

Demand for Gambler's Help Southern Services Continues to Grow

Manager Chris Freethy talks about issues facing Gambler's Help Southern

Demand for Service

The service has continued to experience strong demand for appointments and persistent waiting lists throughout the year. Counselling waiting lists have not dropped below 50 people, whilst Financial Counselling waiting lists are growing consistently and generally exceed 20. This number is anticipated to blow out in the coming year. Actual waiting times vary, but popular time slots such as late afternoon and evening can be unavailable for a number of months.

Funding

All Gambler's Help services are lobbying government to address a shortfall in funding caused by larger than usual salary increases. So far these efforts have been unsuccessful, resulting in the neighbouring metropolitan service shedding staff. Gambler's Help Southern is able to maintain current resources for now, but will also face reductions in future. On a more positive note, we were recently given \$10,000 to assist with waiting list reduction in recognition of the pressures facing the service. We also recently met with Minister Garbutt to discuss these funding issues, and the Minister agreed that funding for southern region required further consideration.

Appointment System and Intake

We have continued to develop our central intake and appointment system in an effort to ensure it is as efficient and user friendly as possible. Phase two of implementation has seen us move to a real time project based calendar which all counsellors and financial counsellors can access. Staff log onto a secure section of our server and enter all ongoing appointments, while our intake worker adds new appointments. In this way, the service is constantly updating availability information, allowing the best possible response to callers. Our aim is to have no unfilled appointment slots within a two week window, though at times this can be challenging where callers are difficult to re-contact.

IRIS

In January, we hope to implement the new IRIS database developed by the Department of Human Services. The main advantage for our service will be instant access to client demographic data, where in the past we have had to request selected data reports from the Department. This data is in increasing demand, particularly by local governments faced with gaming venue planning applications. It is also of great value in service planning.

Community Education and Development

Community education and development staff have been increasingly proactive in targeting prevention and early intervention activities. Basic gambling awareness and education, whilst still valuable, are recognised as inadequate on their own to ensure gambling impacts are reduced. These approaches need to be supplemented by more fundamental interventions that significantly impact on the minimisation of gambling related harm. We also understand that most people impacted by gambling will not seek treatment, and need to be offered alternatives that assist in more effective self management. Service staff would be more than happy to explain the innovative approaches we are now adopting to address these needs in our community.