Problem Gamblers Receiving Counselling or Treatment in New South Wales

Fourth Survey
December 2000

Report to the Casino Community Benefit Fund Trustees prepared by:

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The publication in 1999 of the report of the Productivity Commission on gambling in Australia marked the end of a decade in which gambling opportunities increased dramatically. It also highlighted the growing awareness of the problems that are caused by excessive gambling at the individual, family and community levels. In New South Wales, a 2% levy on gross revenue of the Star City Casino provides the funds to maintain a network of counselling services for problem gamblers and their families. The Casino Community Benefit Fund (CCBF) trustees according to policies developed by the Department of Gaming and Racing administer the funds from the casino levy. The CCBF also funds G-Line, a telephone counselling and referral service for problem gambling. However, the CCBF funding program does not cover all of the services available to problem gamblers. In particular, some services are funded partly or wholly through other government departments and some are privately operated. The annual survey of clients receiving counselling for excessive gambling and the problems caused thereby provides statistical information relating to the extent to which the available services are being used and are meeting the demand for such services.

Previous surveys were conducted in 1997, 1998 and 1999. The surveys focused on the clients counselled in a one-week period and the number of clients with appointments for the next week. When the results of the previous surveys are compared, it is clear that the numbers of gamblers and their families seeking help from counselling services have been increasing dramatically. Thus far, it appears that the services available have increased in step with the demand. From the perspective of planning services for New South Wales, it is imperative to know whether the demand for services is continuing to increase or whether it may now be levelling out. This fourth survey will provide this information.

Aims of the third survey

- To estimate the number of gamblers treated in a seven-day period;
- To estimate the number of gamblers with appointments in the next seven days;
- To report the number of gamblers who have been waiting to begin treatment for more than a week;
- To provide a demographic description of clients receiving treatment;
- To report the proportion of referrals received through G-Line;
- To estimate the extent to which the network of services available is being used;
- To compare current usage patterns with those reported in 1997-1999.

METHOD

The approach used in previous surveys, and continued in the current survey, involves constructing a list of all agencies and counsellors who provide face-to-face counselling for problem gamblers and their families. The list does not include agencies and counsellors who may counsel in relation to gambling as an issue secondary to a more major problem in the client's life. The survey also does not include clients who attend only Gamblers Anonymous meetings, since much of the information required is not available. This exclusion is consistent with the surveys conducted in 1998 and 1999.

Locating Relevant Agencies and Individuals

The list of agencies compiled for the 1999 survey formed the basis of the list used in the current survey. The list was updated through contact with agencies in the course of the current survey. Altogether, the final list consisted of 140 counsellors (see appendix 1 for this list). Of the full list, 120 counsellors completed the survey. Of the remaining 20 counsellors, fourteen were on vacation, three were unavailable for interview due to other commitments, and three counsellors could not be contacted despite repeated attempts. That 10% of the counsellors were on vacation may be attributed to the Christmas vacation period. By comparison, in 1999 only 3% of counsellors were on vacation at the time of the survey (October-November). Agencies that provide only telephone counselling were omitted from the survey. Agencies that provide both telephone and face-to-face counselling were included, but the main analyses are conducted on face-to-face counselling with telephone counselling excluded.

Conduct of Survey and Interviews

Unlike the surveys conducted in the three previous years, which were conducted wholly or primarily by face-to-face interview, in the current survey all interviews were conducted by telephone. The use of telephone interviews was determined by practical considerations involving completion of the work prior to the Christmas break. All telephone interviews were conducted between December 1st and December 22nd 2000. It should be noted that the use of telephone interviews introduces a level of potential unreliability that was not present in previous surveys. Of the counsellors who could be contacted, no counsellor refused to take part. Each survey typically involved up to thirty minutes to complete.

Interview Questions

The full list of questions included in the interview schedule is shown Appendix 2. The questions can be regarded as falling in three areas: (a) clients seen in the last seven days (gender, age, ethnicity, residential location, details of the gambling problem, and source of referral); (b) clients with appointments for the next seven days; (c) case load, capacity, and length of waiting list. Unlike the survey conducted in 1999, no questions were included concerning assessment procedures used, treatment approach, counselling for gambling related issues or the use of follow-up assessment to measure treatment effectiveness. Questions in these areas involve lengthy explanations, which are inappropriate for a telephone interview.

Interviewers and Procedure

Three interviewers conducted all of the interviews recorded. The interviewers were fully trained and two of the three took part in the 1999 face-to-face survey. Care was taken to ensure that each interviewer followed the same interview protocol. All agencies received a preliminary letter informing them that the survey would be conducted in December, and that an interviewer would telephone to make appointment times.

RESULTS

Numbers of Problem Gamblers in Treatment

In a one-week period in December 2000, 704 clients received counselling from 120 counsellors employed in problem gambling counselling. Of these clients, 18 received telephone counselling. For comparison with previous surveys, the clients receiving telephone counselling are omitted from detailed analysis. Thus, 686 problem gamblers or their family members received face-to face counselling. This is an increase over the comparable figures for 1997 (N = 154), 1998 (N = 310) and 1999 (N=558) – see Figure 1. The numbers of counsellors increased over the same period as shown in the figure 1.

Figure 1: The increasing numbers of problem gamblers receiving face-to-face counselling.
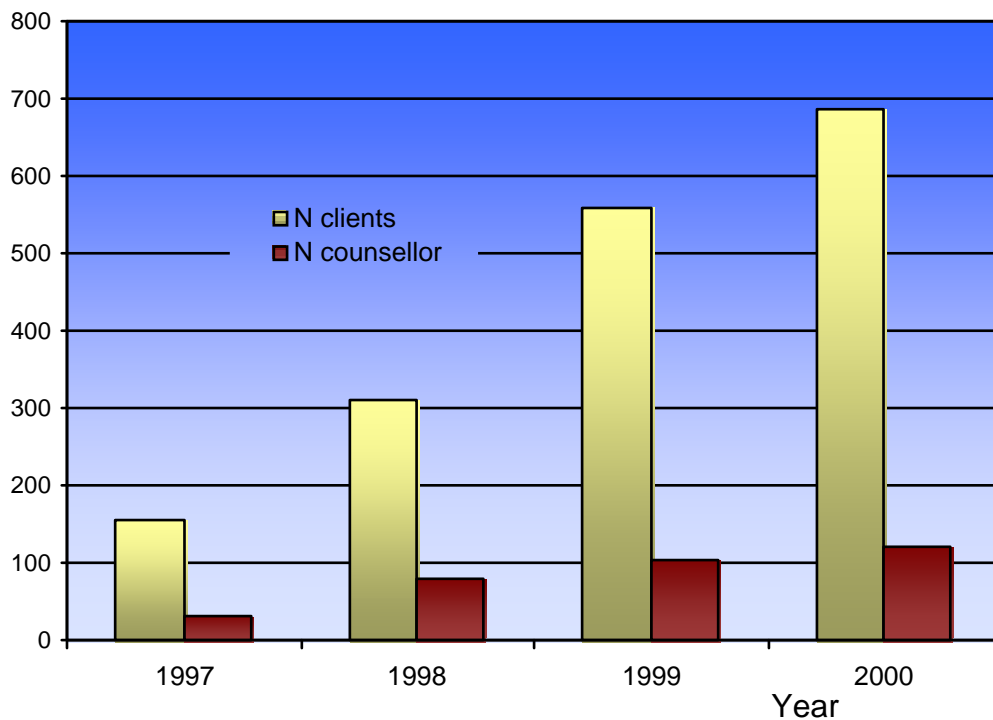
Type of counselling provided

Problem gamblers can receive a range of services from counsellors. Typically, gambling clients receive some kind of therapy aimed at helping the individual cut back or stop gambling. Additionally, counselling may focus on helping the client deal with gambling related problems. Thus, the client may receive relationship counselling, individual psychotherapy, financial counselling, and so on. Any given session with a client may involve working on a range of problems associated with the gambling. In categorising the type of counselling received, broad distinctions only were used. Based on the training counsellors have received, a simple distinction can often be made between financial counselling and addictions counselling. The term addictions counselling refers to counselling focused on cutting back the gambling and resolving the associated problems. Financial counselling refers to the attempt to deal with an acute financial problem caused by excessive gambling. Financial counsellors have a separate accreditation system. Another distinction is made between individual and group counselling. In group counselling, two or more individuals are counselled simultaneously. A grey area in this distinction concerns the categorisation of couples. In table 1, couples are regarded as examples of group counselling rather than as individual counselling. A distinction is also made between assessment and treatment. Assessment refers to a session in which the nature of the problems is assessed by one or more tests as the primary use of the counselling session. Finally, a distinction is made between counselling the client who is an excessive gambler and counselling another person, usually a family member, in relation to the problems caused by the excessive gambling of the other. In table 1, counselling the person who is not the problem gambler is referred to as relationship counselling. Table 1 shows the comparisons for the four surveys in terms of the numbers receiving different categories of counselling. Approximately 70% of face-to-face counselling of individual problem gamblers, across surveys, is directed primarily to helping the client cut back or stop gambling

Table 1

The different kinds of counselling provided to problem gamblers

	1997		1998		1999		2000	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Individual								
Addiction	115	75	238	77	360	65	459	67
Financial	16	10	31	10	69	12	38	6
Relationship	23	15	32	10	56	10	31	5
Assessment		0	9	3	7	1	10	1
	0							
Total	154	100	310	100	492	88	538	79
Group [1]	n/a		n/a					
Addiction							106	15
Relationship							42	6
Total	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	66	12	148	21
Overall Total	154	100	310	100	558	100	686	100

Note 1: Group counselling was included with addiction counselling in 1997 and 1998

From table 1, it can be seen that approximately 88% of face-to-face counselling in 2000 was concerned with the problem gambler as the client. Only 11% of the counselling is

directed to the family and friends of the gambler. This is consistent with the 1999 survey where 10%, of clients were not themselves problem gamblers.

Problem Gamblers in Treatment: Demography

Table 2 shows the demographic statistics for the years 1997 –2000. Figure 2 shows the changes in major demographic characteristics of the sample of problem gamblers receiving treatment. It is clear from figure 2, that the major cause of problem gambling in NSW at this time continues to be electronic gaming machines, which have increased their percentage, as the main cause of problems, from 74% in 1997 to 88% in 2000. There is little evidence that this cause of problem gambling has peaked.

NSW is a highly urbanised society with 64% of the population living in Sydney and a further 15% in Newcastle and Wollongong. In the 1997 and 1998 surveys, the ratio of the numbers of Sydney to Non-Sydney problem gamblers was similar to the ratio of the respective populations. However in 1999 a change was evident such that problem gamblers from areas outside Sydney were over-represented in the total sample. This change has been maintained in 2000, with 45% of problem gamblers living outside the greater Sydney area.

There is a continuing trend for counsellors in NSW to describe their clients as problem gamblers rather than compulsive or pathological gamblers. This trend is consistent with the consensus in Australia that the labels 'pathological' and 'compulsive' should be avoided with respect to gambling (Producivity Commission, 1999). Interestingly, the main assessment methods for pathological gambling overseas (SOGS, DSM IV) are the same methods used to assess problem gambling in Australia.

The average age of problem gamblers in treatment remains constant at just under 40 years. Similarly, male problem gamblers outnumber female problem gamblers by approximately 2:1. However figure 2 shows that the proportion of female problem gamblers is slowly increasing, possibly reflecting the so-called 'feminisation' of gambling.

Table 2:

Problem gamblers seen individually in the last seven days

Number of clients receiving counselling		**1997** N=154 %	**1998** N=310 %	**1999** N=558 %	**2000** N=686 %
Gender	Male	80	65	61	62
	Female	20	35	39	38
Location	Sydney	79	73	54	55[1]
	Rural	21	27	46	45
Average age	All	37	38	39	38
Ethnicity	Anglo-Australian	71	71	76	68
	Other English	9	4	4	4
	NESB non-Asian	15	17	11	21

	Asian	3	4	6	5
	Islander	1	2	2	1
	Aboriginal	0	1	1	1
	Other	1	1	0	0
Type of gambling	Racing	17	12	11	$8^{(1)}$
	Machines	74	79	83	88
	Casino	6	6	5	2
	Numbers	0	2	1	1
	Stockmarket	0	0	0	<1
	Multiple	3	1	0	0
	Sports betting	-	-	-	$<1^{(2)}$
Gambler Category	Compulsive	33	26	21	6
	Pathological	16	19	13	16
	Problem	51	55	66	77
	Non-Problem	-	-	-	$<1^{(2)}$
	Other	-	-	-	$<1^{(2)}$

Note: Non-gambling clients (n=73) were excluded in the 2000 analysis
(1) Percentages are calculated excluding the category 'unknown' (location n=7, type of gambling n=4)
(2) These categories were not included in previous years

Figure 2: Demographic trends among gamblers seeking help
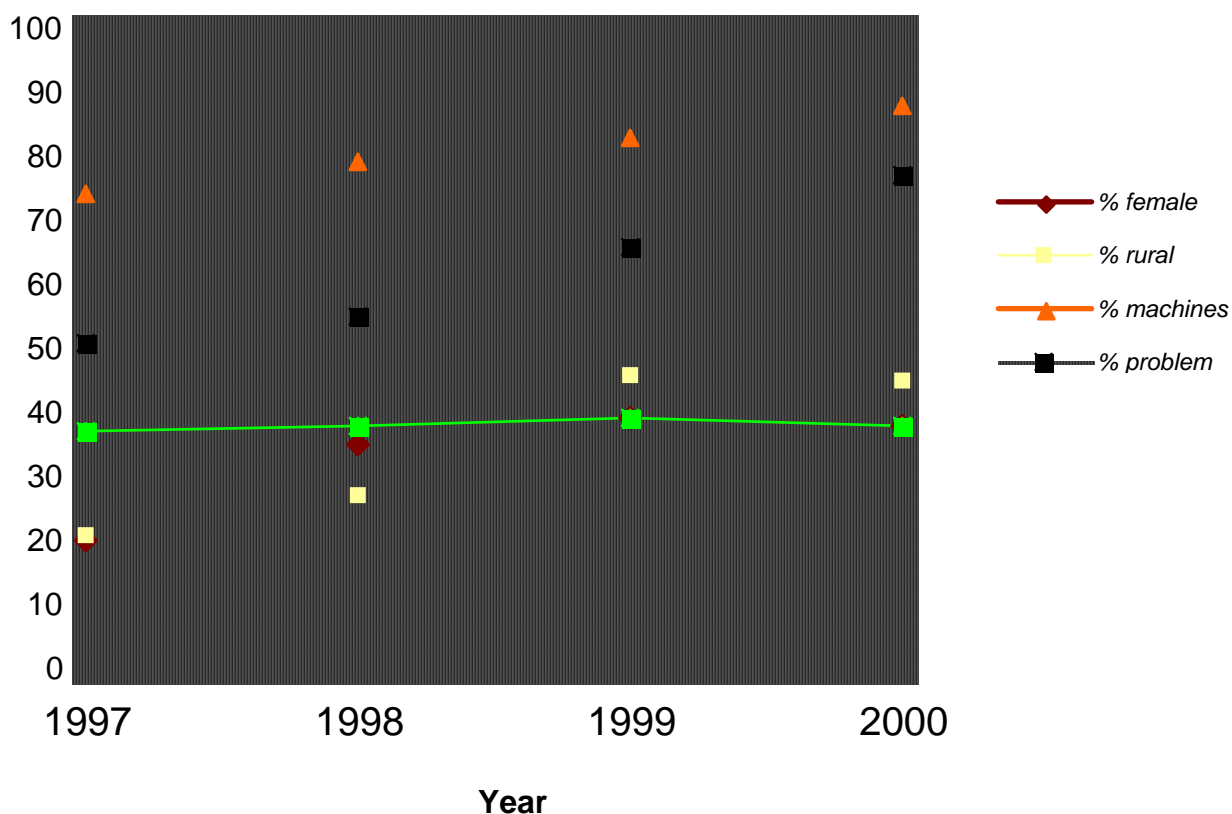
Problem Gamblers with Appointments for Counselling in the Next Seven Days

Each counsellor was asked to provide information on each client with an appointment in the next seven days. Where the individual seeking counselling is a new client, much of the demographic information is unknown. This situation applied to 20 clients who had not been seen previously. These individuals are omitted from the data analysis. Thus table 3 shows the demographic information for problem gamblers and does not include family and friends, who might be receiving relationship counselling, or the 20 individuals for whom detailed data is not available.

Much of the data shown in Table 3 was collected in the week ending Friday December 22nd. The proximity of this week to Christmas day may account for the relatively low numbers of clients seeking counselling (n=246). For this reason variations in the description of the sample from previous years should be treated with caution.

The division between the proportion of appointments in Sydney and the proportion in the remainder of New South Wales is consistent with those for the previous week (see table 2). Similarly, the age and ethnicity data for the coming week reflect those for the previous week. However, more female clients have appointments than do male clients. This may be an anomaly associated with the time of year. In general, the numbers of clients with appointments for the coming week is relatively low. It is likely that this fact should be attributed to the Christmas period and agencies winding down for Christmas. The surveys in 1997-1999 were conducted earlier in the year (September-November). However, in 2000, the Olympic Games precluded the use of September and October.

Table 3:

Problem gamblers with appointments for the next seven days

Number of clients receiving counselling		1997 N=116 %	1998 N=259 %	1999 N=456 %	2000 N=246 %
Gender	Male	75	66	57	39
	Female	25	34	43	61
Location	Sydney	91	72	58	54[1]
	Rural	9	28	42	46
Average age	All	38	39	39	38
Ethnicity	Anglo-Australian	67	67[1]	77[1]	72[1]
	Other English	10	5	3	7
	NESB non-Asian	15	17	12	15
	Asian	3	7	6	3
	Islander	2	1	1	1
	Aboriginal	0	1	1	2
	Other	3	2	0	0
Type of gambling	Racing	24	10[1]	10[1]	9[1]
	Machines	67	83	85	90
	Casino	9	6	5	1
	Numbers	0	1	0	0
	Stockmarket	-	-	-	0
	Multiple	-	-	-	0
Gambler Category	Compulsive	24	17[1]	13[1]	4[1]
	Pathological	14	23	13	20
	Problem	62	60	74	76
	Other	-	-	-	<1

Note: Non-gambling clients and assessments (where it was unknown whether the client was a problem gambler) were excluded from the 2000 analysis (Assessments n=20, Non Gamblers n=27)

Note: (1) Percentages are calculated excluding the category 'unknown' (location n=1, ethnicity n=3, gambling type n=2, gambling category n=2)

Source of Referral of Problem Gambling Clients: The Role of G-Line

G-Line is a telephone referral agency funded by the CCBF. From September 1997, until
August 1999 the Addiction Research Institute in Melbourne operated G-line. Since August 1999, G-Line has been operated by High Performance Health in Sydney. This survey provides information concerning the extent to which G-Line is responsible for problem gambling referrals in New South Wales. It is the first survey, since the transition to High Performance Health, in which the proportion of referrals can be

compared unambiguously with that achieved by the Addiction Research Institute. Table 4 shows the referral source categories for all problem gamblers treated in a one-week period or with appointments for the following week.
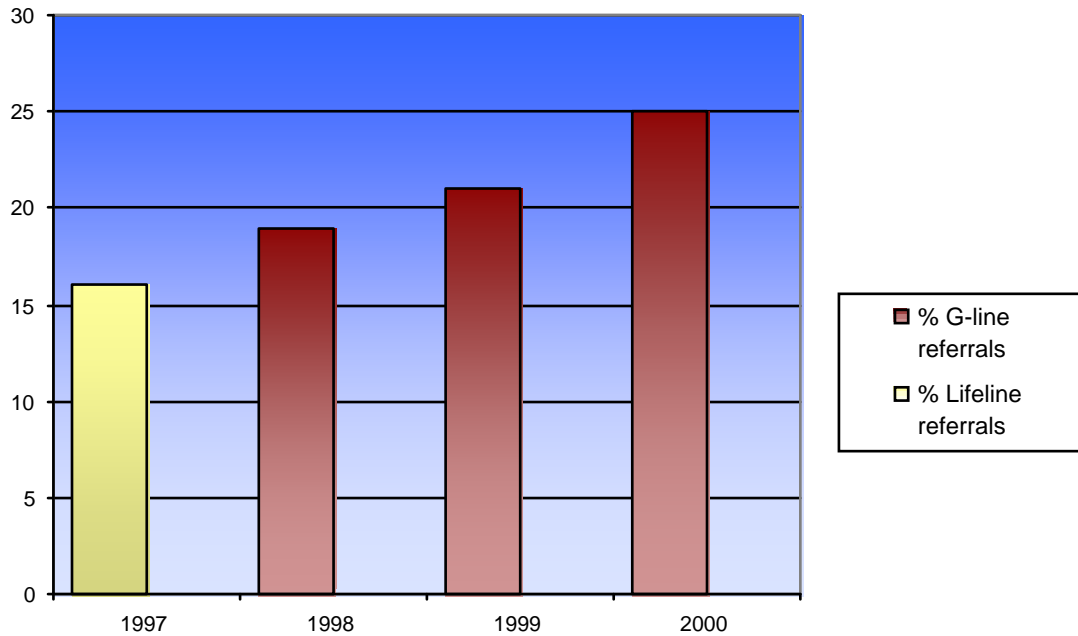
Table 4:

Source of referral for all clients treated in a seven-day period in 2000

Source of Referral	Last Seven Days		Next Seven Days	
	N	%	N	%
Telephone Referral				
G-line	174	25	68	28
Lifeline	8	1	6	2
Total	182	26	74	30
Gambling Related Agencies				
Another gambling agency	40	6	9	4
Gambling industry	16	2	6	2
Total	56	8	15	6
Non-Gambling Agencies				
Medical	55	8	15	6
Parole service	15	2	10	4
Legal agent	7	1	5	2
Church	1	<1	4	2
Another non-gambling agency	45	7	6	2
Total	123	18	40	16
Advertising				
Advertising	54	8	21	9
Telephone books	20	3	9	4
Total	74	11	30	13
Individuals				
Self	62	9	14	6
Family or friends	84	12	25	10
Another client of the agency	10	1	3	1
Total	156	22	42	17
Other	28	4	8	3
Not known	67	10	37	15
Number of problem gamblers	686	100	246	100

G-Line referrals make up 25% of all referrals for the last seven days and 28% of all referrals for the next seven days. Figure 3 shows the comparison of referrals through G-Line in 2000 with those in the previous two years. The value for 1997, prior to the initiation of the G-Line service is for Lifeline, which at that time, was the primary telephone referral agency.

Figure 3: G-line referrals expressed as a percentage of all referrals

Analysis of Residential Addresses of Problem Gamblers in Treatment

Table 5:
Numbers of problem gamblers from regions across NSW

Geographic Region	N 686	%
Sydney	362	65
Rural	197	35
Central West	8	1
Hunter	62	11
Illawarra	34	6
Mid North Coast	14	3
Murray	10	2
Murimbidgee	19	3
North Western	16	3
Northern	2	<1
Richmond Terrace	23	4
South Eastern Lower South	9	2
Total	559	100
Unknown	43	

Interstate	4
No fixed address	7
Family members	73
Total	127
Total	**686**

Table 5 shows the numbers of problem gamblers from different regions of New South Wales and from sub-regions of Sydney, based on the definitions of regions used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It is clear that the division of clients between the rural and Sydney sectors parallels the population division.

Usage of services

Counsellors were asked to nominate the maximum number of clients that they could counsel in a week while maintaining their counselling standards. These estimates form the maximum load that the agencies can sustain and are the baseline against which usage can be measured. Figure 4 shows the percentage usage of services in Sydney and outside Sydney (Rural) across the years 1997-2000. Usage is defined as the number of clients seen in a seven day period divided by the capacity of the counsellor and expressed as a percentage.
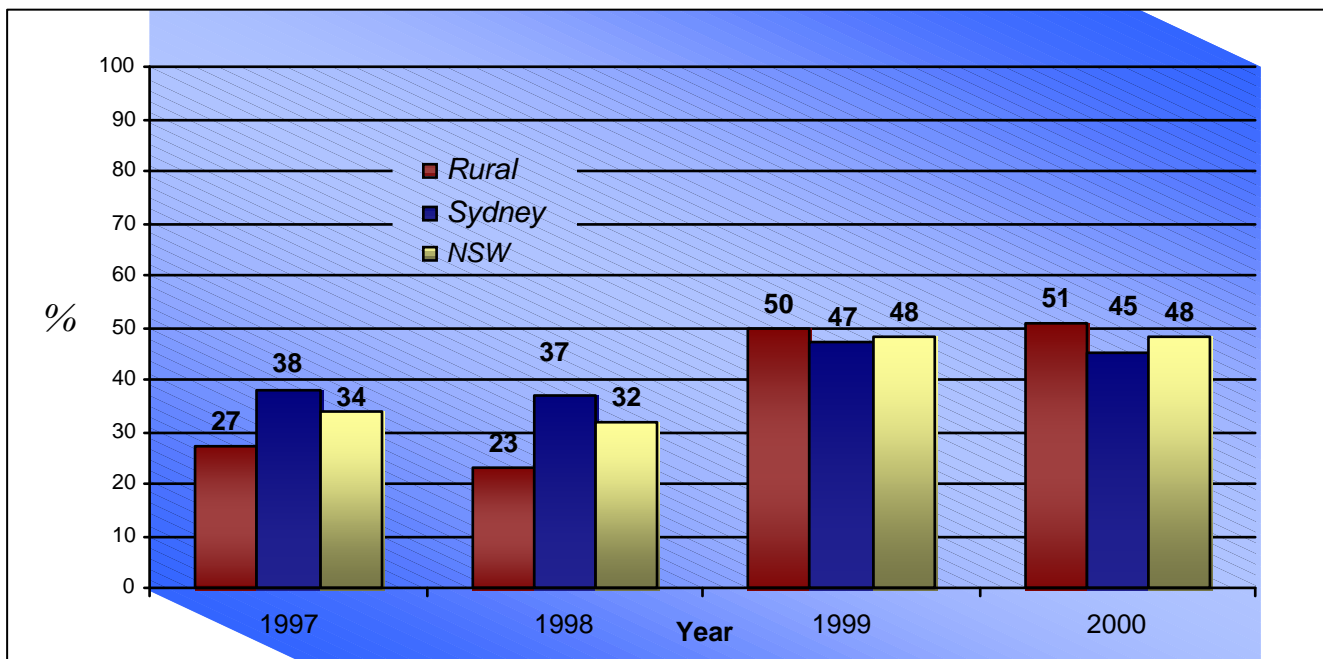

Figure 4: Usage of services across the period 1997-2000

The usage data confirms that the increased number of agencies and counsellors in 2000 continues to be matched by increasing numbers of problem gamblers and their families using those services. There is a trend towards heavier counsellor loads that is apparent over the years 1998-2000, although the trend is not marked.

Waiting Lists

After the prospective client has contacted a counsellor, it is often important that an appointment is made as soon as possible. The counsellors interviewed were asked whether, in the last week, they had been unable to make an appointment to see a prospective client because all their appointment times were full. A waiting list was defined by the prospective client having to wait more than seven days before an appointment time became available. Table 6 shows the extent to which counsellors have waiting lists compared across the years 1997-2000.

Table 6:

The presence of waiting lists for problem gambling clients

	1997	1998	1999	2000
Number of Counsellors	31	78	105	120
Counsellors with waiting lists	7	3	4	3
Number of clients waiting	22	24	9	5

References

Productivity Commission (1999), <u>Australia's Gambling Industries</u>. Report no.10, Canberra: Ausinfo

Walker, M. B. (1997). <u>Problem Gamblers Receiving Counselling or Treatment in New South Wales</u>. Report to the Casino Community Benefit Fund Trustees.

Walker, M. B. (1998). <u>Problem Gamblers Receiving Counselling or Treatment in New South Wales</u>: Second Survey. Report to the Casino Community Benefit Fund Trustees.

Walker, M. B. (1999). <u>Problem Gamblers Receiving Counselling or Treatment in New South Wales</u>: Third Survey. Report to the Casino Community Benefit Fund Trustees.

Appendix 1

Agencies Interviewed by Telephone

Agency Name	Area of NSW	Number of Counsellors	Services Provided
Australian Arabic Welfare Centre	Lidcombe	1	a
Baptist Inner City Ministries	Darlinghurst	3	a
Beth Stone	Edgecliffe	1	a
Betsafe	Eastwood	3	a
Bridge House	Wickham	1	a
Carlingford Counselling Services	Carlingford	1	a
Centacare Catholic Family Services	Blacktown	4	a
Central Coast Problem Gambling Service	Woy Woy	3	a
Cessnock Family Support Service	Cessnock	1	a
Christian Community Aid Service Inc	West Ryde	2	a
Coastwide Community Services	Gosford	2	a
Creditline Financial Counselling Service	Narellan	2	a
Gambler's Helpline Inc.	Berkeley	1	a
Greek Welfare Centre	Newtown	1	a
Lao Community Advancement NSW Cooperative	Cabramatta	1	a
Life Activities Inc	Newcastle	2	a, b
Lifeline Central West	Bathurst	2	a, b
Lifeline Central West	Dubbo	1	a, b

Lifeline Northern Rivers	Lismore	1	a
Lifeline Western Sydney	Parramatta	2	a, b

Maryfields Day Recovery	Campbelltown	4	A
Mission Australia Nowra	Nowra	4	a, b
Monaro Crisis Accomodation Service Inc.	Cooma	1	a
Newcastle City Mission	Newcastle	2	a
Northern Sydney Health Gambling Counselling Service	Hornsby	1	a
NSW Indo-China Chinese Association	Canley Vale	2	a
Odyssey House McGrath Foundation	Sydney City	1	a
Odyssey House, Minto	Minto	1	a
Port Macquarie Neighbourbood Centre Inc	Port Macquarie	1	a, b
Queanbeyan Problem Gambling Services	Queanbeyan	1	a
Relationships Australia Newcastle	Hamilton	1	a
Riverina Gambling Service	Wagga Wagga	2	a, b
Salvation Army, Youth Crisis Service	Wickham	2	a
Salvation Army William Booth Institute	Surry Hills	13	a
St David's Care	Albury	2	a, b
St Edmund's Private Hospital	Eastwood	3	a
St John of God Hospital	Burwood	1	a
St Saviour's Neighbourhood Centre	Goulburn	3	a, b
St Vincent de Paul Society GAME	East Sydney	3	a, b
St Vincent Hospital Ltd	Darlinghurst	2	
Society of St Vincent de Paul, Freeman House	Armidale	1	a

South Pacific Private Hospital	Harbord	1	a
The Northern Rivers Gambling Service	Bangalow	2	a
The University of Sydney Gambling Treatment Clinic	Sydney	2	a
Vietnamese Community in Australia-NSW Chapter Inc	Cabramatta	1	a
Wagga Wagga Family Support Service Inc Best Bet Counselling	Wagga Wagga	2	a, b
Waverly Action for Bondi Youth Services (WAYS)	Bondi	1	a
Wesley Gambling Counselling Services	Chippendale	8	a, b, c
Wesley Gambling Counselling Services	Penrith	4	a, b
Wesley Legal Counselling Services	Chippendale	4	c
Wesley Mission Central Coast	Tuggerah	2	d
Wollongong City Mission	Wollongong	4	a, b
Woodrising Neighbourhood Centre	Woodrising	2	a, b

Key to Appendix 1

a = 'addiction counselling' which refers to counselling which is primarily concerned with helping the client to cut back or stop gambling;

b = 'financial counselling' which refers to counselling which is primarily concerned with resolving the financial problems caused by excessive gambling;

c = 'legal services' which refer to services primarily concerned with providing legal advice and providing the client with assessments for legal purposes;

d = 'relationship counselling' which refers to counselling where the client is not the problem gambler, but a family member or friend of the gambler;

Appendix 2

Telephone Interview Questions

Name of Service Provider: _____

Date of interview: _____

Phone   _____   Fax _____

Employment hours   _____

Section a

Gamblers Currently Receiving Treatment
(Last 7 days; kept appointment/'phone/self-help)

___ / ___ / ___ to ___ / ___ / ___

	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Source of referral	Counselling Service	Type of gambling	Category of gambler	Attend other agency?	Post code
1.									
2.									
3.									
4.									
5.									
6.									
7.									
8.									
9.									
10.									
11.									
12.									
13.									

NB: Validation required, e.g., log or other record.

Section b

Gamblers Currently Receiving Treatment

(Next 7 days; appointments only)

___ / ___ / ___ to ___ / ___ / ___

	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Source of referral	Counselling Service	Type of gambling	Category of gambler	Attend other agency?	Post code
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____
10.	_____
11.	_____
12.	_____
13.	_____

<u>NB</u>:   Validation required, e.g., record of appointment in diary.

Section c

Case Load, Capacity and Length of Waiting List

*   How many gamblers are you currently treating (estimate)?

         (i.e. -what is your current case load?)   N= _____

*   What is your capacity in terms of the maximum number of problem gamblers that you can treat per week to the standards that you set for yourself?

*   What is the capacity in terms of the maximum number of problem gamblers that your agency can treat adequately per week?

Gamblers Currently on Waiting List N = ___

Number of days since they asked for treatment until today =

         1. ___   2. ___   3. ___   4. ___   5. ___