



Community Attitudes to Poker Machines and Gambling Reform Analysis Report

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Executive Summary

Wesley Mission, in partnership with FastTracker, routinely surveys adults in NSW to evaluate their views on reducing gambling harm. Three surveys have been conducted thus far. The first, an online survey with 1,000 participants, took place from April 18-23, 2023. The second survey, conducted in October 2023, involved 1,007 respondents. The most recent, another online survey with 1,007 participants, occurred from April 19-21, 2024.

Key Insights

- 1. Personal impact of gambling harm:** 30% of respondents know someone harmed by gambling on poker machines, underlining the widespread personal impact of gambling. As a result of our work in continuing to highlight the levels of harm in the community, more and more people are realising it is likely they do know someone who has been harmed, but are not sure if it's the case due to the stigma associated with acknowledging gambling problems.
- 2. Broad support for gambling reform initiatives:**
 - a) Operational restrictions:** An overwhelming 83% of respondents support switching off poker machines between midnight and 10am, highlighting a critical area of focus to reduce gambling harm. This figure has remained steadily high over the last two surveys.
 - b) Cashless gambling cards:** While around a third of NSW residents, over the three surveys to date, consider a mandatory card with harm minimisation features to be the best intervention by the government, the number of those supporting midnight – 10am closing is increasing. It is unclear if this is due to industry attempts to portray the card as ineffective, or the result of increasing focus on the dangers of late-night gambling.
- 3. Regional differences in reform preferences:** When considering the best intervention, from a choice of actions, regional areas show the highest support (32.8%) for switching off poker machines from midnight to 10am, while Inner Metropolitan regions favour cashless cards (31.5%).
- 4. Declining trust in government commitment:** Trust in the NSW government to oppose the gambling industry has fallen since we commenced the survey, and is now down to 28%, with distrust rising to 72%, indicating significant public concern over government actions and transparency. These results are worse, for the government, than the consistent 60% of people who think the gambling lobby has too much influence on NSW politics.
- 5. Gambling industry efforts to delay reform:** It may be too soon to tell, but changes in some of the results could be the result of in-house and generic messaging from pubs and clubs to undermine support for significant reform. This trend might be seen in the decrease in numbers identifying mandatory cashless gambling as the best intervention, and the increase in support for clubs to use poker machine profits for operational purposes as well as an increase in the number of people who would attend a venue with poker machines. There is no doubt that the level of support for FRT is underpinned by general attitudes of “surveillance realism” and “digital resignation” where people assume that data is always being gathered, but hope that it is protected (we discuss this in detail in [our discussion paper on FRT on our website](#)).

Survey findings

Three cross-sectional surveys were conducted in April 2023, October 2023, and April 2024, each involving approximately 1,000 adults from NSW.

PART 1: Demographic Insights

Sample characteristics

The samples across the three waves are comparable with minor demographic shifts, as shown in the **Table 1** below:

Characteristics	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
<i>Totals (n)</i>	1,007	1,000	1,007
Gender			
<i>Male</i>	49.3	48.8	46.8
<i>Female</i>	50.5	51.2	53.0
Age distribution			
<i>18-24</i>	12.0	11.1	10.0
<i>25-34</i>	19.1	18.0	19.5
<i>35-44</i>	17.1	17.6	16.2
<i>45-54</i>	16.5	16.3	18.1
<i>55-64</i>	14.9	15.1	15.1
<i>65+</i>	20.5	21.9	21.0
Education			
<i>School</i>	24	23.2	23.4
<i>Trade/TAFE</i>	27.3	28.5	28.8
<i>University</i>	48.7	48.3	47.8
Income			
<i>Less than \$70,000</i>	36.7	36.2	35.7
<i>\$70,000K to \$160,000</i>	45.4	46.1	45.0
<i>\$160,000 or more</i>	17.9	17.7	19.3
Voting preferences			
<i>Labor Party</i>	41.3	40.1	34.5
<i>Liberal Party</i>	28.0	28.6	29.7
<i>Greens</i>	10.5	10.3	10.4
<i>Independent</i>	5.9	6.2	6.3
<i>One Nation</i>	4.1	4.0	5.9
<i>Nationals</i>	3.3	3.7	3.8
<i>Other</i>	1.2	1.5	3.1
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	5.8	5.6	6.3
Region*			
<i>Inner city of Sydney</i>	37.5	37.4	35.3
<i>Outer suburbs of Sydney</i>	28.2	29.5	21.6
<i>Other major city (e.g. Newcastle)</i>	11.5	11.9	-
<i>Regional</i>	19.1	17.5	23.0
<i>Rural</i>	3.7	3.7	20.1

*Note: *In the 2024 dataset, the 'region' variable options were updated to: inner metropolitan, outer metropolitan, provincial and rural areas.*

Key voting insights

Education and voting preferences: Education and age significantly influence voting preferences, as shown in Table 2. The data reveals distinct patterns across demographic segments, highlighting the need for campaigns to craft targeted strategies that resonate with specific voter groups.

Table 2: Voter preferences by age and education level, April 2024

April.2024 n=1,007	Vote	Labor Party (%)	Greens (%)	Liberal Party (%)	One Nation (%)	Other (%)	Nationals (%)	Independent (%)	Prefer not to say (%)	Totals (%)
Education	Age									
School	18-24	2.5	12.8	1.0	3.2	6.1		3.0	9.1	3.6
	25-34	1.7	3.7	0.6	6.5	9.1		1.5	4.5	2.2
	35-44	2.8	1.8	1.0		3.0	5.0		7.6	2.2
	45-54	3.9	1.8	3.5	6.5	6.1	2.5	4.5	6.1	3.9
	55-64	5.8	0.9	3.8	4.8	12.1	5.0	3.0	4.5	4.6
	65+	6.1	1.8	9.9	1.6	6.1	5.0	12.1	7.6	7.0
Trade/TAFE	18-24	1.4	5.5	1.3	1.6			3.0	3.0	1.9
	25-34	3.6	6.4	1.9	3.2	3.0	7.5	9.1	7.6	4.1
	35-44	3.0	2.8	5.1	11.3	9.1	2.5	6.1	7.6	4.8
	45-54	5.8	0.9	4.5	17.7		2.5	7.6	6.1	5.4
	55-64	7.5	6.4	5.1	3.2	3.0	2.5	1.5	6.1	5.6
	65+	5.8	2.8	8.3	9.7	3.0	25.0	7.6	1.5	7.0
University	18-24	4.1	9.2	4.8	1.6		5.0	3.0	3.0	4.5
	25-34	13.3	17.4	15.1	4.8	9.1	10.0	13.6	9.1	13.2
	35-44	9.9	9.2	10.3	11.3	3.0	7.5	9.1	3.0	9.2
	45-54	10.8	8.3	8.3	6.5	15.2		4.5	9.1	8.8
	55-64	6.9	4.6	3.8		3.0	5.0	9.1	1.5	5.0
	65+	5.2	3.7	11.5	6.5	9.1	15.0	1.5	3.0	7.1

Voter preferences and perceived weakness on gambling reform:

Public perception remains largely consistent, identifying Labor and Liberal parties as the weakest on gambling reform.

Table 3: Party (Q12. Which party is weakest on gambling reform?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Greens	10	9	10
Independent	4	5	4
Labor Party	25	26	23
Liberal Party	26	23	24
Nationals	5	5	6
One Nation	6	6	8
Other (specify)	4	5	6
Prefer not to say	21	22	19

PART 2: Perceptions on Government Interventions

Support for gambling reforms

Table 4: Gambling reforms (Q5. What would be the best intervention by the government?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Mandatory cashless gambling card	32	36	29
Midnight closing for poker machine venues	22	27	28
Negative sound/silence mandate for poker machines	10	7	7
Simplifying self-exclusion	10	11	13
Opposition to government intervention	8	9	10
Cashless gaming trial	7	n/a	n/a
Local Council Involvement	7	7	8
Other (please specify)	4	5	4

Note: ** Wesley Mission did not seek access to the suggestions under "Other".

Cashless gambling card

About a third of respondents continue to support a mandatory cashless gambling card for all venues with loss limits as the best intervention by the government. In October 2023, support stood at 36%, while slightly decreased to 29% by April 2024. Despite this decline, it remains a significant preference, highlighting the need for further exploration.

Operational hours for poker machines

Support for closing poker machine venues from midnight to 10am remains very high. This should be coupled with the 28% of respondents who considered this the best intervention, showing a strong mandate for government regulatory change.

Table 5: Opinion (Q20. Should poker machines be switched off between midnight and 10am?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
No	-	18	17
Yes	-	82	83

PART 3: General Awareness and Perceptions

Shifting public concerns

The study has highlighted changing public priorities regarding pressing social issues, as follows:

Table 6: Social issue (Q1. Most pressing social issue?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Domestic violence	36	29	45
Social inequality	23	23	20
Illegal drug abuse	16	16	15

Table 6: Social issue (Q1. Most pressing social issue?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Racism	8	13	8
Gambling/poker machines	11	12	7
Alcohol addiction	6	7	5

These trends reflect major public debates at the times of the surveys.

Frequency of gambling on poker machines

Respondents were asked about their frequency of gambling on poker machines. The results were:

Table 7: Frequency (Q2. How often do you gamble on poker machines?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Never	47	49	47
Less than once per year	21	21	20
Several times per year	20	18	19
More than once a month	9	8	11
More than once a week	3	4	3

Participation frequency in gambling on poker machines has remained relatively stable. The majority of respondents either never gamble (47%) or do so less than once per year (20%).

Perceptions of poker machine fairness

Respondents' perceptions of poker machine unfairness remain extremely high, at nearly 90%.

Table 8: Perception (Q3. When it comes probability of winning, are poker machines fair?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
No	89	89	89
Yes	12	11	11

Awareness of cashless gambling trial

Rather than commit to a roll out of a mandatory cashless payment system with harm minimisation measures, the current government announced it would undertake a six-month cashless gambling trial in NSW. The trial will include at least 4000 of the state's 87,000 poker machines, with a mix of pubs and clubs across NSW.

Table 9: Awareness (Q6. Were you aware of this cashless gambling trial?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Yes	47	40	45
No	53	60	55

Support for cashless gambling measures

In October 2023 this question was “Should the NSW government abandon the trial of cashless gambling on poker machines and instead commit now to the full implementation of a cashless system with daily, weekly and yearly loss limits?”

In April 2024 the question changed slightly to “Rather than just trialing cashless gambling on poker machines to see whether they may introduce it, should the government commit now to the full implementation of a cashless system with daily, weekly and yearly loss limits and just use the trial to test the technology is ready?”

Table 10: Opinion (Q7.Should the government instead implement cashless machines across the state, with loss limits?)	April 2023 (%) n/a	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Yes	-	54.9	54.6
No	-	45.1	45.4

This consistent level of support, combined with a mandatory cashless system with harm minimisation measures remaining the lead suggestion for best intervention by the government, underscores a significant public endorsement for cashless gambling measures as a means to minimise gambling losses.

Public trust and confidence in government’s stance on gambling, in the context of gambling industry influence

Respondents were asked a number of questions related to influence over public policy and the degree to which they felt the government would act.

Table 11: Trust in government (Q14. Do you trust the government to stand up to the gambling industry?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Yes	35	31	28
No	65	70	72

Table 12: Confidence in government (Q8. Are you confident that the NSW Government is fully committed to addressing gambling harm? [in the context of the cashless gambling trial])	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Yes	46	33	44
No	54	67	57

Table 13: Influence on NSW Politics (Q10. Does the gambling lobby have too much influence on NSW politics?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Yes	66	65	64
No	34	36	36

Table 14: Influence on NSW Labor Party (Q11. Does the gambling lobby have too much influence on NSW Labor?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Yes	60	62	61
No	40	38	40

Interestingly, while the findings on influence are roughly similar, with around two thirds of respondents thinking the industry has too much influence, their opinions on whether the government is committed to harm reduction is slightly better than this (57% yes:44% no) but much worse on trusting the government to stand up to the industry (28% yes: 72% no). Overall, it is clear from the four questions the public have little faith that the government will resist industry lobbying.

Key influential actors on NSW gambling policy

Respondents were asked who they believe has the strongest say on gambling policy in NSW.

Table 15: Influential groups (Q13. Who has the strongest say on gambling policy in NSW?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Industry lobby	33	33	36
Citizens/voters	26	25	24
Politicians	25	23	24
Media	10	10	9
Academics and reform advocates	7	9	7

The industry lobby is consistently viewed as having the strongest influence on gambling policy in NSW, with its perceived influence increasing from 33% in April 2023 to 36% in April 2024. The perceived influence of citizens and voters has slightly decreased from 26% to 24%, suggesting people feel they have less say in the process, although reassuringly perhaps, they see themselves as more influential than the media or reform advocates.

Preferred names for gambling awareness week:

In 2020, the government rebranded the gambling help services in NSW as GambleAware, including renaming the awareness week from Responsible Gambling Awareness Week to GambleAware Week. Other jurisdictions in Australia have either Gambling Harm Awareness Week or Safer Gambling Week (Qld). We are interested in the public's opinion and while Gambling Harm and Responsible Gambling have roughly similar levels of support, GambleAware and Safer Gambling Week resonant far less.

Table 16: Preferred name (Q21. What do you think the best name should be for [the annual awareness week for gambling harm])	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Gambling Harm Awareness Week	36	33
Responsible Gambling Awareness Week	33	35
GambleAware Week	19	21
Safer Gambling Week	12	11

PART 4: Personal and Social Impact

Awareness of harm from poker machines

When we introduced the “Don’t know” option to the survey in October 2023, we immediately saw a drop in the number of people who were certain the answer was “No”. That has fallen even further in this survey, although we will need to ask addition questions in future to determine if the “Don’t know” figure represents uncertainty about whether others have been harmed, or uncertainty about knowing someone who has been harmed. Regardless, it is clear that messaging from advocates and government about the widespread nature of gambling harm is changing public awareness.

Table 17: Awareness of harm (Q9. Do you have a colleague, family member or friend who has been harmed by gambling on poker machines?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Yes	31	33	30
No	69	54	38
Don’t know	-	14	32

Sentiment around club operations

Respondents were asked if not-for-profit clubs should rely on poker machines to fund their running costs. In the first two surveys “not-for-profit” was not included in the question. We will need to undertake further research to determine if that phrase lies behind the very significant increase in support for poker machines funding operational costs, or whether the industry’s campaigns, such as “I love my club” are influencing public opinion. The fall in opposition to visiting venues with poker machines suggests the latter.

Table 18: Funding source (Q16. Should not-for-profit clubs rely on poker machines to fund running costs?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
No	79	72	57
Yes	21	28	43

Note: *In April 2024, the term “not-for-profit” was added before “clubs” in the survey question.

Respondents were asked if they are more likely to visit venues with or without poker machines. The results were:

Table 19: Venue preference (Q15. Are you more likely to visit venues with or without poker machines?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Clubs without poker machines	67	69	60
Clubs with poker machines	33	31	40

Facial recognition technology in pubs and clubs

This question was prefaced by the following information: *In 2023 the NSW government committed to introduce mandatory Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) in all pubs and clubs across NSW. FRT can match a human face from a digital image or video frame against a database of faces. The use of FRT has raised privacy concerns in jurisdictions where it has been used.*

While definite lack of support trails support opinions, the significant number of people who are unsure or who have mixed feelings should tell policy makers that this technology is not acceptable in NSW.

Table 20: Opinion (Q17. Feelings towards facial recognition in pubs and clubs?)	April 2023 (%)	October 2023 (%)	April 2024 (%)
Strongly support	-	23	21
Supportive	-	20	20
Mixed feelings	-	19	22
Concerned	-	11	14
Strongly opposed	-	13	9
Unsure	-	14	14
Summary			
Support (strong+support)	-	43	41
Neutral (unsure+mixed feelings)	-	33	36
No support (concerned+strong)	-	24	23

Appendix
Study questionnaire

Community Attitudes to Poker Machines in NSW – April 2024

1. Gender (standard)
2. Age (standard)
3. State (Screen out all other than NSW)
4. Region
 - a. Inner city of Capital city (e.g., Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane)
 - b. Outer suburbs of Capital city (e.g., Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane)
 - c. Other major city (e.g., Newcastle, Geelong, Gold Coast)
 - d. Regional
 - e. Rural
5. Please enter your postcode (number entry)
6. Please select which political party you identify with most?
 - Greens
 - Labor Party
 - Liberal Party
 - Nationals
 - One Nation
 - Independent
 - Other (Please specify)
 - Prefer not to say
7. What is your highest level of education?
 - School
 - Trade/TAFE
 - University
8. What is your annual household income?
 - less than \$70,000
 - \$70,000k to \$160,000
 - \$160,000 or more

=====QUESTION=====

1. What do you think is the most pressing social issue from the list below? (randomised, single selection)
 - a. Domestic violence
 - b. Illegal drug abuse
 - c. Alcohol addiction
 - d. Gambling/poker machines
 - e. Social inequality
 - f. Racism
2. How often do you gamble on poker machines?
 - a. More than once a week
 - b. More than once a month
 - c. Several times per year
 - d. Less than once per year
 - e. Never
3. When it comes to the probability of winning money, do you think poker machines are fair?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Do you think the NSW government is doing enough for poker machine and gambling reform?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5. What do you think would be the best intervention by the government? (randomised, single selection)
 - a. Introduce a mandatory cashless gambling card for all venues with daily, weekly and yearly loss limits.
 - b. Require all poker machines to be switched off from midnight until 10am.
 - c. Require poker machines to be silent
 - d. Make it simpler for people to self-exclude from all poker machine venues in the state instead of the current maximum of just 36 venues.
 - e. Let local Councils have more of a say about extra poker machines being introduced into their area.
 - f. No need for intervention by the government
 - g. Other (please specify)

The NSW government has commenced a six-month cashless gambling trial in New South Wales. The trial will include at least 4000 of the state's 87,000 poker machines, with a mix of pubs and clubs across NSW.

6. Were you aware of this cashless gambling trial?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Rather than just trialling cashless gambling on poker machines to see whether that may introduce it, should the government commit now to the full implementation of a cashless system with daily, weekly and yearly loss limits and just use the trial to test the technology is ready?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Are you confident that the NSW government is fully committed to addressing gambling harm?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Do you have a colleague, family member or friend who has been harmed by gambling on poker machines?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
10. Do you believe the gambling lobby has too much influence on NSW politics?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. Do you believe the gambling lobby has too much influence on the NSW Labor Party?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
12. Which political party/grouping do you believe is weakest on gambling reform?
 - a. Greens
 - b. Labor Party
 - c. Liberal Party
 - d. Nationals
 - e. One Nation
 - f. Independent
 - g. Other (Please specify)
 - h. Prefer not to say
13. Who do you believe has the strongest say on gambling policy in NSW?
 - a. industry lobby

- b. citizens/voters
- c. politicians
- d. academics and reform advocates
- e. media

14. Do you trust the government to stand up to the gambling industry?

- a. Yes
- b. No

15. Are you more likely to visit venues with or without poker machines?

- a. With poker machines
- b. Without poker machines

16. Should not-for-profit clubs rely on poker machines to fund running costs?

- a. Yes
- b. No

In 2023 the NSW government committed to introduce mandatory Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) in all pubs and clubs across NSW. FRT can match a human face from a digital image or video frame against a database of faces. The use of FRT has raised privacy concerns in jurisdictions where it has been used.

17. How would you feel about the introduction of Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) into all pubs and clubs?

- I believe FRT in pubs and clubs would greatly enhance security and I fully support it (= strongly supportive)
- I think FRT could be beneficial for safety reasons and generally support its introduction (= supportive)
- I am uncertain about the benefits and potential drawbacks of FRT in pubs and clubs (= mixed feelings/neutral)
- I have some reservations about privacy and misuse of data, but I can see some benefits in the use of FRT. (= concerned)
- I believe FRT in pubs and clubs is an invasion of privacy and strongly oppose its use. (= strongly opposed)
- I don't know enough about FRT to form an opinion. (= unsure)

18. Have you noticed that venues in NSW have taken down their external poker machine-related signage?

- a. Yes
- b. No

19. Given the absence of this external signage, are you:

- a. More likely to enter a venue to gamble on poker machines?
- b. Less likely to enter a venue to gamble on poker machines?
- c. The signage does not influence my decision.
- d. I do not gamble on poker machines.

20. Research suggests that gambling after midnight is associated with a higher risk of harm. Do you support a proposal for all poker machine to be switched off from midnight until 10am?

- a. Yes
- b. No

21. Like many issues, there is an annual awareness week for gambling harm. What do you think the best name should be for that week:

- a. Responsible Gambling Awareness Week
- b. Gambling Harm Awareness Week
- c. GambleAware week
- d. Safer Gambling Week