

CLUBS FOR THE COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

Community clubs are a part of Canberra's social fabric. They support our sporting teams, employ hundreds of people, and offer a place to meet and socialise for thousands of Canberrans.

However, too many community clubs are highly dependent on pokies revenue, an activity we know causes harm to people, their families and communities.

Switching off poker machines during the COVID-19 lockdown provided welcome relief for many people experiencing gambling harm.

It also caused financial hardship to many clubs, highlighting the need for a different financial model for our clubs; one that does not rely on people experiencing gambling harm in order for clubs to survive.

The Greens have a plan to reinvigorate our clubs, and promote them as community spaces able to offer live music, dancing, art spaces, meeting spaces and fun family-friendly outings for the whole community.

We will also offer assistance for community clubs to host community events and activities, with community-use kitchens or high-quality restaurants, and offer a space of sanctuary during heat waves or bushfire smoke.

The ACT Greens will work with and support clubs to move away from this broken business model, to create a network of pokie-free clubs for Canberrans to meet their friends and family, eat, play games, dance, listen to music, talk, read the paper or connect with their local community.

BACKGROUND

Over a number of years, the Greens have worked to reduce the harms caused by poker machines in the Territory. As part of a commitment in the 2016 Parliamentary Agreement we have reduced poker machine numbers from nearly 5000 to well under 4000 - a decrease of more than 20%. The financial support offered to clubs through the licence buy back scheme has been welcomed by clubs that are looking to diversify their business model.

The Greens don't believe that community clubs should rely on poker machines for 60-80% of their revenue. Some clubs take almost \$18 million of gross gaming revenue each year through poker machines.

TO ACHIEVE STRONG COMMUNITY CLUBS THAT BUILD COMMUNITY AND PROVIDE A PLACE TO GATHER AND CONNECT, WITH THE LEAST HARM POSSIBLE, THE ACT GREENS WILL:

1. Create a network of pokie-free community clubs across Canberra by offering financial support and incentives for pokie-free venues, to enable diversification of revenue streams
2. Further reduce the number of Electronic Gaming Machine (EGM) licences in the ACT to 3000 during the next Assembly term
3. Implement stronger harm minimisation measures of \$5 bet limits and \$100 load up limits by the end of 2022 at the latest
4. Establish a Community Clubs Ministerial Advisory Council with key stakeholders to ensure frequent dialogue and collaboration on the future of the clubs industry
5. Support clubs to become Heat and Smoke Refuges, so that Canberrans have somewhere to go during extreme climate events
6. Establish a \$5 million Community Facilities and Clubs Environmental Upgrade Fund

1. CREATE A NETWORK OF POKIE-FREE COMMUNITY CLUBS ACROSS CANBERRA BY OFFERING FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND INCENTIVES FOR POKIE-FREE VENUES, TO ENABLE DIVERSIFICATION OF REVENUE STREAMS

The Greens want community clubs to be a safer place for families and vulnerable people to meet and connect. Community members are the heart and soul of community clubs.

There is clear evidence that poker machines are highly accessible in the ACT, and reducing the number of venues that have pokies located in them will significantly reduce harms. We want places where families and others can go to enjoy the ambience of their local club, without the presence of pokies. Many people who experience gambling harm speak to the challenge of finding venues that are safe from them to visit due to the high concentration of venues with pokies in Canberra.

While we understand that gaming regulations currently require clubs to section off their gaming machines, clubs with pokies in them still have sections with enticing music and flashing lights which are attractive to children, meaning every parent needs to guide their child away from these sections and have the conversation about gambling activity. This makes clubs less than ideal spaces to bring children.

The Greens are keen to support clubs to affordably reduce their heavy reliance on EGMs and operate with lower revenue activities, thereby returning their focus to their members' interests. We would like to see each club's membership determine what offerings provide the best support for their local communities, and focus on providing places to come together through shared connections (such as sports, culture, ethnicity or local interests).

The Greens plan for a network of pokie-free venues across Canberra focuses on working with clubs to support them to diversify their revenue streams to make them financially sustainable. Each club has its own unique objectives, membership and asset base, so it will be important to tailor support packages to suit these individual clubs.

The benefits of becoming a pokie-free club include:

- Being a key place for community gatherings - for events and social meetings with friends or family
- Having high-quality kitchens that could be used to attract high-quality restaurateurs, or could be hired out by community groups
- Becoming a venue of choice for community venue hire, promoted by the ACT Government along with other government-owned community halls
- Being able to offer a range of safe entertainment opportunities
- Providing acoustically treated music venues for concerts and performances
- Being able to support the many new and emerging communities in Canberra which do not have their own spaces or club venues. We know that in other cities, many older ethnic club venues are supporting these newer groups by sharing their spaces for a fee.
- Reduction in regulatory burden and the removal of taxes specific to clubs with poker machines, including community contributions, the Gambling Harm Prevention and Mitigation Fund, and the Gaming Machine Tax.

THE GREENS WILL OFFER POKIE-FREE CLUBS A RANGE OF INCENTIVES, INCLUDING:

A. A SCHEME TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS TO USE CLUB SPACES

We know there are community groups in Canberra looking for safe and functional spaces for their meetings and functions. We also understand that there is underutilised capacity in many existing community clubs. The facilities available in our clubs across the ACT include kitchens, meeting rooms, and family play rooms. We want to help clubs and local groups make better use of these amenities to bring people together.

The ACT Greens will investigate the introduction of a funded government program for pokie-free clubs to become venues of choice for community venue hire/ Government promotion - eg. community access to club kitchens. This work will take into account issues and costs of public liability insurance, equitable access for interested groups, and the most effective forms of Government support for the measure.

Specific measures in the scheme could include:

- **Subsidies for community organisations to hire club halls, meeting spaces and kitchens**
- **Grants to upgrade kitchens to make them safely accessible to community groups, or suitable for renting out to professional restaurateurs**
- **Government fees and rates subsidies and concessions**
- **Grants and support for converting adjacent open space into food gardens**
- **Grants for venues to become heat and smoke refuges, so Canberrans have somewhere to go during extreme climate events.**
- **A government support unit tasked with assisting clubs that wish to go pokie-free, advising them on available grants, connecting them with community groups, Music ACT, Mingle, etc.**

B. SUPPORT FOR LIVE MUSIC

Canberra's artists and musicians have repeatedly let us know that there is a need for new venues to showcase their talents. Music ACT have been calling for action to reverse the decline in ACT live music venues for over a decade now - the Greens believe that community clubs could be part of the solution to this problem.

We have a plan to support community clubs to host live music and performance events by:

- **Offering grants for acoustic attenuation measures for concert and performance halls, to help reduce the sound impacts in the neighbourhood**
- **Supporting other costs of installing sound production infrastructure, including staging and lighting**
- **Providing grants to pay Music Australia performance fees for live music**

3. IMPLEMENT STRONGER HARM MINIMISATION MEASURES OF \$5 BET LIMITS AND \$100 LOAD UP LIMITS BY THE END OF 2022 AT THE LATEST

The Greens support the Productivity Commission's recommendations for harm minimisation measures being applied to all poker machines in the ACT.

In the ACT, people can lose more than \$1,000 in an hour playing the pokies. In 2014-15 almost 20% of ACT adults played the pokies at least once, with net losses from the community totalling \$37.48 million.

The 2019 ACT gambling survey commissioned by the ACT Gaming and Racing Commission and undertaken by the Australian National University notes that 9.6% of the ACT adult population experienced gambling harm in the past 12 months, and 64.3% of respondents agreed that poker machines do more harm than good for the community.

Every other jurisdiction in Australia, except New South Wales, has moved to restrict bet limits to \$5 per spin. We have been assured by gaming harm reduction experts that bet limits can be implemented without major technical challenges, and we have seen it occur interstate without financial support from the government.

The Greens want a Government plan, worked up in close consultation with the sector, for the introduction of \$5 bet limits and \$100 load up limits for all gaming machines in the ACT, commencing by the end of 2022 at the latest. We will investigate the use of gaming tax waivers to reward those venues that implement the arrangements more quickly.

4. ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY CLUBS MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COUNCIL WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE FREQUENT DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE CLUBS INDUSTRY

We all understand that there are a range of issues facing clubs that need serious review, especially considering the impacts of COVID. In conversations with clubs and their staff, we have heard about the multitude of challenges facing the industry. The Greens will establish a Community Clubs Ministerial Advisory Council to support the development and implementation of revenue and activity diversification activities. This Advisory Council should meet frequently to ensure strong ongoing dialogue with clubs and other stakeholders to help develop a sustainable pathway for clubs in Canberra.

5. SUPPORT CLUBS TO BECOME HEAT AND SMOKE REFUGES, SO THAT CANBERRANS HAVE SOMEWHERE TO GO DURING EXTREME CLIMATE EVENTS

This year Canberra has weathered unprecedented extremes. Before the pandemic we were dealing with the fires destroying our beloved bush and many homes in our region, and with two months of record levels of smoke. For many people, public spaces such as clubs were a place to escape from the heat and smoke.

Recognising the impacts of a changing climate on vulnerable residents, the ACT Greens will support clubs to become heat and smoke refuges for local communities. This will include ensuring appropriate air filtration systems, and financial payments for venues designated as official extreme weather refuge sites.

6. ESTABLISH A \$5 MILLION COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND CLUBS ENVIRONMENTAL UPGRADE FUND

Canberra clubs offer a range of services and facilities for our communities, including outdoor sports facilities such as golf courses and bowling greens. They also provide large, indoor community spaces, which is becoming more important as Canberra becomes hotter due to climate change, and is impacted by issues such as heat waves and smoke.

Providing these services means clubs are large users of water and energy.

Recognising the value of these community services, we will establish a **Community Facilities and Clubs Environmental Upgrade Fund** to support our community clubs to improve the water and energy efficiency and sustainability of community assets and spaces. We will initially allocate \$5 million for environmental grants and a revolving no-interest loan fund for community clubs, to undertake upgrades which will reduce their bills and improve environmental outcomes. Examples include water and energy efficiency measures, installation of solar panels and batteries, and the upgrade of gas heating infrastructure with electric replacements.

The fund will stimulate investment in improvements to community facilities, reduce bills for community clubs and other community service providers, and create good environmental outcomes, making it a win for all Canberrans.