

Gambling downturn triggers review of help services

A downturn in the number of gambling addicts seeking help has led the Ministry of Health to review 12 problem gambling services throughout New Zealand.

However, the ministry is not rushing into shutting down the services just yet, because no one knows why the numbers of problem gamblers looking for help are apparently dropping.

Nor does the ministry know how long the downturn will last, deputy director-general for mental health Dr Janice Wilson said.

„We also know that problem gambling internationally is a growing problem and long-term New Zealand is unlikely to be much different,“ Dr Wilson said.

„We know from overseas experience that many problem gamblers do not seek help until their gambling problems have got to the point of wreaking havoc with their lives and the lives of their loved ones.“

The smoking ban and gambling-limiting legislation are both seen as contributing to lowering the numbers of people contacting the help services, she said.

Last year the Government claimed a world first with its NZD 54 million strategy aimed at reducing problem gambling.

A three-year programme was announced to raise public awareness of gambling risks, boost problem gambling treatment services and provide information to communities. In September, the ministry released an overview of clients seeking help via the Gambling Helpline and face-to-face intervention services during 2005.

The number of people using ministry funded specialist face-to-face intervention services dropped 15.8 per cent in 2005. There was also a 20.9 per cent decrease in the number of new clients using these services.

The ministry at the time said the drop in numbers was possibly due to the impact of smokefree venues, regulatory measures to prevent and minimize gambling harm and increasing public awareness of gambling issues.