

MEDIA RELEASE



Community football unites to tackle Australia's \$31.5 billion gambling crisis

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Three of Australia's largest community football leagues have joined forces to address online gambling-related harm in sport, as research reveals alarming rates of gambling behaviour among young players¹.

The Victorian Amateur Football Association, Adelaide Footy League and Perth Football League have launched The Real Stakes – a community-led program that will reach nearly 40,000 community members across 208 clubs.

The program aims to challenge the normalisation of online sports gambling in Australia and provide crucial support to those most at risk of harm.

Starting from March, The Real Stakes will deliver 15 in-person workshops and nine webinars across metropolitan Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

The program includes comprehensive educational resources, support materials, and specialised training for coaches and volunteers on identifying and addressing online sports gambling -related harm.

A dedicated themed round in May will promote awareness of online sports gambling-related harm across all three leagues, while an online hub will provide ongoing access to tools and resources. The program's effectiveness will be measured through a comprehensive research and evaluation framework.

¹ <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/regular-online-betting-australia-2022>

[REALSTAKES.COM.AU](https://realstakes.com.au)



The Real Stakes has been developed to address the real harm that online sports gambling can cause not only in amateur sport, but also the wider community.

Recent quantitative studies across the three leagues commissioned as part of program development showed one in three young men felt pressured to bet by their mates, while 20% of players aged 15-34 reported betting more than they can afford.

Deane Pieters, CEO of program developer Elevate Strategic, said the initiative comes at a critical time, with Australians collectively gambling \$31.5 billion per year, equating to the highest per capita in the world, according to the Queensland government's Australian Gambling Statistics report².

"We're facing a crisis in Australian sport," Mr Pieters said.

"What we do know is that gambling participation has more than doubled in less than a decade, with the most dramatic growth among players aged 20 to 49 - the heart of community football³.

"Our research shows that 84% of people want online sports gambling-related harm openly discussed in their clubs.

"The Real Stakes delivers practical tools and support to identify and address harm related to online sports gambling, learn how to prevent it and understand how to support your friends or even yourself"

Perth Football League CEO Andrew Dawe said community football's independence from online sports gambling partnerships created a unique opportunity for positive impact.

"For 94% of our players, their football club is central to their mental health," Mr Dawe said.

"This program is about reminding everyone that true mateship means looking out for each other and supporting your mates."

West Coast Eagles AFLW Captain Emma Swanson has joined as a program ambassador, saying the initiative will help protect the next generation of players.

"As a player in the game and a fan of the sport, I see how embedded gambling has become," Ms Swanson said.

"The strength of community football has always been its ability to bring people together and create positive change.

"The Real Stakes is about protecting what makes our sport great - the community spirit, the mateship, and the focus on wellbeing both on and off the field."

² <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/society/gambling/australian-gambling-statistics>

³ <https://www.cqu.edu.au/news/708252/national-research-reveals-online-habits-double-in-a-decade>

Program Ambassador Matt Owies said he had witnessed how online sports gambling outlets targeted young players throughout their footballing career, from juniors through to the professional ranks.

“Every AFL player starts at a local club,” Mr Owies said.

“These are the places where we learn our values and form lifelong friendships.

“Now these same clubs are stepping up to raise awareness of the real harm that sports gambling can cause. It’s a powerful example of community sport taking the lead in building stronger and more resilient club environments.”

The Real Stakes, which is being delivered through a Strong and Resilient Communities (SARC) Activity Grant, which is an Australian Government Initiative, represents a significant step forward in addressing online sports gambling -related harm through community sport.

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