



29<sup>th</sup> May 2008

### **ASSISTANCE FOR GPs TO IDENTIFY PROBLEM GAMBLERS**

An innovative professional development program that will help doctors identify and assist problem gamblers at an early stage will be launched throughout Victoria next month.

The Solutions for Problem Gambling (SPG) Program represents an expansion of existing gambling resource kits for GPs and will markedly improve the capacity of the State's 6000 GPs to more quickly identify and help patients with problems related to gambling.

The basis of the new program is the *Problem Gambling Resource Kit: A guide for health and welfare workers who encounter problem gambling issues*, which has been expanded to include additional education and training for GPs, as well as strategies that will ensure improved service delivery to clients.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Melbourne General Practice Network, Debra Goldfinch, said today that around 1.12 per cent of Australians experienced problems due to their gambling habits.

"Problem gambling is characterised by difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling, which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others - such as family and friends - and often for the wider community," she said.

"GPs can play an essential role in the early identification of gambling problems, as well as in the identification of those with problems of long-standing. On that basis, it is important that GPs are equipped with all the resources and information they need in order to make early, effective referrals and any other interventions deemed necessary."

Ms Goldfinch said there were "a few key signs" that might indicate a patient has an underlying gambling problem requiring action/intervention by a GP. These included:

- a need by a patient to frequently seek unexplained emergency financial assistance;
- seemingly poor health and nutrition;
- complaints about unexplained stress, anxiety, or sleeplessness;
- on-going financial problems that cannot be logically explained;
- relationship issues;
- feelings of guilt related to mood swings, anger or frustration vented on their family, or friends;
- issues relating to parental neglect - e.g. children left home alone, or older children taking on parental responsibilities.

The new GPs resource kit contains information about all aspects of problem gambling and covers all sections of the community. It also deals with gambling problems as they relate specifically to gender and adolescence.

Anyone requiring help to ensure that they gamble responsibly can access the **Gambler's HELP Line - 1800 156 789. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free and confidential.**

For further information please contact:

Debra Goldfinch 0417 581 341 or Stacey Ramage 0449 128 911