

# MEDIA RELEASE

## **More pokies for Bendigo ... faith-based organisations are not cheering**

**Bendigo, Monday 7 June 2010:** Recent auctions of poker machine licences held by the State Government will result in local businesses purchasing more poker machine for operation within the City of Greater Bendigo.

A group of faith-based social service agencies have joined together to voice their concerns about the potential social impacts to the local community of a greater number of poker machines.

St Luke's Anglicare, Salvation Army, BaptistCare, Centrecare and Uniting Care all agree there is strong evidence that the social disadvantage and economic loss to the community does not justify any increased recreational benefits from additional machines.

### **So how much are we losing and what are the economic consequences?**

In 2008/2009 people living in Bendigo fed just under \$47 million dollars into local poker machines, the equivalent of \$617 for every adult in our community.

This is \$47million that did not go into the local community or into local business cash registers, with the exception of the gambling venues.

In the same year our spending on poker machines increased by 7.4 per cent and our unemployment rate increase significantly.

Whereas every dollar spent in a local shop actually brings multiple benefits to the community (employment, rates, goods), every dollar spent on a poker machine at best only return 10 cents to the player and the community in the form of grants and employment.

Gambling is generally funded by reducing spending on essential goods and services.

One-third of people identify reducing the household grocery budget to cover the losses, so the local butcher, baker, supermarkets, fruit and vegetable suppliers also suffer the losses.

### **New machines bring new social problems.**

But it's the social impact on the gambler and their families that most concerns the agencies.

The persistent loss of relatively small amounts of money for people on low and fixed incomes may lead to financial difficulties and seriously impacts the family unit, resulting in family breakdown, declining health and increased stress.

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Research tells us that the families most likely to suffer as a result of the additional pokies are those that live within relatively close proximity to the venues.

Convenience, living within two kilometres of a venue, does increase the probability of individuals experiencing gambling related problems.

News of a proposed increase in machines at venues such as the Bendigo Sports Centre (formerly the Schweppes Centre) is not a welcome change and is also inconsistent with the City of Greater Bendigo's Gambling Policy which states that new machines should not be located near low socio-economic suburbs or community centres.

A recent survey in Bendigo found that 80 per cent of local residents believe there are already enough poker machines in our community.

These Bendigo faith-based social service agencies encourage the City of Greater Bendigo to hold firm on its policy.

This group will continue to research the impact of gambling problems in our community and continue to advocate through submissions to council and the Victorian gambling regulatory bodies to reduce harm in our community as a result of electronic gaming machines.

**For further information regarding this statement please contact David Pugh at St Luke's Anglicare, phone 5444 1100.**