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**Gambling – serious public health issue or essential prop for schools?
Government can't have it both ways**

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is deeply concerned by a recent Council for Education report which confirmed state schools' increasing reliance on pokie profits.

CPAG is concerned about a recent dramatic increase in problem gambling, primarily related to pokie machines.

Gambling seriously undermines family income and as gambling venue outlets are strategically placed in low-income communities, it is those families and their children, who are disproportionately affected by the negative effects of gambling.

The report said schools increasingly rely on grants from Community Trusts to balance their budgets and provide essential resources. CPAG believes that when the government is running record budget surpluses schools should be funded appropriately.

CPAG spokeswoman Dr Lorna Dyall says "It is wrong for government to allow schools and community services to become increasingly dependent on the proceeds of gambling, (mostly pokies) while at the same time acknowledging that gambling is a serious public health issue. The government is stated to be committed to reducing gambling-related harm. The growing dependence of schools on the proceeds of gambling is both unethical and repugnant."

\$1.87 billion dollars was lost by New Zealanders gambling in 2003, for which the social, economic and cultural costs are unknown. CPAG believes that local initiatives should be able to result in a ban or elimination of pokie machines from their neighbourhoods. Distribution of funds from gambling should be in the hands of the communities shouldering the losses, not in the industry profiting from them.

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