

International Advisory Panel to National Addictions Management Centre and National Council on Problem Gambling

Report of the Inaugural Meeting 5-7 December 2007, Singapore

1. The Inaugural Meeting of the International Advisory Panel (IAP) for the National Addictions Management Centre (NAMC) and the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) was held on 5-7 December 2007 in Singapore. The IAP was set up jointly by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) to advise MOH and NCPG on prevention and control strategies required to address problem gambling and other addictions including drug, alcohol and behavioral addiction.

2. The IAP's Terms of Reference include:
- i. share insights on global trends and highlight critical issues in measures to address problem gambling and harmful addictions;
 - ii. advise on how problem gambling and addictions prevention, management and treatment measures could be developed and improved in Singapore;
 - iii. advise on research areas on problem gambling and addictions; and
 - iv. advise on the infrastructural, manpower and clinical development of the proposed NAMC.

I. Global Trends and Measures to address Problem Gambling and Harmful Addictions

3. Key global trends observed by the IAP members include:
- a. increase in number of gaming venues and opportunities (e.g., Internet, mobile phones);
 - b. increase in normalisation and glamourisation of gambling;
 - c. research on and evaluation of treatment outcomes is increasingly focusing on the efficacy and extent of harm reduction and how individuals with problem gambling and their families are helped¹;
 - d. helplines are evolving in the problem gambling field to be much more than the first point of contact, and would therefore need to be considered as one element in a full spectrum of services;
 - e. focus on the importance of different factors at different stages of the treatment of addiction;
 - f. focus on the effectiveness and impact of training professionals who treat addiction problems.

4. The IAP members commended Singapore's proactive approach towards problem gambling. The IAP members advised the adoption or continuation of the following measures to address problem gambling and harmful addiction:

- a. Adopt an integrated approach in addressing problem gambling. The IAP members commended Singapore's inter-ministry approach to address problem gambling and recommended that this approach continue.

¹ Rationale is to separate the person from the problems and reduce stigma

- b. Effectiveness measures to address problem gambling could focus more on objective indicators of harm such as incidence of family violence, crime, bankruptcy, etc. related to problem gambling.
- c. Awareness and prevention services can be targeted to the general population.
- d. Build up treatment and intervention services gradually. Integrated evidence-informed treatment approaches that bring together clinicians, consumers and researchers.

II. Addressing Problem Gambling Prevention and Addictions Management and Treatment

5. The IAP emphasised the importance of preventive measures and treatment in addressing problem gambling and suggested the following:

Public Education and Prevention Strategies:

- a. Widespread dissemination of various information resources is necessary in public education on all forms of addictions.
- b. A multi-faceted and segmented approach for public education on problem gambling.
- c. Specific and targeted messages for harder-to-reach groups of the population.
- d. Involve parents, peers and role models in public education efforts for children and youth.

Helpline services and community and social service agencies

- e. Structure helplines to meet the varied needs of callers, and relate to research and evaluation to provide seamless and immediate connection to service providers.
- f. Train and help counsellors to appreciate that building rapport and engaging clients are critical in their work and to serve as an avenue for callers to access information or help services.
- g. Use multiple channels for outreach to problem gamblers and their families seeking information.
- h. Train professionals in the community on problem gambling.
- i. Educate frontline persons in the community to familiarise them with problem gambling issues and train them to identify individuals affected by problem gambling.

Problem Gambling Pilot Centres and Capability Building Framework

- j. Build capabilities in a two-pronged approach, i.e. offering learning opportunities for counsellors from the pilot centres through overseas attachments, and inviting overseas expertise to provide on-site supervision in Singapore.
- k. Collaboration between pilot centres and addiction management programmes to facilitate resource sharing, mutual capability building and skills transfer.
- l. Train senior staff in community and social service agencies to supervise staff to better identify problem gambling issues and facilitate better referrals.

Social Safeguards for Problem Gambling (For Casinos and Other Operators)

- m. Ensure a more integrated response to exclusion requests.
- n. Casinos should play an active and significant role in the practice of responsible gambling and be clear about their obligations.

III. Advice on Research on Problem Gambling and Addictions

6. The Meeting recommended the following in building up local research expertise:

- a. Identify Singapore's research competitive advantage.
- b. Establish centres of excellence for problem gambling and addiction.
- c. Encourage programmatic approach to research at both the strategic organisational level and individual researcher level. Some of the suggested initiatives include i) undergraduate/postgraduate scholarships; ii) competitive research grants; iii) multidisciplinary collaboration; iv) visiting professorships at local universities; and v) interdisciplinary teams engaging in top-tier journal/book publications.
- d. Prioritise the areas of research. Some of the suggested priority topics of research include studies on youth and other more vulnerable groups and tracking of changes in gambling-related attitudes and behaviours.

IV. Advice on a National Addictions Management Programme

7. The IAP reviewed the current addictions management programmes and suggested that issues related to process and service delivery should be reviewed. They emphasised that it is important to establish ways of developing a good match between programmes and patients.

8. In general, IAP was of the view that such national programmes has the potential to become a centre of medical excellence in treatment, training and research in gambling addiction. The IAP also made the following recommendations:

Clinical Programme

- a. The clinical programme should be based on the need for services that will evolve over time and should be evidenced-based.
- b. Facilities for adolescents and adults should be kept separate. Patients with different types of addictions should also be segregated.
- c. The feasibility of providing treatment services for pathological gambling in a community setting should also be studied.

Infrastructure & Manpower

- d. The size of the programme should be appropriate to the projected clinical load. Building manpower capabilities should start early to train adequate addiction psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors.
- e. To operationalise the programme, it is important to actively engage the clinical team and related resources to develop strategies to enhance the current

programmes and to plan for new ones, such as those for gambling and for youths.

Joint Follow-up

9. The IAP recommended that NCPG, MCYS and MOH coordinate joint follow-up actions in relevant areas including the following:

Public education and responsible gambling

- Widespread dissemination of information resources to the public.
- Casinos to play an active role in implementing and promoting responsible gambling initiatives.

3-Tier Service Framework and Capability building

- Joint training and sharing of resources to build up expertise in clinical and treatment research.
- Establish mid- to long-term plans for professional training and career management to produce a critical mass of experts for addressing problem gambling and other addictions in Singapore.

Data Collection and Research

- Increase coordination and collaboration among the various agencies involved in addictions management on data collection and evaluation.
- Enhance research capability and develop research culture on problem gambling and other addictions.

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