

Proposal 4

Gambling Reform

That the Synod of SA resolves to:

1. **ENGAGE** with the issues of gambling harm and gambling reform as a major Synod focus for 2026–2028, by **REQUESTING** the Justice, Mission and Theology (JMT) Subcommittee of the Mission and Leadership Development Board (MLDB) to establish a Gambling Reform Task Group to lead, coordinate, and support the Synod's response and implementation of this resolution;
2. **ENCOURAGE** presbyteries, congregations, and faith communities to support gambling reform activities, to participate in Gambling Harm Action Week each October, and to promote education, awareness, and pastoral support for individuals and communities experiencing gambling-related harm;
3. **ESTABLISH** a prayer network linked with the Gambling Reform prayer initiative of Wesley Mission New South Wales, recognising the pastoral and spiritual dimensions of addressing gambling harm;
4. **JOIN** the Alliance for Gambling Reform and actively participate in its coordinated advocacy and collaboration at state and national levels;
5. **ADVOCATE** in coalition with relevant community service organisations and peak bodies, to the South Australian Government for increased and better-targeted funding for services addressing gambling harm, including an integrated public health response, financial counselling, treatment and recovery services, and education initiatives, with particular attention to communities experiencing disproportionate harm.
6. **ADVOCATE** independently and through the Assembly, for a comprehensive public health response at the national level, including:
 - a. A complete ban on gambling advertising, particularly to protect children and young people; and
 - b. The establishment of a robust, well-resourced, and independent national gambling regulatory framework.

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Rationale

1. Theological Foundation

The Uniting Church in Australia understands justice advocacy as an expression of discipleship and participation in the mission of God. In Jesus Christ, God's reign is revealed as a reign of justice, reconciliation, and abundant life for all. As articulated in *Our Vision for a Just Australia*, the Church is called to be bold in love, relentless in justice, and committed to the flourishing of all people and communities.

The vision of an Economy for Life affirms that economic activity must serve human wellbeing and the common good. Industries that rely on addiction and the exploitation of vulnerability—particularly through pervasive promotion to children and young people—are incompatible with this vision. Advocacy for gambling reform is therefore both a pastoral and prophetic expression of the Church's calling: pastoral in accompanying those affected by gambling harm, and prophetic in challenging the systems and industries that profit from it.

Gambling harm stands in direct contradiction to this vision. It diminishes human dignity, fractures families and communities, and is disproportionately concentrated in communities already experiencing social and economic disadvantage—including low-socioeconomic areas of metropolitan Adelaide and a number of regional centres in South Australia. The Church therefore rejects frameworks that construe gambling harm primarily as a matter of individual responsibility or moral failure. Gambling harm is properly understood as a structural injustice, arising from economic systems, regulatory failures, and cultural practices that normalise exploitation.

2. The Evidence of Harm

Evidence demonstrates that gambling harm is widespread and continuing to grow in South Australia (Browne et al., 2025). It contributes to poverty, relationship breakdown, family and domestic violence, mental health challenges, and community fragmentation. Gambling harm affects not only those who gamble, but also partners, children, extended families, and wider communities. Research consistently identifies connections between regular gambling and significantly elevated risks of intimate partner violence, financial distress, anxiety, depression, and housing insecurity.

The Church recognises gambling harm as a public health issue and affirms it must be treated as such. A public health approach moves beyond voluntary, industry-led controls and individualised responsibility, calling instead for structural reform—including advertising restrictions, strong and independent regulation, and coordinated responses at every level of government and civil society.

3. The Funding Crisis in South Australia

Funding for gambling treatment and recovery in South Australia is critically inadequate and poorly targeted. Of the more than \$400 million received annually by the South Australian Government from gambling taxation, only approximately one percent is directed toward prevention, treatment, and recovery services (Consumer and Business Services [CBS], 2022). This is a systemic failure of public policy that the Church is called to name and challenge.

4. The Advertising Crisis and the Murphy Report

A central element of the public health crisis is the volume of gambling advertising permitted in Australia, particularly through sporting broadcasts and online platforms. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs report, *You Win Some, You Lose More: Online Gambling and Its Impacts on Those Experiencing Gambling Harm (June 2023)*—chaired by the late Peta Murphy MP—recommended a comprehensive advertising ban as a necessary public health measure.

After more than one thousand days without substantive action, the Australian Government announced partial advertising reforms in April 2026 that addressed only a small number of the report's recommendations (Albanese, Plibersek, & Wells, 2026). The Australian Medical Association has warned that partial bans are ineffective as public health measures and continue to expose Australians—particularly children—to pervasive gambling promotion (Australian Medical Association 2026, 2 April). The Church urges full implementation of the Murphy Report's recommendations.

Subsequently, on May 13, 2026, the Australian Government tabled its long-awaited formal response to the Murphy Report. The government announced AU\$112.7 million over five years in the May 2026 Budget to reduce gambling harms, including a national ban on wagering advertisements during live sports broadcasts on free-to-air TV between 6:00 am and 8:30 pm, and a cap of three wagering advertisements per hour per broadcast channel within that restricted timeslot. Gambling advertisements will be restricted during school commuting hours, and betting logos on sports uniforms and in stadiums will be banned. Of the 31 recommendations of the Murphy Report, the government partially implemented three and only noted the rest. Advocates remain determined that these reforms do not go far enough to decrease gambling harm.

5. The Regulatory Crisis

Regulation of the approximately \$50 billion gambling industry in Australia remains fragmented and inadequate. Most online gambling operators are registered in the Northern Territory, where oversight is carried out by a small, part-time authority with limited national reach. Australia continues to record the highest gambling losses per capita in the world (Queensland Government Statistician's Office 2023; H2 Gambling Capital 2021).

The case for a well-resourced, independent national gambling regulator—the central recommendation of the Murphy Report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, 2023)—remains unaddressed in the Government's April 2026 reform package.

6. The Alliance for Gambling Reform

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is a national advocacy organisation working to reduce gambling harm in Australia. The Alliance partners, such as Wesley Mission in NSW and Rev Tim Costello, work with other organisations and with local councils to reduce the alarming level of gambling harm in Australia; we work to change the laws and rules governing the gambling industry. There is no financial requirement for membership in the Alliance.

7. Process and Discernment

This proposal emerges from a sustained process of theological reflection, justice discernment, and contextual analysis within the JMT Subcommittee of the MLDB. Through the Justice Watch process and subsequent deliberations in late 2025 and early 2026, gambling reform was identified as an emerging justice concern requiring faithful public engagement. This proposal represents the Subcommittee's considered recommendation to the Synod as a concrete expression of the Church's commitment to justice, compassion, and the common good.

References

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