

Problem Gambling Conference: Opening Speech

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Published online March 10, 2005

The Maori have a long history of involvement with gambling; in this presentation, the impact of gambling and problem gambling on the Maori people and community is discussed. The numbers of Maori people seeking professional assistance is rising, and gambling and problem gambling patterns reveal social and health trends. Gambling addiction has emerged as a serious lifestyle risk for Maori. Maori people are 3 times more likely to become problem gamblers than non-Maori people, and this is expected to lead to greater crime, co-addictions like alcohol and smoking, poverty and worsening mental health. As far as the gambling related harm amongst Maori, a causative relationship approach between well-being and socio-economic conditions is taken. To address these problem gambling issues, a development of long term planning capacity is required.

Keywords: Gambling; Maori; Problem gambling.

Last year we held a gambling conference here and for those of us who were present you may recall a presentation from Richard Northey, wherein he set the scene by wearing different hats and welcomed us all here within the many roles he had. In this quickly evolving world of two parent working families, rising costs of living, widening socio-economic disparities, unwelcome genetic engineering, and burgeoning international conflict, living a life with multiple roles is not a concept unfamiliar to us all. The fact that we all sit in this room driven by a social conscience to try and ensure that a global society does the right thing on the issue of gambling is symbolic of this. In spite of our busy lives and our endless commitments we are here and we should all be commended for that.

I stand here today as just another example of you—a very busy person who also happens to be Maori. I Manage Special Maori Health Projects for the Auckland District Health Board (ADHB); I lecture in the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland; I manage research projects, supervise post-graduate students; I conduct the Maori health correspondence for Maori Television and Maori Radio; *Iwi*

representation work for both of my tribes (*Ngati Maniapoto* and *Ngati Awa*); I am a member of the Maori Reference Group on Problem Gambling (*Te Herenga Waka o Te Ora Whanau*); I try to publish annual research papers; and I deliver the occasional conference papers. I have my *whanau* (plural), which also includes Eleanor and my children. These are some of the things I do—some are essential, others voluntary, most are annoying, but if I were to prioritize these commitments, then I would have no hesitation at all on placing my *whanau* at the top of that list.

You may have noticed that I said my *whanau*, which also includes Eleanor and my children. In the Maori world the concept of *whanau* is diverse and unique. Mason Durie's (2004) latest book, *Launching Maori Futures*, discusses Maori *whanau* capacities, or the ability of *whanau* to perform tasks that Maori expect of them. There are six such capacities: (a) the capacity to care; (b) the capacity to share; (c) the capacity for guardianship; (d) the capacity to empower; (e) the capacity to plan ahead; and (f) the capacity for growth.

On Tuesday, I went to *powhiri* at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), and I realized that I was amongst a group of people who were surprisingly very familiar. We were asked to introduce ourselves to three people we did not know and I found it difficult. It dawned on me that this was yet another *whanau* and

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here in lies our strength. If we revisit [Durie's \(2004\)](#) six Maori *whanau* capacities then this provides us with an interesting overview of our capacity to perform tasks we should expect of ourselves:

1. The capacity to care: This is certainly an issue we care about.
2. The capacity to share: It is a cause we all share and a collective responsibility.
3. The capacity for guardianship: We must act as wise trustees of a society our children will inherit and our guardianship role will impact on that.
4. The capacity to empower: This is our role of advocacy and our role of ensuring people are able to make wise choices based on informed decisions.
5. The capacity to plan ahead: This is probably the most important, but, invariably, it is the one we practice the least. We tend to do this individually or in small groups with research. Our ability to perform this task is accelerated when we come together like we have right now.
6. The capacity for growth: This is the key to progress and indeed survive in the future.

I have referred to us as a *whanau* and outlined six ways of measuring *whanau* capacity from a Maori perspective. While gambling related problems abound, and indicators all point to ample room for improvement, there are also some positive signs. There are more of us and it is increasing—this *whanau* is growing. Community conscience levels are rising and awareness is growing. Gambling research is getting funded and outcomes are either being published or publicised. The MoH has the National Plan for Reducing Gambling Related Harm and the soon to be renounced Problem Gambling Purchasing Agency (and the Problem Gambling Committee), have forged ahead with increasing peoples participation in the sector but we must continue to grow. Even within our *whanau* here, there are other *whanau*. I have already mentioned *Te Herenga Waka o te Ora Whanau* (the Maori Reference Group on Problem Gambling), and our focus is primarily on Maori problem-gambling health issues.

It is no secret that Maori have a long history of involvement with gambling. Our people quickly took to sports betting on the TAB. The installation of non-casino gaming machines in sports clubs and pubs throughout the country has seen a constant flow of Maori utilisation. Changing patterns of gambling have had flow-on effects. The impact of gambling and problem gambling is invisible for tangata whenua; however, it is quite clear that our people are exposed to a range of gambling related harms. The most obvious are the health effects of gambling addiction. The numbers of our people seeking professional help continue to grow and the patterns of gambling and problem gambling continue to reflect other social and health trends. It is

a sad fact that Maori are disproportionately affected and gambling addiction has emerged as a serious lifestyle risk for Maori. Maori are three times more likely to become problem gamblers than non-Maori and this is expected to lead to greater crime, co-addictions like alcohol and smoking, poverty and worsening mental health. As far as the gambling related harm amongst Maori is concerned I tend to take a causative relationship approach between well-being and socio-economic conditions. If there is a greater choice in housing, education and employment then the chances of well-being and healthy lifestyles are higher. Unhealthy and trapped lifestyles are more likely to occur when there is less choice. In every society the poorest and least educated people have the lowest health status and they are the most vulnerable health issues such as these. Maori are over-represented on all negative scores. But I am not here today to lecture you on that and I would prefer to leave that to my colleagues, friends and *whanau* who are here for that very reason.

I started this little speech with an acknowledgement to all of us for making the effort to be here and thanking those who made it possible for us to gather. It is obvious that we all have some interest in the area of gambling but this does not mean we are all here for the same reasons. If I were to encapsulate all our reasons for being at this conference then I would say this: We are here to have an informed debate, aimed at developing a positive shared vision for managing the impact of gambling on our lives. We are here to bring a broad cross section of people together with thought provoking national and international speakers who can debate how best we can manage this issue in the twenty-first century. From a Maori perspective, we are also here to address, or indeed improve, our capacity to do what we do best and to function more effectively as a *whanau*. To this end I wish to outline an emerging issue.

I share an interest with a colleague of mine who is here today; this interest lies in the health of the Maori health worker. We, who work for the Maori health cause, are too often the worst practitioners of healthy living and because our lives are relatively short in cultural development terms—three score years and ten—we often fail to grasp the significance of two things: time and people. The point I am making here is that we all tend to take our own survival (individual and collective) for granted and simply allow ourselves to go with the flow. In doing this we are neglecting lessons of the past and placing future generations at the mercy of whatever comes along. We have to be more deliberate than that.

Our mindset needs to be on survival on our own terms. It is one thing to plan for the future. It is entirely another matter to plan for survival in that future – and that's what we need to do. As if we do not have enough to do already, what I am saying is the development of a

long-term planning capacity should be an objective of this conference.

For me, personally, as a Maori, in 500 years' time I do not want my descendants to look back and think of us as the generations of Maori who became strong in numbers but overwhelmed by matters of the moment. I don't want us to become captivated by the smallness of tribal estates that were once enormous or blinded by the promise of a few fish and the foreshore or so intoxicated with the trappings of sovereignty that we fail to make a place for our children in the future. We need to plan for survival and not to look inwards, or backwards but to seek out horizons for new opportunities. The issue we address along the way will determine the outcome of this.

In this address to you all I have alluded to capacity building within the concept of *whanau* and on this note I want to once again acknowledge the Maori Reference Group on Problem Gambling (*Te Herenga*

Waka o te Ora Whanau) and the PGPA and PGC for setting up this forum. Too often, there is very little long-term planning undertaken by Maori. Most energy tends to be spent coping with crisis or responding to political agendas. Planning well ahead for too many Maori health issues, still awaits serious input. If capacity building is about the future, then a Maori planning capacity must be created before a comprehensive approach to problem gambling issues can be addressed in a coordinated way. *Te Herenga Waka o te Ora Whanau* is a potential mechanism for this.

No reira e rau rangatira ma tenei te mihia nei ano, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.

References

- Durie, M. (2004). *Nga kahui pou: Launching Maori futures*. Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers.