gaming Machines data, NSW Department of Customer Service <https://www.liquorandgaming.nsw.gov.au/resources/gaming-machine-data>
- Australian Institute of Family Studies, 'The impact of gambling problems on families', 2014. <https://aifs.gov.au/agrc/publications/impact-gambling-problems-families>

Articles and other resources

- South-west Sydney wants to open its libraries after dark to help gambling addicts, October 2020 <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/south-west-sydney-wants-to-open-its-libraries-after-dark-to-help-gambling-addicts>

- One-in-three NSW teens illegally gambling, February 2021
<https://www.fairfieldchampion.com.au/story/7108475/one-in-three-nsw-teens-illegally-gambling/>
- Community-designed screening tool aims to help GPs and community workers identify gambling harm and improve patient outcomes, September 2020
https://www.swsphn.com.au/index.cfm?module=news&pagemode=indiv&page_id=1110925
- Libraries After dark initiative, Fairfield Champion, November 2020
<https://www.fairfieldchampion.com.au/story/7108475/one-in-three-nsw-teens-illegally-gambling/>
- Pokies venues could ban problem gamblers reported by family members under proposed NSW legislation, ABC News, September 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-25/nsw-gambling-laws-aimed-at-problem-gamblers/12696444?nw=0>

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