

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> February 2005

Ref No. 0105

## **POKIES Reduction – Good News Starts Today**

For the first time in the State's history, today is the start of a programme to reduce the level of gambling activity in the State.

The legislation to reduce poker machine numbers by 3,000 comes into effect today with the Premier stating "We need to now focus on the needs of problem gamblers."

UnitingCare Wesley welcomes the Premier's commitment to focus on 'problem gamblers' and his recognition of the damaging impacts for individuals and the broader community that have resulted from the introduction of poker machines into South Australia.

"Last year was a year of active and passionate debate about poker machines, we look forward to this year being the year of action. We believe that it is reasonable to expect that the first 2,100 of the poker machine reduction occurs by June this year, the remaining 900 should be out of hotels by December this year," said Mark Henley; Manager of Advocacy and Communication.

UnitingCare Wesley is also expecting the Commissioner of Liquor and Gambling to be vigilant in enforcing the licensing conditions and codes of practice that now apply to hotels and clubs. "We recognise that there is still a risk that turnover per machine will increase and reduce some of the harm reducing benefit of removing 3,000 machines," said Mr Henley.

"Recognising that Clubs have been given a number of concessions in the legislation, we are also looking to see clear action to reduce problem gambling being implemented by Clubs, particularly the larger clubs like Morphettville junction and SANFL Clubs,' added Mr Henley.

As the first provider of problem gambling counselling services in SA, UnitingCare Wesley is also pleased that there will be an increase in funding to Break Even services and commits to working with Government and the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund (GRF) to ensure that these funds are used in the best possible way to reduce the pain of problem gambling.

UnitingCare Wesley also wishes to acknowledge the high quality work on the gambling issue that has been undertaken by the Independent Gambling Authority and Treasury staff, during the debate.

### Further Comment

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